

“A superabundant population, or rather a disproportion between the demand and supply of labour”, especially in the cotton manufacturing districts, led to a recommendation for a grant of public money to assist about 1,200 families, *ie* about 6-7,000 people, to emigrate, especially to Nova Scotia. “Your Committee are strongly impressed with the conviction that the removal to the colonies of 1,200 families ... will tend in a far greater degree than is commonly supposed to the diminution of general distress; and while those removed will be placed in a situation of comfort and of ultimate independence, those who remain will be materially benefited by the abstraction of their redundant labour.” So this was a win-win situation, it was felt, as long as the poor went voluntarily, not to mention the saving in poor relief to the property owners left behind with fewer mouths to support. The Committee went on to say that it was not ready to report details of a permanent system of emigration, but thought that one would “produce very beneficial results”.¹

As an addendum, the Committee added that it would not be enough to think only of emigration from England, Wales and Scotland, since the Irish would cross the Irish Sea to fill any gaps in Great Britain if they were not included in the scheme.

Various witnesses to the Committee told of rural poverty in the Midlands and the cost of allaying it. A witness from Oundle said that the poor rates in the parish (population 2,500) cost £3-4,000 a year and that 40-60 people were employed mending the roads “doing little or nothing”, paid for from the poor rates. Many were agricultural labourers but they included carpenters, tailors, masons and shoemakers: “there is such a redundancy of them”. A farmer and overseer of the poor from Great Horwood in Buckinghamshire argued that it would be advantageous to the ratepayers to mortgage their rates for a period of years to raise money to pay for emigration.² “The quantity of labourers in the country where I live is about one third more than can get regular employment, so that one third is supported at parochial expense.” There was no manufacturing work except lace-making by women in the parish. None of the poor had said that they were disposed to emigrate but, he argued, if they had it explained to them, they would be willing to go. “A gentleman of Kent is sending them off by waggon loads to the United

¹ 2nd Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Emigration from the UK 1827 (Parliamentary Papers session 1826-27, vol V).

² Thomas Bradbury, QQ 1209-53.