Scots and Emigration 1800 – 1950
handling collection
Welcome to the National Museum of Scotland.

Our Emigration handling collection contains 9 original artefacts and 9 written sources from our collection and we encourage everyone to enjoy looking at and touching the artefacts to find out all about them.

These notes include:
- Background information on emigration from Scotland, including the Highland Clearances in the 19th century.
- Details about each item.
- Ideas for questions, things to think about and discuss with your group.

NMS Good handling guide
The collection is used by lots of different groups so we’d like your help to keep the collection in good condition. Please follow these guidelines for working with the artefacts and talk them through with your group.

1. Always wear gloves when handling the artefacts (provided)
2. Always hold artefacts over a table and hold them in two hands
3. Don’t touch or point at artefacts with pencils, pens or other sharp objects
4. Check the artefacts at the start and the end of your session
5. Please report any missing or broken items using the enclosed form
What is emigration?

- Emigration involves individuals or groups of people leaving their country of origin to settle in another. This may be for personal, social or economic reasons, or to escape hardship or persecution.
- Immigration is the arrival and settlement into a country or population of people from other countries.

Scots and emigration

- For hundreds of years, Scots have left this country to live and work abroad. Some people left in search of a better life, others were forced to leave.
- The main destinations for most Scots were Canada, America and Australia. This was largely due to British Colonial expansion which began at the turn of the seventeenth century with the establishment of the Virginia Company (led by Captain John Smith) and many more like it.
- People could go to these countries as they were part of the growing British Empire and the empire needed e.g. administrators, soldiers and missionaries.
- During the 19th century, the number of people leaving Scotland increased as more became known about countries overseas. Transport by sailing ship and eventually steam ship also became more readily available.
- Many who left Scotland did not survive the lengthy voyages. On packed ships there was also the risk of diseases such as dysentery and smallpox which would spread rapidly amongst passengers.
- Some emigrants failed to prosper in their new homes.
- Other people found success in various trades and established families in their new country.
- Scottish emigrants took their traditions, music, customs and language with them and many Scottish traditions were maintained, developed and influenced by cultures that they found there.

One of the ships taking the emigrants to Canada, leaving Stornoway harbour
The earliest settlers

- The earliest Scottish settlements in Canada formed in the 18th century and were often made up of disbanded regiments of soldiers.

- The Seven Years’ War (1756 – 1763) is regarded as the first global war and involved Britain, Prussia and Hanover against France, Austria and Sweden. The outcome of the Seven Years War was that Britain was established as the greatest colonial power with control over India and North America.

- Soldiers who had fought in the Seven Years’ War and the American War of Independence (1775 – 1783) were given generous freehold land grants by the government which allowed them to settle in Canada. This also provided a reserve of trained men should the need to defend the new colonies that were arising.

- During this period, the aftermath of the Jacobite Risings (1688 – 1746) performed as a catalyst for many Scots to move to the Americas in greater numbers.

Forced emigration

- From the late 16th century to the 19th century, many Scots were forced to leave their homes.

- Convicts were often sent to penal colonies which were being established in Australia. These convicts acted as labor to build the colonies.

- Many people emigrated as a form of religious salvation, moving to places where they would be free to practice their own religion without persecution. As settlements began to be established in America and Canada distinct religious groups were visible.
The Highland Clearances

- One of the main forms of forced emigration was due to the Highland Clearances that took place in the 18th and 19th centuries.

- During this period thousands of crofters were forcibly evicted from their land by the landowners to make way for the more profitable intensive sheep-farming or deer hunting.

- These crofters often had little alternative to move as they were faced with high rents and little legal protection.

- Many of those evicted chose to move to large industrial towns such as Glasgow where they experienced cramped tenement living and poor working conditions in factories. To avoid this, many people chose to emigrate to Canada where they could continue farming.

- Whether the Highland Clearances destroyed a way of life or this way of life was coming to an end anyway, they were depicted in paintings and song for generations to come.

Crofts at Garthsness, Quendale, 1874
after the tenants were evicted
In search of a better life

• It is important to note that not all Scottish Emigration took place as a result of forceful displacement. Instead, many Scots carefully planned their travels and were aware of the economic benefits that places like America and Canada offered. Many Scots were driven by enterprise and entrepreneurship; a new land would consequently offer new opportunities.

• Social and economic pressures in Scotland during the 18th and 19th centuries meant that although levels of employment in industry were high, earning a living and maintaining a decent life were often difficult.

• Although many people left Scotland as a last hope of escaping poverty, many were skilled workers and had some capital to help them.

• Emigration was encouraged by emigration societies and government agents who arranged destinations and passages. Emigration societies were often set up by businessmen or groups of tenant farmers.

• Although Scotland’s population rose from 1,265,380 in 1755 to 4,472,103 in 1901 and the country became a mature industrial economy, during the same period it had one of the highest levels of emigration in Britain.

• Although the reasons for emigration changed over time, rates of emigration from Scotland stayed high until the 1930s.

Canada

• One of the most popular destinations for emigrants from Scotland was Canada and this resource looks at some of the items that the emigrants would have needed when they arrived.

• A key ship which brought 200 Scottish immigrants to Pictou in 1773 was the Ship Hector. It is thought that this stimulated a continual flow of Scots to Canada.

• Nova Scotia is a Canadian province which means ‘New Scotland’ An example of a trade which attracted many Scots to Canada was the timber trade. The places where settlements were made were attributed to where people could easily access this work and the ships that would take the timber back to the Clyde (eg. Charlottetown).

• Scots went on to lay railroads, found banks and exploit the fur trade, and helped form the political infrastructure of modern day Canada.

Two well-dressed young ladies, happy to wave good-bye to the old life, as they leave for Canada in 1927
Scots and Emigration 1800 – 1950 handling collection

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Items from home

1. Darning mushroom

- This is a mushroom shaped tool which is usually made of wood.
- It is used to hold socks and stockings in place for them to be darned.
- The sock is stretched over the curved top of the mushroom, and gathered tightly around the stalk to hold it in place for darning.
- Darning is a sewing technique for repairing holes and worn areas in fabric.
- It is a traditional method for repairing fabric damage or holes that do not run along a seam and where patching is impractical or would create discomfort for the wearer, such as on the heel of a sock.
- Other tools for darning include darning eggs, darning gourds and darning needles.
- Darning is mainly done by hand but can also be done on a sewing machine.

See

Look at the size of the object. It is quite small and would have been fairly easy to fit in a bag to take on a ship.

Touch

Feel the object. It is quite comfortable to hold. Can you imagine darning a sock on it?

Think

Why do you think people darned the holes in their socks instead of just buying new ones?
2. Butter pats

- In the 19th century butter pats were used to shape butter into bricks, ready for sale and use.
- Milk that had been churned into butter needed to be patted into shape but a person’s warm hands would melt the butter, so butter pats were used instead.
- Butter pats are sometimes referred to as ‘Scotch hands’.
- Using butter pats was a skilful job and involved considerable dexterity.
- First, excess moisture was squeezed out of the butter, which was then transferred to a wooden board. Holding a pat in each hand, the butter maker then worked the butter into shape.
- The inside face of the pat is ribbed. This gripped the butter and squeezed out any remaining water. The ribs also made attractive patterns on the finished butter.
- Butter pats and moulds were washed in salted water. This prevented the butter from sticking to them.

See

Like the darning mushroom, these are small items that would have been easy to pack.

Touch

Hold the objects. How do you think they would have been used?

Think

Many emigrants settled in rural areas where they needed to make/grow everything required for daily life – what might this have included?
3. Spurtle

- A spurtle is a Scottish tool used for stirring porridge and soup.
- The long thin shape means it can be used for constant stirring which stops the porridge from congealing and becoming lumpy.
- It is curved to make it easier to hold.
- Spurtles were usually made from beech wood which was plentiful in Scotland.
- Porridge was one of the main foods for poor people living in the Highlands of Scotland in the 19th century.
- People often made enough porridge to last a week and poured it into the kitchen dresser drawer to set.
- They made fresh porridge for breakfast each day and take slices of the set porridge to work with them.
4. Iron

- In the 19th century clothes were normally made from natural fabrics such as cotton and linen.
- Cotton and linen crease easily and needed to be ironed after they were washed.
- The iron was heated directly on the fire or the hotplate of a stove.
- Most irons came with a stand to rest on.
- There were different types of iron used in the 19th century, each with a specific purpose and which often used different heat source. These included polishing irons which gave a smooth, polished finish to clothes, millinery irons for ironing bonnets and hats and egg irons for ironing sleeves or gathered fabric.
- Laundries – either commercial or in a large or medium sized household would have kept some of these different types of iron. However smaller households, including the people who were likely to emigrate would only have had one or two as they had fewer, less fashionable clothes to iron.
5. Christening robe

- A christening in a church marked a baby’s first public appearance and was a cause of celebration.
- The Church decided that all babies should be christened in white to symbolize their innocence and purity.
- Christening gowns were usually made of fine cotton or linen and decorated with a type of embroidery called ‘Whitework’.
- They were designed to resemble fashionable 19th century ladies dresses.
- Christening gowns were often kept for sentimental reasons and were passed down through the generations, often becoming family heirlooms.
- The baby always wore a white cap with the dress and was usually carried in a christening cape, mantle or shawl to help keep it warm.
6. Wolf fur

- In the 19th century in Canada wolves were hunted to protect people and animals from being attacked. Wolf fur was also used to make clothing and blankets by people living in Canada as they protected the wearer from the cold climate.
- Wolves have thick furry coats made up of two layers of hair. The first layer consists of long tough hairs called guard hairs that repel water and dirt. The second layer is an undercoat of dense, soft fur that insulates the wolf and keeps it warm.
- The outer layer grows in ‘capes’ on the wolf’s back and can be up to 20cm long. The inner layer of fur may be up to 10cm thick and helps keep the wolf warm in temperatures up to -40F.
- The colour of wolf fur varies from grey to white, red, brown and black and some have mixed colour coats.
- The colour of a wolf’s coat helps to camouflage it. For example, white wolves are more common in areas with lots of snow.
- Wolf pelts were valued by many Native American Indian tribes and were traded with the Scottish immigrants.
7. Caribou and moose hides

- Caribou are wild reindeer which are found in Canada and Alaska. Moose are the largest member of the deer family and are found in Canada, Alaska and parts of northern USA.

- Animal hides were an important raw material for people living in 19th century Canada, particularly for clothes, moccasins (a type of glove) and boots. Moose and caribou skins were the most commonly used.

- Animal skins need to be tanned before they can be made into garments. Tanning is the process of making leather from the skins of animals.

- Traditional tanning methods are time consuming – up to 2 weeks for one hide - and take a great deal of physical strength. Hides can also be tanned in a factory but these are not as soft and strong.

- Moose and caribou hides which have been tanned using traditional methods are strong, durable, lightweight and warm.

- Once a hide was tanned, people would often decorate it by sewing beads onto it or trimming it with fur.
8. Snow shoes

- These are special shoes designed for walking over snow.
- They work by distributing the weight of the wearer over a larger area so that the person’s foot does not sink completely into the snow.
- Snowshoes were made of a tough hardwood frame with a webbing of caribou hide in the middle of the frame.
- The frame had a small opening for the foot, which was fastened to the snowshoe by leather straps.
- Snowshoes were raised at the toe to prevent the wearer from tripping and to stop them gathering snow.
- Snowshoes are an example of immigrants adopting practices and techniques used by indigenous people. They were originally used by Native Americans and then adopted by immigrants. John Rae, the Scottish explorer, was one of the first non-Native Americans to use snowshoes. He was sneered at by other explorers for doing this but recognised the superiority of these technologies over anything introduced from Europe.
- Snowshoes were essential for fur traders, trappers and anyone whose life or living depended on the ability to get around in areas of deep and frequent snowfall.
9. Porcupine quills

- Porcupines are rodents with a coat of sharp spines called quills which defend them from attackers.
- The quills can drop out when the porcupine shakes its body or they can be pulled out.
- Porcupines were hunted for meat. The quills were traditionally used for decoration by Native Americans and this practice was then adopted by immigrants.
- They could be wrapped onto fringe and rawhide strips, or sewn onto leather for embroidered clothing and accessories, or stapled through birch bark to decorate boxes or ornaments. They could also be used to make jewellery.
- Quills are hard on the outside and spongy on the inside, making them useful for many kinds of craftwork. They can be left their natural white color, or can be dyed in various colors.
Contemporary images of Emigration

10. Painting – *The Last of the Clan*

- This painting is by Thomas Faed (1826 – 1900)
- It shows the departure of an emigrant ship from a Scottish village at the time of the Highland Clearances.
- The scene is viewed from the point of the person on board ship who bids a sad farewell to his friends and family who are left behind.
- This type of painting is called a ‘narrative painting’. This means that it tells a story.
- Narrative paintings were very popular in the Victorian period.

Think

What impression of the experience of emigrants does the artist create in this painting? How does the painting make you feel? Compare it with the other scenes of emigration that are included in this pack.

See

Look at the faces of the people in the paintings. How do you think they are feeling?
11. Painting – *A Coronach in the Backwoods*

- This painting is by George W. Simson (1791 – 1862)
- It shows a settler who has emigrated from Scotland playing a lament on the bagpipes as his wife weeps and comforts the baby after receiving news from Scotland.
- The scene is about the resourcefulness and independence of the Highland emigrant who has single-handedly cleared the forest with his axe and built a cabin. Although he has achieved this, his mind, and that of his wife, is still filled with the vision of home.
- Many Scottish emigrants to Canada would have felt this same sense of longing for their homeland.
- This type of painting is called a ‘narrative painting’. This means that it tells a story. Narrative paintings were very popular in the Victorian period.
There is a lot of information on this poster and whether the information was helpful or not depended on people being able to read. What do you think would have been the most important information for the emigrants?

What kind of information does it give us? What problems do you think this poster was designed to avoid?

12. Poster – General Information for intending Emigrants

- In 1888, the British government issued this poster providing ‘General Information for Intending Emigrants’ to Canada and the colonies in Australasia and South Africa.

- It includes details of the best months to sail, the cost and number of days the journey will take, what to do on landing and what kind of jobs were waiting to be filled.

- Until the 19th century, the British government rarely intervened to control the conditions in which emigrants travelled. However, following alleged abuses by emigration agents, the government placed restrictions on the numbers of passengers carried, improved health and hygiene on ships and ensured that every person travelling would have an allocated supply of food.

- Journey times to destinations were reduced when steam ships replaced sailing ships in the 1850s and 60s. For example, in 1850 it took 5 weeks to sail from Greenock to Canada by sail ship. By 1870 this was reduced to 2 weeks by steam ship.
13. Poster – Anchor Line Steamers from Glasgow to New York

- The Anchor Line was a transatlantic steamship company founded in 1856 by two brothers, Nicol & Robert Handyside and shipmaster Robert Henderson.
- The company’s first steamship voyage across the Atlantic was very slow, taking 28 days.
- However, by the 1870s they were sailing from Glasgow to New York every Wednesday and Saturday and from Glasgow to Halifax, Nova Scotia and St John, New Brunswick (both in Canada) once a month from March to September.
- A ticket to Canada with the Anchor Line cost £13 and 13shillings (there were 20 shillings in every pound. This would be about £800 in today’s money and would have been a substantial amount for the average person who would have earned around 10 – 20 shillings a week.
What information on this poster would encourage people to emigrate? Compare this information with the information on the other posters in this resource. Which one do you think would have been most useful for emigrants?

Why are the USA and Canada at the bottom of the list by the time this poster was published?

14. Poster – Emigration to Cape of Good Hope and Natal

- This poster, advertising emigration to many parts of the world, is from Arbroath in 1882.

- Although emigration from Angus was never on the scale of highland emigration, significant numbers still left the area during the 19th century.

- In the early part of the 19th century the main destination was Canada, reaching a peak in the 1830s.

- Canada and the USA are near the bottom of the list in this advertisement. This is because they were already popular destinations and there was an existing demand to travel there.

- John Herald, Auctioneer, was acting as a broker for steamship companies, selling their tickets to his clients.
How many people can you see that live in this house?

Do you think the houses would have been quick to put up and easy to adapt? What do you think they would have been like to live in?

15. Photograph – Settler’s house in Canada

- Much of the settlement of western Canada in the late 19th century was carried out by land development companies, such as the Commercial Colonisation Company of Manitoba, who offered homesteads (house with a patch of land) at reasonable rates. The company offered settlers wooden houses as illustrated: a one-roomed house with cellar cost £20 and a two-storey house with five rooms cost £66.

- These houses were like kit houses – they would be ordered flat packed and then the settler would build the house themselves.
See

What reason do you think these people have for leaving Scotland?

Think

Compare this photograph with the painting The Last of the Clan. The painting deliberately evokes a sense of sadness and romanticism. The photograph creates a more positive and forward looking impression but may still be deliberately posed. Which one do you think is the more reliable source of evidence for what emigration was really like?

16. Photograph – We’ve got jobs in Canada; We don’t want the dole!

- This photograph shows a group of Scottish emigrants on board the ship ‘Minnedosa’ on their way to Canada in 1925.
- Many Scottish people made the journey to Canada which offered new beginnings and job opportunities, in short supply in their own country. There are descendants of the Scots settlers in Canada today. Nova Scotia translates as New Scotland and traditional Highland Games are still held in the region.
- This photograph shows us that emigration continued into the 20th century.
You can see that many of the people are holding white handkerchiefs. These were traditionally used to wave people off on a voyage.

Imagine the hustle and bustle at the docks as emigrant ships were leaving. What do you think the atmosphere would have been like?

This photograph shows people on Glasgow docks waving goodbye to emigrants from the Hebrides leaving for Canada on board the ship ‘Metagama’ in 1925.

Can you put these scenes in order? What impressions do these give of life on board the ship?

Think Do you think these are promotional drawings or drawings by someone on board as part of the voyage?

These engravings show what life would have been like on an overcrowded 19th century emigrant sail ship.

The engravings include:
1. Passengers waving as the ship departs
2. A roll call being taken on deck
3. The emigrants eating their dinner below deck
4. Passengers receiving their soup rations on deck
5. Passengers eating their dinner in the ‘forecastle’ area on deck
6. Emigrants charting the ship’s progress
7. Emigrants relaxing below deck
8. Emigrants relaxing on deck
9. Emigrants dancing on deck for evening entertainment
10. The transportation of animals on the ship
11. A plan of the sleeping berths and dining tables below deck