Australia's increasing popularity as a destination for emigrants from the United Kingdom in the mid-nineteenth century was linked to the provision of government-assisted passages and the discovery of gold in 1851–2. These developments transformed Australia's negative image in the popular imagination as a penal colony and contributed to the peak in United Kingdom emigration in 1854.¹ Convicts aside, just over half of the 624,545 United Kingdom emigrants who arrived in Australia between 1831 and 1860 had received financial assistance towards their passage from British and Australian colonial governments anxious to encourage new settlement in infant colonies. The wealth of official records has facilitated scrutiny of the social characteristics of those who negotiated the 'bureaucratic corridors' to an assisted passage.² Consequently, the historical literature is dominated by a carefully controlled flow of emigrants assisted by a plethora of official and charitable schemes.³


³ Baines, Migration, p. 3; this point is emphasized by Charlotte Erickson, Invisible
Figure 3 Places in Australia and New Zealand mentioned in the text
In contrast, little is known about the second main strand of emigration to Australia, those individuals who financed their own passage. Admittedly, they formed a minority in most colonies, but in Victoria the gold rushes distorted the typical pattern, as almost 70 per cent of United Kingdom arrivals between 1831 and 1860 were unassisted by official agencies. As Robin Haines recognizes, the picture for this emigrant stream 'remains somewhat misty'. Official agencies showed little inclination to record their movements, and such individuals are barely visible to the historian.4

For Cheshire, however, there are a few exceptionally well documented individuals who travelled to Australia at the height of the gold rush without assistance from official agencies. The correspondence which John Brown sustained with his parents in Chester is a particularly rich source: a sequence of over forty letters spanning the period 1849–84 which provides a moving picture of an evolving migration. The letters unfold a complex sequence of moves in both Britain and Australia and cast light on the links between internal migration and emigration, which, as Frank Thistlethwaite argued, should be seen as part of the same process.5 Added interest derives from the fact that the letters are part of a larger collection which documents the migration of John’s brothers, David and James.6 James was also part of the flow of return migrants for whom records are typically ‘few and fragmentary’.7 In contrast, William Wood, formerly a clerk at Thomas Unett Brocklehurst’s silk mill in Macclesfield, stated his intention not to return home in his lengthy shipboard journal of 1852. From a different perspective, Francis Dicken Brocklehurst’s journal and letters, written in 1860, track the movements of a

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wealthy, leisured traveller, and further highlight both the transience and the diverse motives of the individuals who travelled from Cheshire to Australia. In contrast to the sparse details in the unassisted passenger lists, the correspondence of John Brown and the shipboard journal of William Wood inform the debate on the motives of self-financed emigrants and the mechanisms by which they reached Australian shores. They illustrate the diversity of migrant paths to Australia in the mid-nineteenth century, which Haines and Eric Richards have emphasized is still a neglected area of research compared to the interest in the ‘voluminous westward-bound flows’ to America. In the case of John and James Brown, the unusually full correspondence makes it possible to trace their ‘lifelong trajectories of personal migration’. John’s letters highlight the temporary nature of much emigration and the fact that the boundaries between those who intended to settle and those who planned to stay for just a short period were extremely fluid. This article examines these issues at the micro-level by placing the testimony of individuals at the centre of interpretation, an approach exemplified by David Fitzpatrick’s study of Irish emigration to Australia.

These personal accounts offer insight into why some individuals, without financial inducements, emigrated to Australia in preference to the cheaper and more popular Atlantic passage. They can be used to challenge the negative stereotypes of Australia’s immigrants which, until comparatively recently, dominated historical interpretation. The extent to which immigrants either attained or desired permanence in their new environment, and the impact of emigration on their family relationships, can be established only from such personal sources. This evidence, albeit selective, casts some light on the ‘mental worlds of the people who constituted the longest-distance migrants in human history’.

8 Ches. R.O., DDX 598 (journal of William Wood’s voyage to Australia, 1852); D 2455/3 (journal of a tour to Australia); D 2455/11 (corr. of Francis Dicken Brocklehurst).
10 David Fitzpatrick, Oceans of consolation: personal accounts of Irish migration to Australia (Cork, 1994), p. 4.
11 Baines, Migration, p. 130; Fender, Sea changes, pp. 3, 217.
12 Richards, ‘Voices’, p. 32.
These random survivals of personal papers make visible a few examples of movement from Cheshire to Australia in the mid-nineteenth century. They are unlikely to be representative, not least because of the authors’ confident literacy. It is, however, difficult to assess their typicality in quantitative terms, as the contribution which Cheshire and other regions made to emigration to Australia and America is only partially understood. Dudley Baines identifies this as a ‘critical gap’ in understanding English emigration, and Charlotte Erickson emphasizes that attention has focused mainly on emigration from the Celtic fringe. Evidence from the 1841 census and from Baines’s census-based projections for 1861–1900 suggests that the overall rate of emigration from Cheshire was slightly higher than the national average. Between January and June 1841, for example, 187 males and 141 females left Cheshire for the colonies or foreign parts, an emigration rate of 8.3 per 10,000 population compared with the national average of 7 per 10,000. It is not possible to establish its full extent as the passenger lists for Australia categorized those making unassisted passages only by country of residence, not county.

Some voluntary migration preceded the gold rush. The 1841 census of emigration indicates that eighty-six bounty emigrants to New South Wales originated in Cheshire. Edward Murry, transported to Van Diemen’s Land in 1834, explained to relatives in Stockport in August 1846, after gaining his freedom, that ‘I have seen a good many of my townsmen in this colony particular one James Broon.’ They were not necessarily all convicts, because govern-

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14 Baines, *Migration*, p. 89; see also Charlotte Erickson, *Leaving England: essays on British emigration in the nineteenth century* (New York, 1994), pp. 9–12, 32, 93; an important exception to this generalization is ibid. chapter 6: ‘Was the American West a safety valve for Lancashire?’
16 Erickson discusses the limitations of passenger lists to America: *Leaving England*, pp. 95, 212–13.
17 Ibid. tables 5.8, 5.14.
18 Stockport Central Library, Local Heritage Library: uncatalogued corr. of Edward Murry.
ment-assisted schemes had taken many others to Van Diemen’s Land since 1831. Obituaries in the *Chester Chronicle*—such as that in 1856 of Benjamin Goodman, inspector of schools for the diocese of Sydney, who ‘was for some time managing clerk to J. Robert Esquire and was well-known in this city’—also reveal some migration to Australia, though they do not explain either timing or motivation.

Haines has established that a small proportion of government-assisted emigrants to Australia originated in Cheshire. Between 1846 and 1850 a total of 100 subsidized emigrants from Cheshire arrived in Australia: seventy in South Australia, fifteen in New South Wales, twelve in Victoria, and three in Van Diemen’s Land. On the basis of the immigration agents’ returns, she has traced a number of them in New South Wales, South Australia, and Victoria. In 1854–5 a total of sixty-six more reached New South Wales. In South Australia it is possible to identify forty-nine individuals from Cheshire in 1854–5, with a further twenty-nine between 1857 and 1860. In Victoria, the colony with the lowest proportion of government-assisted emigrants, Haines has identified forty-nine Cheshire emigrants in 1855–6. These numbers are very small in both absolute and relative terms, and reflect the meagre contribution from the northern counties of just 10 per cent of all government-assisted emigrants. This is explained partly by the low level of recruitment undertaken by the agents of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission (C.L.E.C.) in northern England, where they considered that plentiful industrial employment limited the supply of potential emigrants. They focused their attention instead on the low-wage counties of the south and southwest. Rural areas of southern England were also disproportionately represented amongst 27,000 paupers who received additional assistance in emigrating from their parishes. In contrast, no Cheshire paupers received similar assistance between 1836 and 1870.

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20 *Chester Chronicle*, 30 Aug. 1856.

21 Haines, ‘Government-assisted emigration’ (thesis), tables IV.4–7 (pp. 477, 484, 489); Haines, *Emigration*, pp. 5, 40–1, 44–5.

Government-assisted emigrants from Cheshire, if typical of the national sample, were drawn from rural economies and were ‘well-informed, self-selecting, literate individuals’. While Haines confirms that they were likely to have experienced economic privation, she challenges the entrenched view that they were the dregs of society, shovelled out against their will. As they had to contribute a sum of money to their Australian passage, often equivalent to the cost of the entire Atlantic voyage, they were not the leftovers of the Atlantic stream but people who made ‘informed choices about the destination best suited for their skills’.23 Cheshire emigrants’ preference for South Australia could be linked to the discovery of copper, which drew in large numbers of miners from the United Kingdom. If so, the Cheshire sample might have included more miners compared to the agrarian-based occupations normally favoured by the C.L.E.C.24

III

John and James Brown of Chester do not fit the traditional historiographical picture of emigrants forced out by rural poverty who made a lifetime decision to leave the United Kingdom. John’s residence of over fifty years in Australia and James’s stay of less than four years were logical extensions of their search for work and their developing ‘migrant mentality’. Both brothers, then aged fourteen, were listed in the census enumerators’ returns of 1841 at Leadworks Lane in Chester. They had been born in Cheshire to parents who had migrated from Scotland. Both were given the occupational label of ‘ship carpenter’.25 James completed his apprenticeship with Thomas Mulvey, shipbuilder in Chester, on 15 November 1847, having served ‘the full term of s[e]ven years... sober, honest and industrious’.26 John may also have been apprenticed to Mulvey.

Both brothers were very mobile after completing their apprenticeships, perhaps by necessity in light of the problems experienced by

24 Ibid. pp. 22, 45, 63.
25 Chester History and Heritage, census enumerators’ returns, 1841, microfilm 129/13, enumeration district 10.
26 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/58; Williams’s commercial directory of Chester (1846), p. 35.
Mulvey’s River Dee Co. shipyard after a fire in 1845. Unlike many others experiencing underemployment in the ‘hungry forties’, their training enabled them to seek work at sea. In a letter of 10 July 1849 John instructed his parents to direct correspondence to ‘no. 62 cottage at High Street, Poplar, Blackwall, London’, and mentioned that he had had ‘a nice voyage to India an back’. Their economic horizons were wider than the shipping routes from British ports, as they could take advantage of demand for labour at different coastal destinations. After a gap in correspondence, John wrote to his parents in August 1853 from Melbourne. He had left his position on board ship due to a ‘few greavences got up with the Boatswain and the captain an the sailmaker’. Though he referred to opportunities in the gold fields, he also explained that ‘their is plenty of work for our people on the shore and that will do for me’.

John’s movements replicated those of his elder brother, David, between 1842 and his death in San Francisco in 1850. While John and James were apprentices in Chester, David, also a ship’s carpenter, had difficulties obtaining work in the yards of north-west England. Writing to his parents from Liverpool in July 1842, he explained how ‘I myself is working at Mr. Williams’ yeard which wee are very shorte at presant.’ He noted how they were ‘so slack in the yard’ that ‘this week wee have made four days and it takes all that I get for to keep us bouth’. His decision to take up a position on a ship bound for Peru was undoubtedly linked to the fact that ‘theire is ten hundred out of employ in our trad[e] and about five hundred at work. Their is a grate part of them in the wourkhouse.’ His attempt to assess conflicting rumours about future job prospects highlights the importance of the flow of information. He explained to his parents how ‘I hurd from a purtickular friend to say that we had got 3 mor of the same six packets for to bild . . . but I have herd the contrary today from the saim friend’. While fear of the system of ‘less eligibility’ in the workhouse was significant, David Brown’s mobility was fuelled more by his desire to maintain his status than by his being pushed out by destitution.

28 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/16.
29 Ibid. CR 31/18.
30 Ibid. CR 31/3.
David’s letters frequently noted the high demand and high wages for ship’s carpenters in South America, reflecting a flow of information which highlighted the opportunities for some trades within a developing global economy. Working for a period on a ship was viewed by all three brothers as a short-term alternative to obtaining a position in a shipyard. Each stated his intention of earning money to send home, but also to return with an amount which offered some independence. Writing from Valparaiso in Chile on 22 December 1844, David calculated that ‘I will bee at home in a few years more but when I come I should like for to have a little money with me and not to be verey poore when I doo come.’ An earlier letter from Valparaiso dated 20 February 1844 indicates that other men from Chester had similar ideas:

I heard of a new ship from Chester had com into the harbour. I was expecting som one from the yard would bee in hur as times was so bad at home. I went on board found Henrey Ball and yong Towers on board which I was glad to se them booth quit well. He gave me inteligence from home . . .

The picture that emerges is one of rapid adjustment to changing economic circumstances. The labour mobility of the Brown brothers was not the outcome of poverty caused by a redundant occupation. Rather, cyclical trade depressions resulted in under-employment which required them to be flexible about where they sought work. Neither David nor John intended to emigrate. Both saw themselves as short-term labour migrants with a specific, limited objective. Writing from San Francisco in September 1849, David explained that he had saved £160 and thought ‘that I was making money fast’. His opportunism was reflected in his decision to invest in gold prospecting in California. He explained how ‘I saw with my own eyes allmost every day sailermen coming from the mines with bags of gold that weighed from 6 to 20 pound weight which caused me for to be verey ancious for to goo allso’. After three unsuccessful ventures, however, he died in San Francisco with ‘scarcely sufficient to pay his doctors and funeral expences’.

John and James Brown’s ability to work their passage to Australia is significant in view of the high cost of the voyage, up to four times

31 Ibid. CR 31/7, 10.
32 Ibid. CR 31/13–15.
greater than the American passage. The cheapest fare advertised in the *Chester Chronicle* of 4 January 1851 was £10 in steerage on Gibbs, Bright and Co.’s ‘New Line of Packets from Liverpool for Port Adelaide and Australia’. The cost was prohibitively high for large sections of the working population, a problem exacerbated by the discovery of gold because heightened demand for passages inflated prices. By 1853 the steerage fare had risen to £23, almost a year’s wages. Working a passage, as the Browns’ shipwrighting skills allowed them to do, thus offered the opportunity to save. Brown’s reference to the death of a female passenger suggests that he worked his passage on an emigrant ship, possibly from Plymouth or London, the leading ports for Australia, or from Liverpool.

John Brown was not drawn to Australia by gold. Writing from Melbourne on 2 August 1853, he explained his intention to work on shore ‘till I get a ship to come home which I hope wont be long in about one year or t[w]o’. Although his arrival in Melbourne coincided with the height of the gold rush, he explained that I don’t think of going to them myself for I dont believe in them just now for their is thousands their doing nothing no one must think of coming out to pick up a fortune without working for it and they must be working men for their is no call for clerks and such like . . .

The C.L.E.C. recognized that the discovery of gold had a dramatic impact on migration to Australia. Estimates of emigration from the United Kingdom confirm this, as numbers increased from 17,347 in 1850 to a peak of 73,118 in 1854. This heightened interest was reflected in a dramatic increase in the number of applications for assisted passages. The C.L.E.C. reported that it was struggling under the burden of almost 19,000 applications in June 1852, compared to just 2,884 in June 1851.

The number of applications received from Cheshire cannot be gauged as the original forms no longer survive. Those selected

33 Haines, *Emigration*, p. 10.
34 *Chester Chronicle*, 4 Jan. 1851.
36 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/18.
38 Information contained in private correspondence with Robin F. Haines.
would have had to meet strict eligibility criteria of age, occupation, health, and literacy. John and James Brown were not the type that the colonial authorities were prepared to sponsor. The C.L.E.C. believed that most of the spontaneous emigrants flooding into Australia in the peak years of 1852–4 were young single men. As policy, it therefore determined that it would ‘not send out at the public expense any single men, nor being members of a family or any families in which the sons outnumbered the daughters’. The organization was concerned that any emigrants it assisted would be drawn to the gold fields rather than supplying the needs of pastoral agriculture. Consequently, in 1853 it placed emphasis on sending out ‘large numbers of persons possessing the now all-important qualification of unfitness for the gold fields’. 39

Although the numbers of unassisted emigrants drawn from different English regions cannot be estimated, it is clear that people in Cheshire had access to information about Australia in a wide variety of forms. This is significant, as Baines argues that the flow of information was the main factor shaping regional patterns of emigration.40 The growing popularity of Australia was reflected in, but also created by, the frequency with which shipping lines advertised passages in the Chester Chronicle. The advertisements placed in 1853 did not mention assisted passages, suggesting that they were aimed at the self-financing emigrant. In January the newspaper carried advertisements for three shipping lines, rising to six in April. In 1851–2, such advertisements had directed prospective emigrants to apply to addresses in Liverpool. In 1853 a novel feature was the inclusion of Chester agents, A. W. Booth acting for the Liverpool Line of Australian Packets, and J. J. Brez, an estate agent, for the White Star Line of Australian Packets.41 From 1858 the agents would have been able to supply copies of John Willox’s Practical hints for emigrants to Australian colonies, which Haines describes as ‘one of the first overtly commercial guides’ for the Liverpool–Melbourne service.42 Booth could also supply the second edition of the Australian Circular, presumably one of the many specialist publications which offered advice to prospective

40 Baines, Migration, pp. 2–4, 6–7, 23, 26–9, 36, 43–4, 87, 139.
41 Chester Chronicle, 23 Apr., 28 May 1853.
42 Haines, Emigration, pp. 169, 172.
emigrants. The assumption that readers were interested in Australian emigration was reflected in the placing of advertisements for commercial products next to those for the shipping lines. Throughout 1853, for example, the *Chester Chronicle* carried advertisements for a ‘Gold Washing and Detector Machine’, mining tools, and ‘all necessary accoutrements for the diggings’.

More significant in stimulating interest was the combination of articles about Australian gold with the publication of emigrants’ letters. Reports of gold finds in the *Chester Chronicle* and the *Macclesfield Courier and Herald* on 20 September 1851 were extremely positive in tone, emphasizing unlimited opportunity. Published with the clear intention of encouraging emigration, a letter in the *Chester Chronicle* on 19 February 1853 claimed that printers could earn £8 a week in Australia, and carpenters, joiners, and smiths between £1 and £1 10s. a day. The writer explained how gold diggers ‘are doing so well that I intend going in preference for a few months’. The letter concluded that ‘this is truly the golden harvest’. As the ‘blatant bias’ of such published letters is well known, they have been excluded from consideration as an accurate source of emigrant experience. There was, in contrast, little advertising for American passages, and editorials were hostile in tone. A government emigration depot for Australia, based in Birkenhead for a brief period from 1852, could have provided a further source of information.

Interest in Australian gold was also reflected in the illustrated lectures which J. T. Towson gave to the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire in 1861 and 1871, on the pattern of the London series on gold mining offered by the Royal Society of Arts in 1852. Contrary to positive reports in the newspapers, the audience was

44 e.g. *Chester Chronicle*, 15 Jan. 1853.  
46 *Chester Chronicle*, 15 June 1853.  
advised on both occasions that the gold fields did not provide a suitable focus for capital investment.\textsuperscript{50}

IV

William Wood’s voyage to Australia on the \textit{Constance} in September 1852 coincided with the upsurge in Australian emigration, although it is not clear if he was swayed by local publicity. His colourful and opinionated account of the journey served as a functional device for recording and understanding his transition to a new life.\textsuperscript{51} Formerly employed at Albert Mill, a silk mill at Hurdsfield in Macclesfield, Wood travelled with his wife Sarah, aged twenty-one, and his son Charley, aged one.\textsuperscript{52} In common with other emigrants, he compiled details of the voyage to inform friends or relatives of the ways they should prepare for emigration, detailing prices of goods, advising on food and clothing, and preparing his readers for the profanity of a Sunday on board ship. In marked contrast to the emigrants’ letters published in the \textit{Chester Chronicle}, Wood did not gloss over the difficulties of the passage, giving a vivid portrait of the discomfort caused by sickness, as well as the lack of privacy in quarters which were ‘dark, dirty, noisy, breathless’. He urged caution not to ‘trust to the tales of owners, captains or agents in docks’ as ‘their words are lying ones’.\textsuperscript{53} The flow of personal advice was often important in encouraging chain migration, although it is not clear whether Wood’s journal drew further individuals from Macclesfield.\textsuperscript{54}

Wood was aged twenty-five and the son of a ‘furnishing ironmonger’ who had a small business in Mill Street, Macclesfield. He clearly regarded himself as part of the supervisory staff at Albert Mill: when describing the work routine on board ship, for instance, he noted that ‘instead of seeing that others do the work I have to assist myself’. His journal indicates that he was well acquainted with the millowner, Thomas Unett Brocklehurst, ‘my much esteemed


\footnotesize\textsuperscript{51} Hassam, \textit{Sailing to Australia}, pp. 1–2.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{52} Public Record Office of Victoria [hereafter P.R.O. Vic.], VPRS 7666 (inward overseas passenger lists 1852–1923): information supplied by M. R. Shennan.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{53} Ches. R.O., DDX 598, pp. 18, 63, 81.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{54} Baines, \textit{Migration}, p. 127.
master and friend'.\(^{55}\) The passenger list of the *Constance* described him as a clerk.\(^{36}\) Brocklehurst visited the *Constance* before it sailed, and left a copy of *Uncle Tom’s cabin* for Wood. When his brother Francis Dicken Brocklehurst was travelling in Australia in 1860 he mentioned that two of his brothers had already experienced the Pacific crossing from America to Australia.\(^{57}\) It is possible that knowledge of Australia in his employer’s family contributed to Wood’s decision to emigrate. It is unclear whether they offered any financial assistance, as Wood’s journal did not refer to assistance from either government or charitable sources. Wood was not the type of emigrant that government agencies wished to sponsor since his family was too small to make a contribution to the needs of pastoral agriculture or domestic service.

Wood paid the balance of his fare at the shipping company office on 27 September 1852 for steerage accommodation. In total he paid £16, which together with £1 8s. 3d. for moving his luggage, made his ‘pocket considerably more “easy and light”’. He expressed ‘no small delight’ that he was free from further payments for the voyage, which suggests that he had already incurred considerable expense.\(^{58}\) The *Constance* was not chartered by government, and the passenger list confirms that the ship carried 384 unassisted passengers.\(^{59}\) This does not preclude the possibility that Wood received assistance from a philanthropic agency or from his Methodist chapel. As Haines points out, this was often an important form of assistance for emigrants rejected by the C.L.E.C.\(^{60}\) The minutes of the Methodist congregation at Sunderland Street in Macclesfield, where Wood’s father Samuel played an active part, make no reference to any emigration assistance between 1850 and 1894.\(^{61}\) The extent to which the benefits of Australia were lauded from this and other chapel and church pulpits in Cheshire is difficult to assess, though they were an important factor elsewhere.\(^{62}\)

56 P.R.O. Vic., VPRS 7666.  
57 Ches. R.O., D 2455/11 (letter from Francis Dicken Brocklehurst to his mother, 2 Apr. 1860).  
59 Ibid. p. 69; P.R.O. Vic., VPRS 7666; ‘Returns relating to the Commissioners for Colonial Land and Emigration’, pp. 8–13.  
61 Ches. R.O., EMS 6/2/1 (minutes of leaders and society meetings, 1814–94).  
Wood’s ship carried other Cheshire emigrants:

near our Berth there are several Cheshire people, farmers &c. They are relatives and of the names of Shaw and Brown, the former comes from Wilmslow, the latter from Mobberly, and has heard father stand up to proclaim the 'Unsearchable Riches of Christ'. There are also several brothers who are from a farm at Hatherton.63

The passenger list of the Constance included Hector Shaw, a shepherd aged twenty-seven, and John, James, and Edwin Shaw, in their mid-thirties and all described as farmers. Since they were listed as Scottish, their movement to Australia was clearly just one part of a lifetime pattern of migration. Their motivation for emigrating is not explained, although Wood’s comments imply that he was fully aware of the opportunities created by the discovery of gold. Preoccupied with the progress of the sailing ship, he commented on 29 November 1852 on the ‘breeze that blows us to the southern clime, the region of gold and plenty’. He explained that some of the men were growing beards because ‘they are perhaps preparing for the “Diggings” by way of seeming fierce’. It is possible that Wood himself intended to spend a period on the gold fields. The C.L.E.C. commented that many emigrants ‘leave their families behind them, and after a short stay at the gold fields return with the profits of their venture, which in many instances they invest in the purchase of land’.64 After the Constance arrived in Australia on 27 December 1852, Wood is lost from view: in common with most writers of shipboard journals, he did not continue his narrative beyond the port. Judging by sentiments expressed in his journal, he did not intend to return to Cheshire, stating on 18 October 1852 that ‘I would scarcely risk another “such” journey for all the gold of Australia’.65

John Brown’s intention to return home to Cheshire within two years certainly changed as a result of the anticipated benefits from the diggings. The casual frequency with which he referred to seeing people from home in different Australian locations points to a flow of individuals from Chester during the gold rush of the 1850s. Most appear to have been men who travelled independently of other family members, a profile consistent with the observations of the

63 Ches. R.O., DDX 598, p. 74.
64 ‘13th general report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission’, p. 38.
65 Ches. R.O., DDX 598, p. 29.
C.L.E.C. Writing from Melbourne in August 1853, John commented on seeing ‘R. Dickson from the Nursery’, who was ‘going to a situation up the country’, and Thomas Thomas, whose ‘father once kept the Manchester small warehouse by the Bowling Green’ in Chester. As a result of a conversation with Dickson, whose family’s nursery business in Chester employed Brown’s father, John found out that his brother Jim had arrived in Australia and had gone out to the diggings with Bill and Harry Jones who ‘used to live in Frances Street’. Thomas Thomas was still in Australia three years later, when John explained that he ‘[h]as been on Bendigo with some Chester chaps Parry & Walker & Co.’ John used his letters to pass news to Chester. On 16 October 1858 he commented that ‘Fred Gill is quite well if you should see anyone inquiring about him.’ Another friend from Chester, who was ‘farming about two miles out from Ballarat’, asked to be remembered to Brown’s parents. In May 1864 and January 1865 he expressed surprised regret that since moving to the gold diggings in New Zealand ‘I have not seen a Chester face that I know’. He repeated this on 18 May 1865, adding that ‘I feel quite alone’. On his return to Melbourne in November 1871 he seemed concerned that he knew none of the people from Chester. Anxious to retain connections with home, he regretted that ‘none of our old mates comes out to Melbourne nowadays’. The possibility of chain migration prompted by return migrants is suggested in a letter of 2 October 1884 from Sydney, where Brown described meeting ‘a boy from Chester’ called Murry who ‘says his farther had the paper in Bridge Street and was well acquainted with Tom Thomas’.

The expansion in Victoria’s population from 77,000 in 1851 to 540,000 in 1861 created opportunities in commerce and services which were exploited by some Cheshire migrants. Brown’s letters indicate that Mr and Mrs Selkirk from Chester established a business at no. 50 Collins Street in Melbourne in 1853 and by 1855 had ‘moved to 87 Collins Street West . . . right opposite [h]is old shop’. A single surviving letter from C. M. Reade in Goulburn,
New South Wales, to his sister in Congleton on 28 January 1855 referred to the generosity of his employers and to his plans to 'commence business in a small way for myself in about two months from now'. In common with many emigrants, Reade expressed his desire to 'succeed and in time return to my dear old home'. He linked his business prospects to the state of the gold fields, commenting that 'everything in the way of business is at present very dull'.

As Fitzpatrick recognizes in his study of Irish emigrants, there was 'an obscure but considerable movement back home from Australia'. Distance and cost did not preclude the possibility of returning home. James Brown returned to Chester in 1856 having spent over three years in Australia. In a letter of 16 August 1853 John penned a section to Betsey, his sister-in-law, and reassured her that James would not 'stop long hear and you at home'. The discovery of 'payable gold' led some to return to Cheshire. Writing from Charleston in New Zealand on 7 June 1869, John Brown exclaimed 'I am glad to hear of some of our old mates coming home for it cheers me up and gives me fresh hope that something might turn up for me yet.' This is not surprising since many who emigrated in the gold rush saw themselves as temporary migrants who would return home with investment capital. This could take some time. Thomas Thomas, who had been in Australia since 1853 or earlier, had returned home by 1869. As Brown commented, 'I supose he got married when he got home.' Some individuals returned again to Australia after a visit to Cheshire. In a letter dated 24 November 1862, John explained to his parents that their is a mate of Jim Duttons made a nice fortune out here this last two years work and he talks of going home next January he don't know whether he will go to stop or come out again. His name is Williamson and he worked with Smith and Jim in London and he belongs to Beaston Castle.

This may not have been unusual: in a letter from Brighton (New Zealand) on 10 November 1867, John Brown explained how 'I had an

72 Fitzpatrick, Oceans of consolation, pp. 530–4, 626.
73 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/19.
74 Ibid. CR 31/43.
75 Ibid. CR 31/44.
76 Ibid. CR 31/31.
old mate of mine that went home in the *Great Brittain* in August last and he promised to call on you before he came out again as he says he dont intend to stop at home.*77

These examples imply an ease of movement between Cheshire and Australasia, and reflect a broader trend of return migration. Pooley and Turner estimate that between a fifth and a quarter of those who emigrated to Australia and New Zealand returned to the United Kingdom, estimates which correspond with the levels of return from America suggested by Fender and Thistlethwaite. The proportion of a quarter is probably too high for return migrants from Australia in the earlier nineteenth century, when the high cost of the passage may have limited the option to wealthier cabin passengers and those able to work their passage home. The figure may be more realistic for the later nineteenth century, when cheaper steamship passages offered the possibility of return to a wider social range of migrants.*78

Fender argues that back-migrants from America were seen by their contemporaries as failures. They ‘were thought to have disgraced the families to whom they returned, and aroused the contempt of the emigrants who stuck it out’.79 Paradoxically, John Brown viewed return to Britain as the mark of success in an emigrant. William Wood’s response corresponds more closely with Fender’s evidence. Almost a month into the voyage on the *Constance*, a male passenger ‘made up his mind to return home’ on a passing vessel. Wood noted the adverse reaction of the other passengers, who ‘rent the air with their hisses and groans at the man who had been so cowardly as to desert’.80

The different reactions reflect contrasting intentions. Brown fits Fender’s picture of temporary emigrants as ‘nest egg accumulators’ earning enough to invest in England.81 On 25 September 1855 Brown explained to his parents that ‘I intend to be saving’. This was still his aim in July 1862, when he stated that ‘I should like to make a hundred or two to go into some business’.82 His desire for independence, which typically threads the narrative of so much

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77 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/40.
78 I am grateful to Robin Haines for her advice on this point.
80 Ches. R.O., DDX 598, p. 35.
82 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/21, 29.
Cheshire Migrants to Australia

emigrant correspondence, led him to comment extensively on employment conditions in Chester, Birkenhead, London, and Australia. He thought about returning home to seek work, but after nine years on the gold fields explained that he would 'appear very strange in the yard if I was going to work at the trade again'. His major concern was that 'I don't think it would suit me after being my own master so long . . . but I suppose I should get used to it again but I hope I shall not require it for I should like to be my own master.'

John Brown used news from Chester to gauge whether he should return. As his brother James was 'out of work so long', he explained that 'it has put me against going home to look for work'. In letters of 1868 and 1869 John repeatedly expressed his concern that 'trade is so bad with you all'. There was some contradiction in his letters. From the outset he stressed his longing to return home, yet emphasized that the journey could not be undertaken due to lack of funds. By 1871 he had accepted that Australia offered benefits:

we made a great mistake when we was first out and I have often thought of it. If we had only sloped on the Bendigo and sent for all belonging to us we would have had a nice little homestead of our own and plenty of everything . . .

His statements of intent to return home were increasingly formulaic, intended to placate his family. They recognized his vacillation. John's father wrote on one of the letters from his son, dated 18 May 1865, that he 'says nothing about coming home at present but we must make up our minds for seemingly he does not know himself'.

A return home did not necessarily bring an end to migration in an individual's life. After his return to Britain, James made a series of further short- and long-distance moves. Writing from Dunedin in New Zealand in January 1865, John commented on his brother's itinerancy, expressing the hope that 'you will stop their for you must have had enough of running about I know that I have'. Within a few months of his return, James moved to London, where John

83 Richards, 'Voices', p. 35; Erickson, Invisible immigrants, p. 27; Fitzpatrick, Oceans of consolation, pp. 565–71.
84 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/38.
85 Ibid. CR 31/42–4.
86 Ibid. CR 31/46.
87 Ibid. CR 31/36.
88 Ibid. CR 31/35.
wrote to him on 24 August 1856 to express the hope that 'you will have plenty of work in London'. After a further spell in Chester, James was employed in a Birkenhead shipyard in 1865, and John hoped that there, too, he 'had plenty of work' as 'I see their [h]as been plenty on building on the Mersey'. James's move to Birkenhead was probably prompted by the decline of shipbuilding in Chester. Cox and Miller of Liverpool took over the River Dee Co. shipyard in 1857, but after building a large number of iron sailing ships sold it in 1869. After a period out of work, James was employed at Birkenhead in 1868. John commented in his letter of 2 July: 'I suppose that most of our fellow prentices are their'. James's return from Birkenhead to Chester in 1874 was linked to his mother's death. John, unable to assist, wrote that 'it was very kind of you and Betsey to go and live in Chester'. James's continuing short-distance moves between and within towns in Cheshire is suggested by the fact that he lived in Birkenhead at no. 11 Princes Place, Lower Tranmere, when he received the news of John's death in 1907, but had not been at that address in 1891.

V

The most notable feature of John Brown's time in Australia was the extent of his wanderings there. Although this type of mobility is perhaps to be expected in the gold-field mentality, it is also consistent with the 'restless mobility' which Fitzpatrick notes in relation to Irish emigrants. Brown's letters offer a narrative of experience in the gold fields which, unlike some travellers' tales circulating in Britain, was based on first-hand experience. Popular stories emphasized the social disorder and inversion created by the influx of gold seekers to Victoria. Brown's comments on inflated prices and high wages, rapid movement of fortune-seekers in response to rumours of new finds, and the canvas-based lifestyle were also

89 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/23.
90 Ibid. CR 31/36.
91 Chester and the Dee, ed. Kennett, p. 15.
92 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/42.
93 Ibid. CR 31/51.
94 Fitzpatrick, Oceans of consolation, pp. 33, 610.
elements which underpinned the popular narratives. If Brown was aware of protests which had taken place on nearby gold fields over the issue of miners’ licences, he made no reference to them in his letters. B. C. Hodge emphasizes that as the gold fields developed, a degree of order and permanency emerged.\textsuperscript{96} This was reflected in Brown’s description of the Ballarat diggings on 24 November 1855. He explained ‘it is getting more like the town than where the diggings used to be for the milkman comes round every morning likewise grocers and such like’.\textsuperscript{97}

Destruction of the natural landscape concerned some contemporary visitors to the gold fields, but Brown was more preoccupied with how large-scale mechanized working affected his own profits, independence, and health.\textsuperscript{98} Describing his working methods at Ballarat on 16 May 1860, he commented that ‘I think we shall make a do of it for we are going to wash all ground before us.’ He was optimistic that an engine of 12 horse power and his team’s knowledge of quartz crushing would enable them to extract gold from the ‘two quartz reefs running through our ground’.

Francis Dicken Brocklehurst, from Macclesfield, arrived in Melbourne from San Francisco in the ship \textit{Lockett} in March 1860. He visited the Ballarat gold fields on 18 April 1860 at the same time that Brown was working there. Drawn from markedly different social backgrounds in Cheshire, there was no reason why either man should have been aware of the other’s presence. Brocklehurst, writing from the perspective of an interested but distant observer, described Ballarat as a ‘big rambling ugly town’. At the Black Hill mining works he described ‘24 crushers working 320 tons a week’. Brocklehurst’s reference to a ‘great number of quartz reefs and alluvial sinkings here’ indicates that surface alluvial gold was becoming more difficult to find, making deep sinking necessary.\textsuperscript{99} In these circumstances miners formed themselves into cooperatives, and in his claims at Ballarat in 1858–9 Brown was part of a co-operative with fifty-nine others. The scale of the undertaking was reflected in the purchase of an engine for £800. When this claim failed, Brown attributed it to the unmanageable size of

\textsuperscript{97} Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/22.
\textsuperscript{98} Goodman, ‘Gold-rush’, pp. 103, 106.
the co-operative, and for his next claim he was one of ten prospectors. As large companies became important in the exploitation of the gold fields in the 1860s, it was increasingly difficult for miners to retain their independence. Brown spent short periods in waged labour in 1862 and 1871 'sinking the hole by contract' for 'which we might make about £3 per week'. He viewed this as a temporary expedient, and his dissatisfaction with the expense of deep digging led him to consider work on 'some shallow diggings' in New Zealand.

Brown showed an awareness of media distortion of the gold rushes, stating in 1864 that 'you cannot believe one half of what you see in the papers for they print anything to keep the miners in the country'. For a more accurate flow of information he relied on reports of new gold finds from Cheshire friends and acquaintances. The flow of information from other prospectors shaped patterns of internal mobility in Australia and also in New Zealand, where Brown spent the period from 1863 to 1871. The extent to which his frustrated accounts of repeated 'bad luck' and his criticisms of 'this roving life' dispelled the positive reports which the Cheshire newspapers disseminated is not easy to assess. In a letter from Ballarat in September 1855 he explained that gold was 'not so easily got at as some people imagine', a theme emphasized at home in Towson's lectures.

VI

Other than the short period spent with his brother in the gold fields, John Brown had no kinship links in Australia. In such circumstances, the letter from home assumed tremendous importance, and Brown's letters exhibit the 'consolatory function' which Fitzpatrick identifies in Irish correspondence. His longing for news is emphasized in a letter of 16 May 1860, where he described how 'I have been waiting mail after mail and still no letter.' Brown used

100 Murphy, 'Goldrush Australia', p. 170.
101 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/30, 46.
102 Ibid. CR 31/34.
103 Ibid. CR 31/21.
104 Fitzpatrick, Oceans of consolation, pp. 20–1, 511.
105 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/27.
letters home as a way of affirming his role within the family and as a way of preventing fragmentation of the family unit. Although his life was characterized by frequent mobility, he viewed his family as a stable focus. This was reflected in the nostalgic way in which he reminded his parents of the part which he had played in earlier family gatherings. Writing on 13 May 1864 from New Zealand, he asked for news of the Chester May Day races, and on 7 June 1869 he placed himself in the midst of the family circle by commenting that ‘I would liked to drop in at the door and had a look at you and gone around to see our old friends.’ Through this device he was reviving fading memories and injecting immediacy into his correspondence. Another way of recalling personal memories was through the exchange of photographic images or cartes de visite. Brown expressed considerable pleasure at receiving one of his brother in 1868, although he was ‘taken aback’ at the unfamiliar image. He concluded that ‘I think they have used too much paint . . . if you had sent one just as it comes out of the machine and no paint I think I would have known you.’

Throughout the letters John Brown demonstrated a strong awareness of his moral duty to support his parents. In September 1862 he explained that he would have one more attempt to find gold as ‘it greaves me to the heart to think as he [his father] [h]as got to work at his time of life’.

Writing from the gold fields in Hokitika, New Zealand, in June 1866, John explained how ‘I hope to God to get a little gold and come home with it to make you comfortable in your old days. I don’t care for it myself only for you and mother.’ As most of the letters which his family wrote to John do not survive, it is unclear whether they contained any direct appeals for help. As Fitzpatrick points out, letters may have contained indirect appeals if they were full of ‘guilt arousing gloom’.

It appears that bad news had been sent to John in Australia, as James explained to his parents in July 1861 that ‘I know if he [John] had had money he would have sent it to you after what I told him’. Many of the letters referred to sending money home, typically £20, and there were elaborate apologies when he was unable to do so. Writing from Brighton, New Zealand, on 10 November 1867, John expressed his sorrow ‘to
hear of James being out of work so long’ and enclosed some money which he hoped they would ‘not be afraid to make use of . . . as far as it will go’. At no point did he request monetary assistance from his family, although Erickson suggests that for some emigrants this was often the motive for re-establishing correspondence after a long interval. Brown, therefore, seems to have achieved some measure of financial independence.

John Brown’s letters do not readily fit into the ‘dominant discourse’ of success which Fender identifies in emigrants’ letters from America. Brown did not emphasize the success of his life in Australia nor did he develop a ‘rhetoric of renunciation’ for his previous life in England. On the contrary, he expressed his longing for aspects of his former life in Chester. The long sequence of letters reflected his loneliness and his failure to assimilate to his new environment, which Erickson regards as one form of bias in emigrant writing. From the Australian perspective, his occupational adaptability was a measure of his success, since it was one of the main attributes needed in opening up new areas of settlement. In 1876 he still described himself as a shipwright, suggesting that, while he retained a clear sense of occupational identity, he was capable of adapting his skills to new tasks. By the time of his death on 12 October 1906, however, he was a farmer in the parish of Yarroweyah, Victoria, though one with somewhat limited resources, as his lease of Crown land of 27 acres had only a ‘very poor’ wheat crop. A Clydesdale stallion, described as a ‘young champion’, accounted for the bulk of the inventory value of £293 11s. 7d. It is impossible to tell whether he had attained the independence for which he had striven and whether this was more important than the pecuniary value of his estate. He left his estate to William Millar, a farmer of Strathmerton in Victoria, suggesting that by the time of his death he had severed links with home.

110 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/40, 59.
111 Fender, Sea changes, pp. 155, 205.
112 Erickson, Invisible immigrants, pp. 5–6.
114 Ches. R.O., Chester City Records, CR 31/54.
115 P.R.O. Vic., VPRS 7591 P2 Unit 397, Series 100 No. 312 (will of John Brown); VPRS 28 P2 Unit 778 (probate papers): information supplied by M. R. Shennan.
These individual case-studies illustrate the diversity and complexity of migrant origins and paths in the mid-nineteenth century. Their experience suggests that the outflow of emigrants from Britain should not be seen as an ‘undifferentiated mass’ of people forced out by rural poverty. William Wood and John and James Brown all set out from an urban context; although they were clearly aiming to avoid downward social mobility at home, their movement abroad was influenced also by the exchange of information within an industrializing economy.

In the case of the Browns, emigration cannot be separated from mobility within the United Kingdom, as their periods of permanent and temporary residence in Australia were at one level simply logical extensions of a developing ‘migrant mentality’. Their correspondence between 1841 and 1884 suggests that some skilled workers from Chester were hiring ‘themselves out on alternate shores of the ocean’. While the Browns may have been atypically mobile, their experience suggests that Foerster’s observation in 1919 may have some resonance in the Cheshire context. He noted that if records of migration ‘were to be gathered together they would reveal an amazing frequency of proletariat globe-trotting, a frequency unequalled by the upper-class traveller’.

It is clear that news of opportunities overseas reached craftsmen in Chester, some of whom were prepared to move repeatedly over long distances as a normal part of working life. Moreover, John Brown’s correspondence suggests that some of the young male adults who travelled to Australia fit Thistlethwaite’s picture of ‘“repeaters” who moved to and from the country of emigration’ and who ‘made a regular practice of temporary migration’. This type of emigration by individuals, rather than families, with a high propensity to return, was a pattern which became characteristic of the late nineteenth century. William Wood, in contrast, viewed his family’s movement as permanent. Even so, his decision to migrate to Australia was linked to the flow of information within an urban context of industrial and commercial development in the

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116 Thistlethwaite, ‘Migration’, p. 28; Baines, Migration, pp. 145–8.
118 Ibid. p. 25.
119 Baines, Migration, pp. 33–4, 139.
north of England. In contrast, the freedom of low-wage rural workers in southern England to migrate to Australia depended more on the provision and promotion of assisted passages.

This movement of individuals from Cheshire to Australia in the mid-nineteenth century is also significant in light of Baines's argument that the establishment of such links could encourage chain migration. Letters, shipboard journals, and return migrants all contributed to the flow of information and could have a profound impact: 'once an initial emigration had occurred, an area might continue to experience relatively high emigration, irrespective of economic or social circumstances'. Neighbourhood links were also important in shaping the experience of individuals once they reached Australia. In common with Irish migrants, John Brown was anxious to maintain contact with neighbours and acquaintances from 'home'.

Emigration, although a commonplace experience, was still selective. John O’Neil, a power-loom weaver of Clitheroe, had gleaned an extremely positive view of Australia from local newspapers. In frequent entries between January 1856 and July 1861 he recorded his impression that work and high wages were easily obtained, which led him to conclude, 'That’s the place to go.' In contrast to William Wood, O’Neil chose not to emigrate despite his awareness of the potential opportunities. The importance of choice is highlighted by John Brown in a letter of June 1869. Concerned at the high levels of unemployment for shipwrights in Britain, he commented that 'I don’t know what will become of all the shipwrights in the dockyard, but I suppose government will do something for them in the way of emigration for those that will go to the colonies.' At a broad level this comment confirms Ravenstein’s assertion that the main causes of migration were economic. However, Brown implies that only some unemployed shipwrights would have been willing to emigrate. The evidence from Cheshire confirms that a crucial factor in migration was the responsiveness of individuals to the flow of information from friends and family.

120 Baines, Migration, pp. 26–9, 32, 44, 87, 139; Haines and Shlomowitz, 'Emigration from Europe', p. 143; Fitzpatrick, Oceans of consolation, p. 516.
121 Fitzpatrick, Oceans of consolation, p. 598.