

Agricultural depression in England, 1873–96: skills transfer and the ‘Redeeming Scots’*

by E. H. Hunt and S. J. Pam

Abstract

This article considers whether the migration of Scottish farmers to East Anglia constitutes evidence that English agriculture failed to respond effectively to changed market conditions in the later nineteenth century. In received accounts of the agricultural depression, enlightened, adaptable, and hard-working Scottish farmers are contrasted with local agriculturalists who, until the Scots demonstrated that survival lay in producing milk for London, were allegedly reluctant to abandon cereal growing. Using detailed evidence from 39 Essex parishes, the magnitude and timing of farmer-migration, and the transfer of skills, are examined in the context of claims that English agriculture ‘failed’.

Migration might transfer skills, as well as labour, bringing advantage to the host economy: refugee Huguenots with their textile expertise for example, and pioneer settlers who introduced British farm stock to new world agriculture. Likewise, skills might be transferred by internal migration, as with the dissemination of eighteenth-century mechanical know-how by men trained at Boulton and Watt’s engineering ‘academy’. Perhaps the best-known example of skills transfer within British agriculture, and the subject of the present investigation, is the migration of Scottish farmers to East Anglia, particularly to Essex, during the late nineteenth-century agricultural depression.

Essex farming, heavily dependent on cereals, was in difficulties after 1873, its plight exacerbated by the contrast with its recent prosperity. That lost prosperity is usually accounted among the obstacles to successful adaptation. The arable farming of the eastern counties had been renowned for its methodological elegance, the lavish application of capital and labour, and prodigious yields. So taken were they by the apparent success of ‘high farming’, it is said, so flattered by numerous laudatory reviews, that when imports rose and cereals no longer paid, farmers and landlords were disinclined to change their ways. They sought other explanations for distress, and their agricultural reputation diminished. Their revised image was of men who were stubborn, short-sighted, and prepared to let land lie derelict rather than adopt alternatives to cereals. One visitor to Essex noted, ‘an obstinate traditionary rule requires that under any

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and every circumstance such and such farm shall grow nothing but corn'.¹ Another described Essex farmers embedded in 'a pattern of farming from which they were unable to extract themselves'.² With farmers allegedly 'stunned', landlords conspicuously failing to display the progressiveness and vigour of their eighteenth-century predecessors, and governments disinclined to temper market forces, the outlook appeared bleak.³

And then, as recorded in numerous scholarly, journalistic, and anecdotal accounts, revival began with the invigorating influx of migrant Scottish farmers. These incomers were enterprising and hard-working, as devoted to pasture as Essex men were to cereals. With their equipment and Ayrshire cows they moved into low-rent Essex farms, demonstrating to astonished locals how to survive, flourish even, despite still falling cereal prices.⁴ This, at least, is the story often told. E. A. Pratt's account (1906) is among the more colourful: 'when things were absolutely at their worst', he wrote, 'they began to get better. Far away from Essex ... lived a sturdy race of farmers ... unspoilt by prosperity ... thrifty and hard-working'.⁵ The question implicit in a chapter-heading in P. A. Graham's *The revival of English agriculture* (1899), 'How derelict Essex was saved', was answered similarly and succinctly, 'a great number of Scottish farmers came'.⁶ More recent accounts describe migrants 'coming to the rescue', making farming pay on 'run-down arable holdings that had bankrupted their predecessors', providing a 'principal' solution to depression, the 'greatest contribution to its limitation', and showing Essex farmers how 'even derelict clay holdings might be transformed'.⁷ The key to this reversal of fortunes, was, of course, replacing cereal growing with milk for London, in which re-structuring migrant Scots were usually attributed the leading role.⁸ Although dairying was reported to have 'everything in its favour', and Essex as 'the land of milk and money', local farmers 'hesitated' to exploit this opportunity, 'while Scottish farmers acted'.⁹ E. G. Strutt, less hesitant than most Essex-men, was nevertheless fulsome in acknowledging the Scots as 'the chief cause

¹ P. J. Perry, 'An agricultural journalist on the 'Great Depression', Richard Jeffries', *J. British Studies* 9 (1969–70), p. 131. On this theme generally see E. H. Hunt and S. J. Pam, 'Managerial failure in late-Victorian Britain?: Land-use and English agriculture', *EcHR* 54 (2001), p. 240; id., 'Responding to agricultural depression, 1873–96: managerial success, entrepreneurial failure?', *AgHR* 50 (2002), pp. 225–7.

² H. Watt, 'Changes in agriculture in Thurrock from 1880–1965', *Panorama: J. Thurrock Local History Society* 9 (1965), p. 22.

³ R. P. Stearns, 'Agricultural adaptation in England, 1875–1900', II, *Agricultural Hist.*, 6 (1932), p. 148.

⁴ Some moved south in trains hired for their exclusive use, stopping at milking time *en route*. For an example, Kathleen Filby's grandfather, J. Gemmill, moved from Ayrshire in 1896. K. Filby, *The annals of the Young family during three generations of farming in Essex, 1896–1995* (1995), p. 1.

⁵ E. A. Pratt, *The transition in agriculture* (1906), pp. 26–8.

⁶ P. A. Graham, *The revival of English agriculture* (1899), p. 23.

⁷ G. E. Mingay, *Rural life in Victorian England* (1977), p. 70; id. 'The Farmer', in E. J. T. Collins (ed.), *Agrarian history of England and Wales, VII, 1850–1914* (2 vols, 2000), (i), p. 776; P. Horn, *The changing countryside in Victorian and Edwardian England and Wales* (1984), pp. 81–3; A. F. J. Brown, *Meagre harvest: the Essex farm-workers' struggle against poverty, 1750–1914* (1990), p. 79; J. A. Symon, *Scottish farming: past and present* (1959), pp. 195–6.

⁸ Among many such comments see VCH Essex, II, (1907), p. 339; E. L. Smith, *Go East for a farm: a study of internal migration* (1932), p. 35; E. J. T. Collins, 'Rural and agricultural change' in Collins (ed.), *Agrarian history*, VII (i), p. 175; Graham, *Revival of English agriculture*, p. 23.

⁹ J. Brown, *Agriculture in England: a study of farming, 1871–1947* (1987), p. 48. See also H. Levy, *Large and small holdings* (1911), p. 208; P. Wormell, *Essex farming, 1900–2000* (1999), p. 52.

of Essex becoming a dairy county'.¹⁰ And while some diehards persevered with 'corn, corn, corn', many others followed the Scottish example.¹¹ Thus was 'derelict' Essex saved.

Such is the traditional story, as told at the time and since recounted by descendents of both the pioneer migrants, and of Scots who moved south later. In time the Essex-Scots flourished: by the mid-twentieth century they farmed somewhere approaching half of the county and were prominent in the local agricultural community.¹² But parts of the story are unclear and other parts, influenced by the self-evaluating accounts of migrant Scots, or their descendants, may have been exaggerated. One Essex-Scot, for example, Hew Watt, claimed his migrant grandparents were 'comparatively poor' when they moved to Thurrock in 1879, whereas other sources indicate that they arrived a decade later, on a hired train carrying their stock and equipment.¹³ Among several issues to be addressed are the scale of the migration, when it began, where settlement occurred within Essex, which transferred skills proved the most valuable, and whether the Scots' contribution was as significant as is claimed. The prominent role of 'redeeming Scots' in received explanations of the recovery obviously reflects unfavourably on the performance of south-eastern agriculturalists as a whole and is often cited as evidence that English agriculture 'failed' at this time. It is in this context, in particular, that the 'redeeming Scots' episode merits serious investigation.

I

While the Scots' influence is mentioned in most accounts of late nineteenth-century farming, and extensively in evidence to the 1894–7 *Royal Commission on Agricultural Depression*, the only previous detailed analysis is E. L. Smith's, *Go East for a farm: a study of rural migration* (1932). This, like the present study, focused on migration into Essex, the destination of most migrant farmers and 'the typical example of agricultural depression'.¹⁴ Smith's pioneering investigation was concerned with more theoretical aspects of rural migration than the present inquiry, and gave little attention to how, or whether, migration brought about agricultural revival. His main source was responses to a questionnaire, distributed in 1930–1, to approximately half of Essex farmers, which included questions on family history. More detailed, and probably more reliable, information can be gleaned from the census enumerators' books now available for the depression period. These list farmers' names and addresses, their age and place of birth, together with similar information for their wives, children, and other co-residents. These details have been assembled for all those whose place of birth was Scotland, Wales,

¹⁰ Evidence to the *Royal Commission on the Agricultural Depression*, BPP, 1894, XVI (i), evidence, 13890.

¹¹ T. W. Fletcher, 'The Great Depression of English agriculture, 1873–96', *EcHR* 9 (1960–1), p. 431.

¹² Wormell, *Essex farming*, p. 52, and below, p. 86. Three out of four Essex delegates to the NFU in the 1960s, and half of the chairmen of the Colchester Farmers' Union between 1912 and 1998, were of Scottish descent.

¹³ The hired train was shared with one other

Scottish family. Watt, 'Changes in agriculture', pp. 22–3; E. J. T. Collins, *A history of the Orsett Estate, 1873–1914* (1978), p. 43; id., 'The Great Agricultural Depression in south Essex' *Panorama: J. Thurrock Local Hist. Soc.*, 9 (1965), p. 17; Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading (hereafter MERL), ESS 3.

¹⁴ Collins, 'Rural and agricultural change', p. 162; P. J. Perry, *British farming in the Great Depression, 1870–1914* (1974), p. 99.

TABLE 1. Parish groupings employed in the study (39 parishes).

Group	Parishes	Characteristics
1	Ingrave, Mountnessing, Margarettng, Ingatestone, Shenfield	heavy London clay, near to railway
2	Downham, Purleigh, Laindon, West Horndon, Ramsden Bellhouse, Cold Norton	heavy London clay, near to railway by late 1880s
3	Steeple, East Hanningfield, Gt. Wigborough, St Lawrence, Layer Breton	heavy London clay, poor access to railway
4	Takeley, Steeple Bumstead, Gt Canfield, Rayne, Stambourne	boulder clay, near to railway
5	Good Easter, Pleshey, White Roding, High Easter, Aythorpe Roding	boulder clay, poor access to railway
6	Frating, Lawford, Bradfield, Little Bromley	medium soil (Tendring Hundred), near to railway
7	Lamarsh, Hatfield Peverel, Stanway, Southchurch, Broomfield	light soil, near to railway
8	Danbury, Gt. Stambridge, Gt. Wakering, Woodham Walter	light soil, poor access to railway

Note: see Map 1 for the location of these groups.

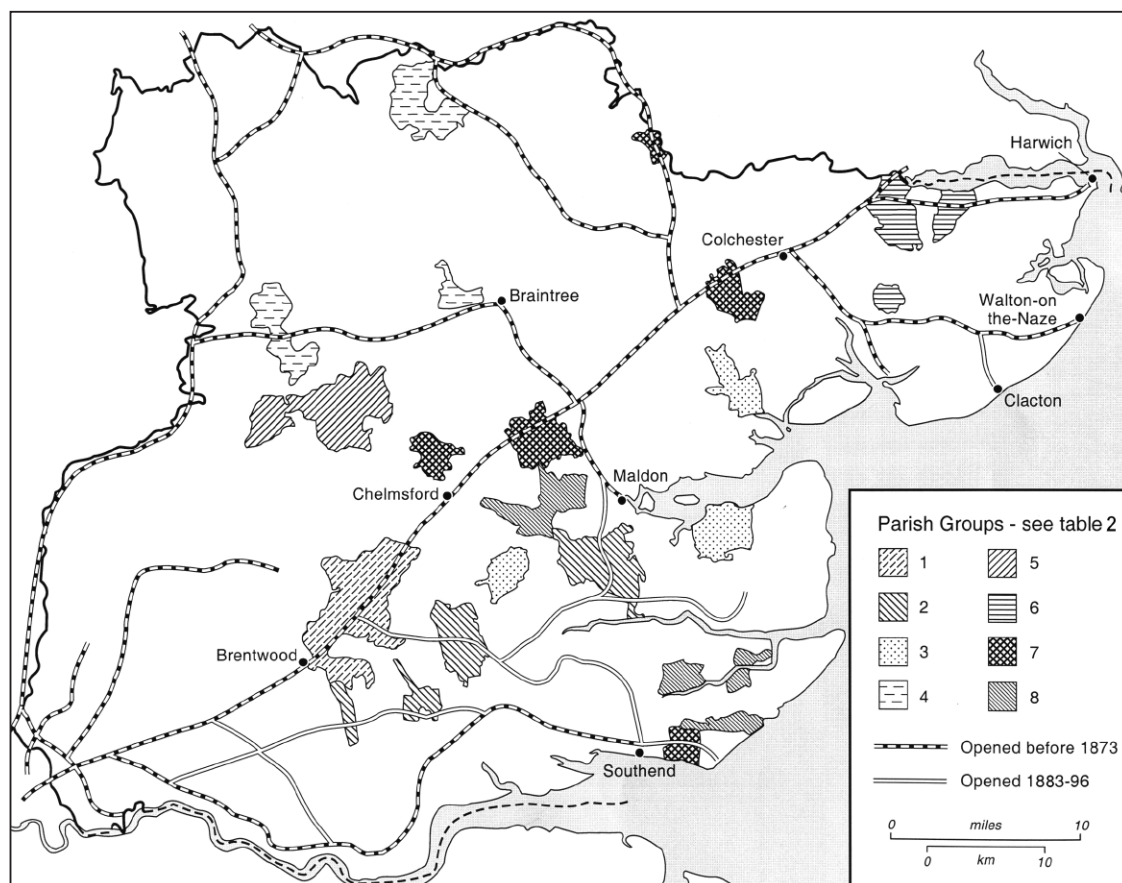
or the more-remote English counties. Time, and budgetary constraints, precluded collecting information from every Essex parish. Accordingly, information has been compiled for the same 39 parishes, containing over 20 per cent of Essex farms, investigated in our earlier analysis of changing land-use (Table 1).¹⁵ Supplementary evidence has been extracted for various dates from *Kelly's Directory*, which lists farmers' names and addresses (or approximate location), but little other information.¹⁶

For 1901, by which time a tentative recovery had begun, the census enumerators' books for the 39 parishes under investigation list just 22 Scottish-born farmers, not much more than one in every 40 farmers.¹⁷ More Scots moved to Essex than to any other county, but on the evidence

¹⁵ For more details see S. J. Pam, 'Essex agriculture: landowners' and farmers' responses to economic change, c.1850–1914' (unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London, 2004), ch. 5. Identifying Scots among farmers listed in *Kelly's* and the *Post Office Directories* was greatly assisted by the specialist knowledge of the late F. E. Kenchington, sometime lecturer at The Essex Institute of Agriculture, Writtle, and Mrs Audrey Lyon, an Essex-Scot, of North Benfleet Hall Farm. More recently Professor E. J. T. Collins kindly made available his annotated lists of migrant farmers drawn from *Kelly's* and the *Post Office Directories*, supplemented by his notes on individual families. He had also been advised by the late F. E. Kenchington and we are grateful to Professor Collins for making available Kenchington's notes and correspondence.

¹⁶ *Kelly's Directories*, 1874, 1886, 1894, 1896, 1906. *Kelly's Directory* and the *Post Office Directory* were the first resort for identifying in-migrants before the census enumerators' books for 1891 and 1901 were made available to researchers, an exercise that relied heavily on identifying those with 'Scottish' names. Smith, Brown, and similar ubiquitous names presented obvious difficulties and it was quite impossible to identify from this source more than a few migrants from distant English counties. This study therefore depends heavily on the census enumerators' books.

¹⁷ Those returned as poultry farmer or market gardener, are counted as 'farmers'. So is the Danbury 'landowner' who in 1871 employed eight men and two boys. Other individuals such as the Takeley 'farmer' with only 4½ acres (1871), and all those returned as



MAP 1. Essex: parishes and railways.

Adapted from A. C. Edwards, *A history of Essex* (1978), p. 91. First published in *Economic History Review* 54 (2001), p. 243 and reproduced with permission of the Economic History Society.

from these parishes their number might be considered barely sufficient to have transformed local agriculture.¹⁸ Nor is it sufficient to support the more robust claims concerning how many came. For example, the unofficial spokesman for the Scots, Primrose McConnell, boasted in 1891 'now the country is overrun with us'.¹⁹ E. A. Pratt's 1906 description of 'the Essex farmer of old' being largely displaced by Scotsmen, and mid-twentieth century accounts that deploy

Note 17 continued

'gardener' have been excluded. Details of landholdings taken from the *Agricultural Returns*, TNA MAF 68. As others have discovered, the census enumerators' books are not without errors. This limited survey encountered, besides illegible entries, a 'son-in-law' named Hannah Bailees, a 'female' James Lamplugh, and a farm labourer at Great Wigborough born in 'Yorkshire, Newcastle'

¹⁸ Perry, *British farming*, p. 99.

¹⁹ P. McConnell, 'Experiences of a Scotsman on the Essex clays', *JRASE* 52 (1891), p. 312. McConnell was unusual among the Scottish migrants. He had studied agriculture at the University of Edinburgh, and was Professor of Agriculture at Glasgow Veterinary College before he settled in Essex. P. Brassley, 'A pioneer in everything: Primrose McConnell, 1856-1931', *JRASE*, 156 (1995), p. 172.

imagery of 'flood' and 'invasion' are similarly exaggerated.²⁰ The more recent of these claims may have been influenced by the far larger number of Scots who arrived, or expanded their holdings, in the twentieth century, particularly between the mid-1920s and early 1930s.²¹ When applied to the depression years (1873–96), however, such claims appear to be wildly misleading. Moreover, and reassuringly, the implications of census evidence from these 39 parishes are broadly compatible with an estimate that appeared in the *Royal Commission on Agricultural Depression* (1894–7), with E. L. Smith's estimate from the 1930s, and with our earlier calculations from *Kelly's Directories*. The sample of 39 parishes contained between a fifth and a quarter of Essex farms which, if they were at all representative, implies some 100 Scottish-born farmers established in the county in 1901: the *Royal Commission* estimated 120 to 130 were present in the mid-1890s; E. L. Smith estimated that 93 moved in between 1880 and 1910; and our analysis of *Kelly's Directories* found 83 farmers in 1894, and 142 by 1906, whose names are compatible with Scottish ancestry.²²

Thus, although the literature focuses on migration from Scotland during the depression, the influx was greater after 1900. More relevant for this inquiry, however, is when the migration began: how many of the Scots farmers in Essex in 1901 had moved south in the early stages of the depression? Living with them in the sample parishes in 1901 were 19 sons and daughters born before 1881: none of these were Essex-born and most had been born in Scotland. The eldest Essex-born child living with Scots-born parents at this time had been born in 1887. This suggests that few Scots moved to Essex before the mid-1880s. It is possible, of course, that children born into migrant families before 1887 had left home by 1901, but earlier census evidence endorses the impression that most Scots migration occurred well after depression began. All but four of the 38 sons and daughters living with Scots-born farmer parents in 1891 had been born in Scotland, and the eldest Essex-born child among them was born in 1882. In all, in the 39 sample parishes, 22 Scots-born farmers were recorded in 1901, only 9 in 1891, just one in 1881, and none in 1871 (Table 2).

Other evidence is consistent with the impression that few Scots arrived to take advantage of depression opportunities before the mid-1880s. Earlier work on *Kelly's Directory* for 1886 found just 21 farmer families in all of Essex whose names suggested possible Scottish origin. Some of these, like the sole Scottish-born farmer enumerated in the survey parishes in the 1881 census, may have already been resident when the depression began.²³ Similarly, Sellars' work on the census enumerators' books of 56 central and west-Essex parishes discovered only one Scottish-born farmer listed in 1881.²⁴ On the 18,000-acre (64 farms) Thorndon Estate,

²⁰ Pratt, *Transition in agriculture*, pp. 37–9; G. L. Waring, 'The "Invasion"', *Essex Farmers' J.*, 26 (1947); G. E. Fussell, 'The foreign invasion of Essex', *ibid.*, 30 (1951).

²¹ Watt, *Changes in agriculture*, p. 23. See also Collins, *Orsett*, p. 71; Wormell, *Essex farming*, pp. 46, 51.

²² BPP, 1894, XVI (i), report by R. Hunter Pringle, p. 44; Smith, *Go East*, p. 20; Pam, 'Essex agriculture', p. 299. Scots farmers were far from evenly-spread across the sample parishes and they were similarly 'clustered'

elsewhere in the county. Unfortunately, recent advances in computer access to census data provide no easy means to discover the total number of Scottish farmers in Essex.

²³ This individual, a Scotland-born market gardener in Shenfield, was not recorded there in 1871, but had an Essex-born son aged 9.

²⁴ We are grateful to Mrs Elizabeth Sellars of Chelmsford for this information.

TABLE 2. Thirty nine Essex parishes: farmers' places of birth, 1871–1901.

	1871	1881	1891	1901
Scotland	0	1	9	22
West Country	7	4	11	20
North	2	2	4	15
Midlands	1	2	3	5
Wales	0	0	1	4
Total	10	9	28	66

Note:

West Country: Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire.

North: Cheshire, Cumberland, Durham, Lancashire, Northumberland, Yorkshire, Westmorland.

Midlands: Derbyshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire.

Source: Census enumerators' books.

the first Scots, James Craig and Thomas Picken, arrived in 1885; 12 more had followed by 1890.²⁵ It is significant too that the 1893–7 Royal Commission included extensive comment on Scottish farmers in Essex, and dates their arrival from around 1880, whereas they are little, if at all, mentioned in the previous Royal Commission of 1879–82.²⁶ Primrose McConnell, who certainly regarded himself as a pioneer and liked to believe that his writings may have triggered a subsequent 'invasion', moved south with his father in 1882 or 1883.²⁷

It appears, therefore, that depression-led migration from Scotland began about 1880, slowly at first, and accelerated in the 1890s. F. E. Kenchington described it as 're-colonising Essex farms after the disasters of the eighties'.²⁸ All commentators agree that south-west Scotland, particularly Ayrshire, was the main source of Scots in-migrants, and that the great majority were dairy farmers: 'the county of Essex is now flowing with Ayrshire milk'.²⁹ A distinguishable secondary migration stream from Scotland, not evident in the census, was of farmers from Perth, the Lothians, and Stirling, who were more likely to have been familiar with stock-raising and arable.³⁰ In fact, the census does not greatly add to our knowledge of the Scottish origins of migrants as in most cases it records only the *country* of their birth. However, three of the

²⁵ Essex RO, Petre Mss, Thorndon tenant ledger, iii–v, D/DP A366/8. The first Scot on the Orsett estate arrived in 1889. Collins, *Orsett*, p. 43.

²⁶ BPP, 1894, XVI (i), report by R. Hunter Pringle, p. 43. On this point, see also Smith, *Go East*, p. 15.

²⁷ Brassley, 'Primrose McConnell', pp. 172, 176; P. McConnell, *The diary of a working farmer* (1906), p. xvi. This claim, too, may have been exaggerated. The Oxley Parker estate was encouraging in-migration before the McConnells arrived and both Waring ('Invasion', p. 26) and Wormell (*Essex farming*, p. 59) claim the first depression Scots migrant came in 1878: J. Oxley Parker papers, ERO, D/DO/p B123/216/219;

J. Oxley Parker, *The Oxley Parker papers* (1964), p. 161. The McConnells probably arrived in 1883, but 'Scottish farming in Essex', *Country Life*, 8, 29 Sept. 1900, claimed they arrived in 1882.

²⁸ Personal communication, F. E. Kenchington to E. J. T. Collins, 1964.

²⁹ Smith, *Go East*, p. 26; BPP, 1894, XVI (i), report by R. Hunter Pringle, pp. 43–4; Waring, 'Invasion', p. 25; McConnell, 'Experiences', p. 311. In Suffolk, too, Scottish settlers were reported to be 'chiefly Ayrshire men'. BPP, 1895, XVI, report by A. Wilson Fox, p. 66.

³⁰ Personal communication, F. E. Kenchington to E. J. T. Collins, 1964.

six farmers for whom more information was provided were born, like Primrose McConnell and Kathleen Filby's and Hew Watt's grandfathers, in Ayrshire, and the others were born in nearby Wigtown and Argyll.

The census is far more helpful in tracing the number and county origins of English and Welsh migrants (Table 2). For this investigation, information was collected on those moving into the Essex survey parishes from beyond a line from Hampshire, Berkshire, and Oxfordshire, through Northants, Leicestershire, and Nottinghamshire, to Lincolnshire. It is immediately clear that the Scottish inflow was paralleled, and considerably exceeded, by migration from the more distant English counties and from Wales. On the evidence in Table 2, the West Country alone was the source of more farmer-settlers than Scotland among those enumerated in 1871, 1881 and 1891. E. L. Smith also noted these other inflows, but in much of the literature they receive little attention.

Smith's figures, which are for migration to Essex from all counties, show 46 English and Welsh and 33 Scots arriving in the 1880s, and 57 and 34 respectively in the 1890s.³¹ Neither his figures, nor those in Table 2, support claims that English migrants arrived *after* those from Scotland.³² Moreover, the one Scottish-born farmer enumerated in the survey parishes in 1881 seems likely to have moved before the depression, because he had a son who was born locally in 1871–2, whereas each of the two north-country migrants enumerated at this date had a Yorkshire-born child aged under three, and a West Country family had a Wiltshire-born daughter aged seven.

Place-of-birth evidence from the sample parishes also affords several peripheral insights into migration patterns at this time. For example, there is evidence of 'stage migration': a Montgomeryshire-born stockman at Ingatestone (1901) with three children born in Warwickshire, and a farmer at Purleigh (1901) with five Devon-born children and a younger child born in Northamptonshire. It seems too that the population of rural Essex was probably less sedentary and homogeneous, less-insulated from external stimuli, than the allegedly cataclysmic impact a Scottish 'invasion' implies: in fact, the county reflected aspects of the generally high level of mobility evident in Britain at the time.³³ There were farm labourers born in Guernsey and Sicily resident at Ingrave (1871) and Danbury (1881) before many Scots arrived; an Essex-born farmer at Frating (1891) was assisted by a grandson born in the United States; and the parishes of Takeley (1891) and Woodham Walter (1901), could each boast a farmer born in Australia. At Pleshey (1901) there was a Cornish-born farmer living with his Danish-born wife, and elsewhere in the sample parishes, a gardener born in India and sufficient Irish-born farm workers to qualify significantly the generalization that Irish immigrants avoided the over-stocked labour markets of the rural south.

Where did Scottish, English, and Welsh migrants settle within Essex? Were they dispersed evenly or in discernable patterns that reflected type of farming, market-accessibility, or place of origin? In Map 1 and Table 1 the 39 sample parishes are arranged in eight groups according

³¹ Smith, *Go East*, p. 20.

³² For such claims see, for example, Pratt, *Transition in agriculture*, p. 29: '... the influx of Scots into Essex ... followed by the immigration of a goodly number of English'. Claims of this kind possibly arose, in part,

from the late arrival of substantial numbers of migrants from the north of England (Table 5).

³³ E. H. Hunt, *British labour history, 1815–1914* (1981), ch. 5.

TABLE 3. Essex-resident farmers born elsewhere,^a 1871–1901: by parish groups.^b

<i>Parish group^b</i>	<i>1871</i>	<i>1881</i>	<i>1891</i>	<i>1901</i>
1	1	2	9	20
2	0	1	6	15
3	3	3	4	7
4	2	2	3	14
5	1	0	1	3
6	0	0	0	1
7	2	0	2	1
8	1	1	3	5
Total	10	9	28	66

Source: Census enumerators' books.

Notes:

^a Born in Scotland, Wales and distant English counties as defined above.

^b As defined in Table 1.

to soil type and proximity to rail transport. Fresh milk production for urban consumption was viable only on farms close to towns or within a few miles of a railway station. Groups 1, 2 and 3 represent the hard-to-work, expensive-to-drain, heavy clay soils that were first to become marginal for cereals; Groups 4, 5 and 6 represent the more easily worked boulder clays and medium soils, good cereal land; and Groups 7 and 8 occupied soils that were lighter and easier to work than the heavy and medium soils, but also less fertile and more vulnerable to 'drying out'.³⁴ Some of these parish groupings had good access to rail transport, others were less favourably located.

Table 3 makes it clear that migrant farmers were not evenly distributed across the survey parishes, they had not 'settled largely all over the county' at all.³⁵ Over half of those enumerated in 1901 resided in heavy clay parishes in close proximity to rail transport (Groups 1 and 2). This concentration doubtless reflected both the need for in-coming dairy farmers to have easy access to London consumers and the attraction of low rents.³⁶ Demoralised cereal farmers, hard-pressed despite reduced rents, abandoned the heavy clay farms whose rents were then further reduced to attract new tenants. In these heavy clay parishes, the number of dairy cattle increased at more than twice the county average (Table 4). Comparatively buoyant rents in Group 6, and buoyant rents and distance from railways in Group 5, are consistent with sparse migrant settlement, but other aspects of the 1901 migrant distribution are less readily explained. The concentration of settlers in the Group 4 boulder clay parishes, where transport advantages were not associated with particularly low rents or many vacant farms, is unexpected, and it is

³⁴ For more details see Hunt and Pam, 'Managerial failure', pp. 241–4.

³⁵ *VCH Essex*, II (1907), p. 339.

³⁶ See, for example, Collins, *Orsett*, p. 43; Mingay, 'The farmer', p. 778.

TABLE 4. Dairy cows per 100 acres: change between 1870/74 and 1896-7.

<i>Parish Group</i>	<i>Change %</i>
1	+86
2	+86
3	+24
4	+20
5	-20
6	+6
7	+67
8	+4
Essex	+39

Note: Data for 1870 and 1874 is used because data is not available for contiguous years.

Source: Hunt and Pam, 'Managerial failure', p. 245.

perhaps surprising also that so few were attracted to the parishes near to a railway with light soil in Group 7. Of course, not all of the incomers specialised in milk production, which may help to explain some of these seeming disparities. Some of the Scots incomers, and still more of the English, were mixed stock and arable farmers, and some raised poor-quality beef cattle on extensive rough grazing, for which low rent was far more important than good transport.³⁷

Distinguishing incomers by their place of origin might throw more light upon these divergent patterns and this is done in Table 5. The most notable feature of Scottish settlement is how much it was concentrated in heavy clay parishes along the established railway lines: two thirds or more of all Scots farmers present in the 39 sample parishes in both 1891 and 1901 were settled in the five parishes that comprise Group 1. Only a handful were returned in the boulder clay and medium soil Groups 4, 5 and 6, none before 1901. On the fertile soils, Tendring Hundred (Group 6), amongst the finest farming land in England and with ready access to rail transport, only one Scottish farmer was listed at this date. Equally interesting is that the Group 2 parishes, like the Group 1 parishes on heavy clay, and, by 1891, close to railways, and therefore seemingly equally attractive to dairying incomers, appear to have been largely shunned by the Scots but to have attracted West Countrymen. They, in turn, appear to have avoided the Group 1 parishes where the Scots congregated. This, in all probability, is evidence of 'chain migration', of pioneer settlers informing their kin and former neighbours of opportunities in Essex and thus encouraging further migration to the same locality.³⁸ Primrose McConnell had a particular influence in this respect: on one day in 1885, sixteen fellow Scots were accommodated at his

³⁷ Table 5 shows that most migrant farmers in Group 4 parishes were from West Country and northern counties.

³⁸ P. Horn, 'When the Scots moved South', *Country-*

man 86 (1981-2), p. 82; ERO, Z13.1 *Preston Guardian*, 1 Oct. 1892, 3 Oct. 1896. For more details see Pam, 'Essex agriculture', ch. 5.

TABLE 5. Essex parish groups and farmers' place of origin, 1871–1901.

Parish Group	1871					1881					1891					1901				
	WC	N	M	W	S	WC	N	M	W	S	WC	N	M	W	S	WC	N	M	W	S
1	1							1		1	1		1	1	6		1		3	16
2						1					2	2	1		1	9	3	2		1
3	2	1					2	1			3				1	2	4	1		
4	2					2					2		1			5	4	1	1	3
5			1								1					2	1			
6																				1
7	2										1				1	1				
8		1				1					1	2				1	2	1		1

Key: WC: West Country; N: North; M: Midlands; W: Wales; S: Scotland.

Note: Parish groups as defined in Table 1; place origin as defined in Table 2.

Source: Census enumerators' books.

Ongar farm whilst appraising nearby holdings. Of the three parish groups in which dairying expanded most (Table 4), Group 1 attracted Scots, Group 2 attracted West Countrymen, and in Group 7 dairying expansion occurred with little assistance from long-distance migrants. North Countrymen were not much evident in any of the survey parishes until after 1891. The northerners were widely dispersed: on soils of different kinds and both near to, and distant from, railways: among them a Lancastrian farmer and corn dealer at Danbury (Group 8), and a poultry farmer, another Lancastrian, at East Hanningfield (Group 3).

Landlord activity played a large part in determining where incomers located. Migrants were drawn to particular Essex estates by offers of reduced rents and flexible leases, sometimes advertised in Scottish journals and newspapers such as the *North Scottish Agriculturalist* and the *Ayr Advertiser*. The first to advertise was John Oxley Parker, an Essex land agent, in 1878; Lord Petre advertised in 1885, attracting Scots to all seven vacant farms on his Thorndon estate; and the Governors of St. Bartholomew's Hospital found tenants in the same way.³⁹ Of course, like most migration flows, that of Scots farmers to East Anglia was a consequence not only of 'pull' influences, such as low rents, London's demand for milk, and the advertising just described, but also of 'push' influences. Land-hunger was an important 'push' influence. In south-west Scotland, little affected by agricultural depression, rents remained high and competition for vacant holdings was keen: one account described Ayrshire as 'a veritable congested district which rears twice as many farmers than there are farms for'.⁴⁰ These

³⁹ R. G. E. Wood, *Agriculture in Essex, 1840–1900* (1975), p. 30; Oxley Parker, *Oxley Parker papers*, p. 161; Oxley Parker papers, ERO, D/D Op. B123–216; Horn, *Changing countryside*, p. 35; St Bartholomew's Hospital Mss (St Bartholomew's Hospital, London), Almoners' Reports, 1889, EO 8/7; Brassley, 'Primrose McConnell',

p. 176.

⁴⁰ BPP, 1895, XVII, evidence on Ayr, Wigtown, Kirkcudbright and Dumfries, pp. 4–5, 8–10; R. E. Prothero (Lord Ernle), *English farming past and present* (sixth edn, 1961), p. 385; McConnell, 'Experiences', p. 311; Smith, *Go East*, p. 18.

circumstances encouraged landlords to minimise expenditure on repairs and resist pressure for rent reductions and freedom of cultivation.⁴¹ 'Pull' and 'push' influences affecting English and Welsh migrants to Essex are less often recorded, but were probably similar to those that shaped migration from Scotland. Shortages of suitable holdings were reported from Devon and Cornwall, for example, and Lancashire witnessed landlord-tenant friction over issues similar to those in Scotland, as well as regarding compensation for unexhausted improvements and damage caused by game.⁴² Landlord advertising too was by no means confined to Scotland: Francis Whitmore, at Orsett, placed advertisements in several Devon and northern English newspapers in 1897.⁴³ And everywhere potential migrants weighed the attractions of Essex against those of Canada, Australia, and other overseas destinations.⁴⁴

II

Such was the broad pattern of farmer migration to Essex during the late Victorian agricultural depression. To what extent was Essex agriculture transformed at this time; either by 'Scottish' practices, or by Scottish influence in combination with other factors? Between the early seventies and mid-nineties the wheat acreage fell by approximately two fifths, while the area under grass and the number of milking cows increased by similar proportions. Nevertheless, in 1896-7 cereals still occupied a third of Essex land and income from milk sales was still no more than that from wheat.⁴⁵ Clearly a substantial restructuring had taken place: equally clearly, this fell well short of a total transformation.

Should this failure to switch more emphatically towards milk be attributed to the inertia which, in many accounts, had become the defining characteristic of south-eastern agriculture, a malaise for which the Scottish influx, and the example it set, might have provided a remedy? In earlier articles, we argued that, far from being devastated by falling prices, parts of Essex farming were able to survive depression without radical restructuring, and that partial, rather than wholesale, transformation was a rational response.⁴⁶ On much heavy clay land, it is true, wheat ceased to be viable as prices fell, no matter how much rents were reduced. But on the better soils, falling prices were matched by falling costs and arable farming remained viable.

⁴¹ R. H. Campbell, *Owners and occupiers: change in rural society in south-west Scotland before 1914* (1991), ch. 8; Pam, 'Essex agriculture', p. 300.

⁴² Smith, *Go East*, pp. 29-34; Pam, 'Essex agriculture', pp. 299-300. Tenant unrest in Lancashire assumed a political dimension when farmers combined to publicise their grievances. One farmer-activist, James Middlehurst, offered himself as a candidate in the 1892 General Election: evicted from his holding, he moved to Essex, where he prospered. The same year, the Lancashire Tenant Farmers' Association dispatched representatives in search of suitable Essex farms for rent. A. Mutch, *Rural life in South-west Lancashire, 1840-1914* (1988), pp. 29-30, 50, 53-5.

⁴³ The *Devon Herald*, the *Devon and Exeter Daily*

Gazette, the *Preston Herald*, *Yorkshire Post*, *Leeds Mercury* and the *Whitehaven News*. MERL, ESS 17/4/45.

⁴⁴ Advertisements placed by Essex landlords sometimes appeared adjacent to those placed by railway and shipping companies, dominion and foreign governments, and by charities that sponsored emigration. On these themes see, for example, M. Harper, *Emigration from north-east Scotland* (1988); J. M. Brock, *The mobile Scot: a study of emigration and migration, 1861-1911* (1999).

⁴⁵ Hunt and Pam 'Managerial failure', p. 245; Pam, 'Essex agriculture', ch. 5.

⁴⁶ Id., 'Managerial failure', 'Responding to agricultural depression'.

Rents on these better soils fell only moderately, tenants were less anxious to quit, and thus there were fewer vacant holdings. It was probably for these reasons, and because here there was less pressure to convert to dairying, that such areas attracted fewer Scots. None were enumerated in Groups 4, 5 and 6 in 1891, and only four in 1901 (Table 5). Moreover, the optimal response to depression was less one-dimensional than a simple expansion of dairying. Oats and barley prices fell by no more than beef prices, and farmers moved readily between oats, barley, and wheat in response to shifts in their relative prices: the acreage under oats rose over the course of the depression.⁴⁷ Another restraint upon dairying expansion was noted above: milk sales were seldom viable on farms far from a railway station. In the heavy clay Group 3 parishes, for example, although rents fell considerably and vacant farms were readily available, very few Scots settled (Table 5), presumably deterred by poor access by rail to London. Change occurred in such places: but rather than the textbook substitution of dairying for arable, farmers moved towards less obvious alternatives. In particular, they focused increasingly upon raising low-quality beef, with minimal labour, on rough pasture. Thus partial transformation was appropriate, neither a consequence of Essex-men failing to follow good Scottish practices, nor of the Scots failing to effect a comprehensive substitution of milk for cereals.

Claims that this partial transformation should be attributed to enlightened Scots, and would have been more widespread but for the intrinsic shortcomings of Essex-men, stem from two further misconceptions. First there are the suppositions that exploiting the 'lucrative liquid milk trade', where that was possible, was manifestly more profitable than persisting with cereals; that dairy farmers 'suffered not at all'; that London 'would take all the milk that could be produced'.⁴⁸ In fact, city markets were periodically glutted. At such times milk prices fell and dairy farmers suffered considerable distress.⁴⁹ Milk production in the long run, it seems, expanded as fast as market opportunities permitted. Dairying, without question, played a major part in the transformation of Essex agriculture, but the 'Scottish' remedy was no panacea. If more Essex farmers had heeded Scottish advice, crises of over supply would have occurred more frequently: towards the end of the depression R. H. Rew reported claims that dairying had been 'overdone', the market 'spoiled'.⁵⁰

Secondly, the 'redeeming Scots' version of Essex agriculture in the depression assumes that dairying was indeed the 'Scottish' remedy, that its expansion began when the Scots moved south: 'As to the Scotch farmers, have they largely introduced dairy farming into Essex? – Yes.'⁵¹ Mid-century Essex was unquestionably a corn county, but it had not always been so. At one time it was noted for dairying.⁵² And although cereals had taken centre-stage by the 1840s, 'alternative agriculture' was far from totally eclipsed. Claims that dairying was 'almost entirely neglected', confined to 'a single farmer here and there', scorned as 'unfamiliar and

⁴⁷ Id., 'Prices and structural response in English agriculture, 1873–1896', *EcHR*, 50 (1997), p. 497; id., 'Managerial failure', pp. 228–33.

⁴⁸ Fletcher, 'Great Depression', p. 419; Fussell, 'Foreign invasion', p. 41.

⁴⁹ Hunt and Pam, 'Prices and structural response', pp. 490–3.

⁵⁰ BPP, 1894, XVI (i), report by R. Hunter Pringle,

p. 83; R. H. Rew, *The agricultural position of today* (1897), p. 96.

⁵¹ BPP, 1894, XVI (i), evidence, 13890.

⁵² Pratt, *Transition in agriculture*, p. 25; J. Broad, 'Regional perspectives and variations in English dairying, 1650–1850', in R. W. Hoyle (ed.), *People, landscape, and alternative agriculture: essays for Joan Thirsk* (2004), p. 104.

distasteful', are quite wrong.⁵³ Nearby farmers had long sent their milk to London, and when railways opened markets to more-distant farmers they responded appropriately. London's St Thomas's Hospital, for example, was supplied with milk from Romford by 1846, decades before the Scots supposedly introduced dairying to Essex; and St Bartholomew's Hospital began to buy milk from farmers near Brentwood in 1856–7.⁵⁴ Not surprisingly, therefore, in the Group 1 parishes, along the London-Chelmsford railway, over two-fifths of farmland was already under pasture before depression struck.⁵⁵ Thus, when Scots dairymen later settled in these parishes their impact could hardly have been transforming, because they were moving into established dairying localities. By the mid-eighties, when substantive Scottish settlement had barely begun, the Essex wheat acreage had already declined by over a quarter from its early seventies peak, and the dairy herd had grown by a similar proportion.⁵⁶ Moreover, Essex pastureland had long supplied London with hay as well as milk, and a minority of Essex farmers, including A. C. Wilkins at Tiptree, produced fruit or vegetables. In short, there had been quite sufficient agricultural adaptation to demonstrate that the contribution of Scottish migrant farmers was supplementary rather than pioneering, that credit for the earlier expansion of dairying and other alternatives to cereals belongs to Essex men.

Moreover, the Scots' contribution must be judged within the context of other developments that encouraged dairying around the time of their arrival. By the mid-eighties the depth, persistence, and causes of depression were better understood and landlords responded accordingly: with accelerated reductions in rent, less stringent lease enforcement, and enhanced expenditure on new dairies, cow stalls, and piped water.⁵⁷ Around this time, too, basic slag was beginning to demonstrate its revivifying effect on clayland grass. Far from the Scots having initiated such positive responses to depression, these were among the incentives that attracted them to Essex and contributed to their success. Another incentive to change, and to in-migration, was the opening of new railway lines. No new lines were completed in Essex between 1873 and 1883 but six, all in the south of the county, opened in the following six years (Map 1). Milk sales then became viable from land where earlier the main practicable alternative to cereals had been beef. The agricultural returns for the heavy clay Group 2 parishes indicate that in the years before the new railways, and before the arrival of many long-distance migrants, beef cattle numbers were increasing faster than the number of milking cows. But when new branch lines opened, the increase in dairy numbers accelerated while beef cattle numbers fell.⁵⁸ Thus some newly arrived migrants occupied farms where milk production was previously restrained, not by native inertia, but by poor transport.

⁵³ Brown, *Agriculture in England*, pp. 3, 45–9; Smith, *Go East*, p. 38; McConnell, 'Experiences', p. 321; J. Thirsk, *Alternative agriculture: a history* (1997), pp. 64, 168; Horn, *Changing countryside*, p. 81.

⁵⁴ G. Dodd, *The food of London* (1856), p. 122; P. J. Atkins, 'The growth of London's railway milk trade, c.1845–1914', *J. Transport History* 4 (1978), p. 208; St Bartholomew's Hospital Mss, London, Governors' minutes, Ha/1/21–23.

⁵⁵ Hunt and Pam, 'Managerial failure', p. 245.

⁵⁶ *Agricultural Statistics (England and Wales)*, *passim*.

⁵⁷ Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to agricultural depression', pp. 238–42; 'A Scottish farmer on farming in England', *Agricultural Gazette*, 28 Jan. 1895.

⁵⁸ Hunt and Pam, 'Managerial failure', p. 247. These Group 2 parishes were on the Barking-Pitsea (1885) and Shenfield-Southend (1888–9) lines and on the extension from Maldon to the Shenfield-Southend line (1889). As noted above, migrants from the West Country responded to the opportunities offered by railway developments more readily than did Scotsmen.

III

The evidence, so far, suggests that whatever the specific contribution of Scottish incomers to agricultural recovery in Essex, their overall impact was less than has often been suggested. Very few Scottish farmers arrived before the early 1880s, by which time adaptation was already well under way; and in any case, restructuring entailed far more than substituting dairy cattle for wheat. This, of course, on its own, does not indicate that Scots brought little of value. Their influence has been exaggerated, but it was nonetheless substantial.

What specific benefits accompanied Scottish immigration? Perhaps the most useful transfer of skills was in grassland management, particularly the use of temporary pasture (leys) in arable regimes. Introduced into existing rotations, leys of two, three, or four years provided a cheaper and more flexible alternative to arable than conversion to permanent pasture.⁵⁹ Well-managed temporary pasture restored the soil, discouraged weeds, yielded cattle-fodder, and was a labour-saving alternative to traditional fallowing. To avoid twitch, wireworm, and similar afflictions, temporary grass required the correct mixture of grass and leguminous seeds, followed by an appropriate fertiliser. Fine judgement was required on when to mow; on when, and how much, stock could graze. Such skills, once commonplace, had languished in the south-east during the 'golden age' of cereals. Contemporary investigators reported 'a great lack of knowledge as to the best [seed] mixtures to use', and that 'grass farming is something new to Essex men'.⁶⁰ But the Scots brought state-of-the-art skills in grass management with them. One described how neighbours mocked as he prepared temporary pasture, but in time followed his example.⁶¹ Scots also gave particular attention to dairy herd management and increasingly purchased feed to regulate milk supply and thus profit from higher winter prices.⁶² Moreover, Ayrshire dairy cows, introduced to Essex by the Scots, yielded more milk than the Shorthorn all-rounder, had a longer milking life, and showed greater resistance to tuberculosis.

The Scots' pursuit of 'low farming', especially by those who were not primarily milk producers, is, on balance, also to their credit.⁶³ Although much criticised by Essex men, 'low farming' was a rational response to falling rents and rising wages, and criticism derived in part from misconceived nostalgia for 'high farming' and the visually unappealing consequences of ruthless economy. One commentator described a 'wretched' landscape between Billericay and Althorne, much of it 'in the hands of Scotsmen'.⁶⁴ They made do with less ploughing and fewer beans and roots; hand weeding, hedging, and ditching were each minimised to save labour.

⁵⁹ James Caird estimated it required 6 to 14 years to make good permanent pasture. Others drew attention to the particular difficulties of establishing permanent pasture on heavy clayland, especially in low-rainfall Essex. J. A. Caird, 'Recent experience of laying down land to grass', *JRASE* 49 (1888), pp. 148–9; M. Evans and T. Bowstead, 'Report on laying down land to permanent pasture', *JRASE* 36 (1875), pp. 450–1.

⁶⁰ W. E. Bear, 'Advantages in agricultural production', *JRASE*, third ser., 5 (1894), p. 263; BPP, 1894, XVI (i), report by R. Hunter Pringle, p. 61.

⁶¹ BPP, 1896, XVII, appendix j, p. 611.

⁶² Mingay, 'The farmer', p. 789; Symon, *Scottish farming*, pp. 195–6; MERL, ESS, 17/1/26.

⁶³ On the rationality of low farming at this time see Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to agricultural depression', pp. 236–7. On excessively 'low' farming see below, pp. 98.

⁶⁴ Rider Haggard, *Rural England* (2 vols, 1902), I, p. 466. For more on this theme, see BPP, 1894, XVI (i), evidence, 13918; J. Thirsk and J. Imray (eds), *Suffolk farming in the nineteenth century* (Suffolk Records Soc., 1, 1958), p. 35.

Primrose McConnell, on his mixed farm at Ongar, described how his English neighbours 'literally waste labour ... the first thing was to reduce the number of men and horses'.⁶⁵ With the same labour-saving end in view, Scots farmers cheerfully ran poor-quality beef cattle on extensive rough pasture. Variations of low farming, of course, were far from unknown in Essex even in the 'golden-age'⁶⁶ but, with little experience of 'high farming', the newcomers followed the logic of market forces with fewer inhibitions.

While expending no more labour or capital than was strictly required, the Scots were equally renowned for not sparing themselves: 'they live and work hard', spending 'nothing, except on their cows', 'you can't starve a Scotchman'.⁶⁷ By working alongside their men, in contrast to Essex farmers with their characteristic 'collar, tie, and clean hands', the Scots were more capable of establishing managerial priorities, not least to maximise labour productivity. Some paid above the going Essex wage, attracting the best local labour and retaining the services of migrant Scots labourers, 'the Scotchmen pay 3s. more, try to get 5s. worth of work more in return, and mostly succeed'.⁶⁸ Costs were contained by the widespread use of unpaid family labour, including hard-working wives and daughters who eschewed the 'piano and dogcart' gentility of pampered neighbours, and cheerfully turned out 'in stockingless feet' to milk the cows.⁶⁹ Family labour was a particular asset at a time when real wages were rising.

This readiness to work hard was combined with adaptability and an eye for opportunities; aspects of the 'canniness' said to be prominent among their characteristics.⁷⁰ Such attitudes possibly owed something to superior Scottish education, something to migration selecting the more enterprising and materialistic, and something to a first-generation determination to succeed.⁷¹ One consequence of these restless and speculative inclinations was a readiness to move repeatedly in response to perceived opportunities. Evidence from the Thorndon estate, for example, shows that Scots tenants were particularly footloose, and the 32 entries for Scots-born families in the four census survey described earlier indicate only five families that failed to move between censuses.⁷² Some moved to rent, or buy, larger or additional holdings, some to diversify into quasi-agricultural activities such as carting, milk retailing, or wholesale greengrocery.⁷³ Such activities were said to have been encouraged by a communal willingness to advance loans to fellow Scots. This 'clannishness' also led to their taking a leading role in early attempts to develop agricultural co-operation in East Anglia, beginning with establishment of the Eastern Counties Dairy Farmers' Association in 1892.⁷⁴

⁶⁵ McConnell, 'Experiences', p. 317.

⁶⁶ In an earlier article we argued that textbook, capital-intensive, 'high farming' was less widespread in 'golden age' Essex than is usually supposed. E. H. Hunt and S. J. Pam, 'Essex agriculture in the 'golden age', 1850-73', *AgHR* 43 (1995).

⁶⁷ On these themes see: BPP, 1894, XVI (i), p. 45, evidence, 13891; BPP, 1896, XVII, pp. 611, 614, evidence, 61661-3; Collins, 'Great agricultural depression', p. 17.

⁶⁸ *Agricultural Gazette*, 28 Jan. 1895.

⁶⁹ BPP, 1895, XVI, report by A. Wilson Fox, pp. 67-8; BPP, 1896, XVII, appendix j, p. 613.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Smith, *Go East*, pp. 40-1.

⁷¹ See, for example, Prothero, *English farming* (introduction II, O. R. McGregor), pp. cxvi-vii.

⁷² ERO, Petre MSs. Thorndon tenant ledgers, iii-v, D/DP A366-8. Kenchington noted this characteristic: personal communication, F. E. Kenchington to S. J. Pam (1977).

⁷³ Pratt, *Transition in agriculture*, p. 37. Some had followed similar quasi-agricultural occupations in Scotland before moving south. Pam, 'Essex agriculture', ch. 5.

⁷⁴ Obstacles to co-operation in England, however, were formidable. Scots also assisted the expansion of potato growing and market gardening, although the

IV

Impressive as it is, this chronicle of Scots' contributions to agricultural recovery in Essex requires qualification. Possibly the most enduring consequence of their involvement in market gardening, for example, arose from the opportunistic purchase of smallholdings close to towns and stations, less for their horticultural potential, as in the expectation of early resale to speculative builders. This activity became more widespread after the depression: indeed, it has been suggested that the twentieth-century prosperity of the Essex-Scots ascendancy may owe as much to successful land speculation as to successful farming.⁷⁵ Such activity is overlooked, or discounted, in traditional accounts anxious to portray twentieth-century material wealth as just reward for earlier hard work, thrift, and enlightened methods. Moreover, their acclaimed geographical mobility, relocating to East Anglia, should be attributed, partly, to the enterprise of Essex landlords who advertised vacant farms in Scottish newspapers. In one respect, moreover, relocation required little adaptability: the Scots were long accustomed to farming of a kind that, fortuitously, was well adapted to depression. Thus their migration involved less occupational mobility than occurred when Essex farm labourers sought work in London, or when Essex farmers abandoned cereals for milk or beef. Determined to maintain their hereditary occupation, and with few vacant holdings available locally, these 'intrepid adventurers' moved to Essex because it entailed less discontinuity than moving to nearby urban employment: spatial mobility was spurred by occupational inertia.⁷⁶ Ironically, one minor occupational change that accompanied this relocation was unhelpful to agricultural recovery. Once in Essex many Scots abandoned their traditional, but arduous, butter and cheese making: 'most of us have come here to escape the drudgery of cheese and butter dairies'.⁷⁷ But butter and cheese making, particularly if it had utilised Scots' co-operative experience and incorporated pig raising, had the potential to moderate the occasional over-supply of fresh milk, and to provide an alternative to rough grazing on land no longer viable for cereals.⁷⁸ While newly arrived Scots were proclaiming the virtues of converting arable to pasture and abandoning butter and cheese, Essex dairy farmers beseeched assistant commissioner R. Hunter Pringle to avoid recommending any measure likely to exacerbate the intermittent over-supply of fresh milk.⁷⁹

There are questions too regarding 'Scottish farming', and its presumed role in helping to deliver hapless locals from their incompetence. Much local criticism can be disregarded, and Scots deserve some credit for farming 'lower' than most locals, but their success rate, and in some cases their practices, fell short of what is often claimed. On the Thorndon Estate, at Michaelmas 1893, Scots accounted for over a third of tenants in rent arrears; the *Royal*

Note 74 continued

slow expansion of market gardening in Essex appears not to have accelerated significantly following their arrival. BPP, 1894, XVI (i), p. 36; Pam, 'Essex agriculture', pp. 261–3; Hunt and Pam, 'Managerial failure', pp. 246–7; Collins, 'Rural and agricultural change', p. 175; Rider Haggard, *Rural England*, I, p. 470; Perry, *British farming*, p. 122; Fussell, 'Foreign invasion', p. 41.

⁷⁵ 'A point for very great discretion in discussion',

personal communication, F. E. Kenchington to E. J. T. Collins, 1964.

⁷⁶ Wormell, 'Essex farming', p. 54.

⁷⁷ McConnell, with customary exaggeration, 'Experiences', p. 322.

⁷⁸ On butter, cheese, pigs, and other under-exploited alternatives to cereals in Essex, see Hunt and Pam, 'Responding to agricultural depression', pp. 244–9.

⁷⁹ BPP, 1894, XVI (i), pp. 64, 83.

Commission on Agricultural Depression suggested that two of the fifteen Scots tenancies on the same estate ended in failure, and included also numerous accounts of Scots 'barely holding their own', or 'losing money'.⁸⁰ Moreover, claims that 'most of the migrants made a success of their farming where their English predecessors had found such difficulty', even if true, should take into account that the newcomers enjoyed lower rents, easier leases, and better access to markets than prevailed in the earlier stages of depression.⁸¹ Some Scots at first assumed too readily that Essex farmers failed to adopt some of their traditional practices out of ignorance, rather than deference to local soils and rainfall. The initial introduction of temporary grasses, for example, was not everywhere successful; and in time Scots discovered also that the heavier Essex clays required more careful management than had been anticipated.⁸² Hunter Pringle noted several examples of Scots being forced to revert to traditional Essex ways, 'after repeated failures to work ... on the north-country fashion'. Primrose McConnell himself, in 1891, admitted to favouring certain practices he had earlier disparaged; later he left his Ongar tenancy, in dispute with his landlord and charged with bad farming.⁸³

Evaluation of the Scots' contribution needs also to address concerns regarding the possibly exhaustive effect of their system of grass management. It was said that land became 'cow-sick', infested with weeds and wireworm and ill suited to a return to arable: off-farm sales of hay, and over-enthusiastic application of nitrates to boost hay crops, were a particular threat.⁸⁴ Scots tenants dismissed such claims, contending that Essex men used similar methods: but Scots were prominent among those who farmed 'lower', and harder, than might be compatible with long-term fertility.⁸⁵ Some were said to exploit their land and move on when the consequences – falling yields and rampant weeds – became manifest: 'the Scotchmen put nothing into the land, they try to take a farm in good condition and leave it in bad'.⁸⁶ These were the 'robber farmers', or 'land skimmers', who cynically abused landlords' anxiety to keep farms tenanted. Hunter Pringle described farms on which:

the fallow lands were very foul ... the old pastures decidedly impoverished ... some ... had top dressed meadowland with nitrate of soda year after year and sold the hay ... and then complained that the meadows were little better than useless ... the Scotchmen are the chief culprits.⁸⁷

Predatory farming of this kind was the unacceptable face of 'canniness'. There are, too,

⁸⁰ ERO, Petre MSS, Thorndon tenant ledger, D/DP A367; BPP, 1894, XVI (i), evidence 8527–8, 8620; BPP, 1895, XVI, report by A. Wilson Fox, p. 69; BPP, 1896, XVII, appendix j, p. 611, evidence, 67810–18.

⁸¹ Horn, 'Scots moved South', p. 82.

⁸² Collins, *Orsett*, p. 70; Perry *British farming*, p. 165; C. S. Orwin and E. H. Whetham, *History of British agriculture, 1846–1914* (1964), pp. 243–7.

⁸³ BPP, 1894, XV (i), report by R. Hunter Pringle, pp. 37–8, 46, 60; McConnell, 'Experiences', pp. 313–8; Brassley, 'Primrose McConnell', pp. 173–4; G. E. Fussell, 'Primrose McConnell', *Essex Farmers Journal*, 30 (1954).

⁸⁴ BPP, 1894, XVI (i), report by R. Hunter Pringle, p. 57, evidence, 81715–7; BPP, 1895, XVI, report by A. Wilson Fox, p. 70; *Essex Standard*, 18 Oct. 1884, 20 Feb. 1895; Perry, *British farming*, p. 101; 'Scottish farming in Essex', pp. 396–8.

⁸⁵ McConnell, 'Experiences', p. 322; BPP, 1894, XVI (i), report by R. Hunter Pringle, p. 45; St Bartholomew's Hospital Mss, Almoners' reports, 1891–1903, EO 8/7.

⁸⁶ BPP, 1895, XVI, report by A. Wilson Fox, p. 66.

⁸⁷ BPP, 1894, XVI (i), report by R. Hunter Pringle, p. 57. For other examples see Collins, *Orsett*, p. 70; P. J. Perry (ed.), *British agriculture, 1875–1914* (1973), p. xxviii.

claims and rumours that the twentieth-century fortunes of certain Essex-Scots families owed something to practices more reprehensible than mere exploitative farming. The accounts of one farm, owned by an Essex widow and managed by a Scot, showed substantial losses year upon year until the owner died: the bailiff was then granted a lease and the farm subsequently flourished.⁸⁸ According to the late F. E. Kenchington, examples of such probably disreputable practices were common knowledge within the mid-twentieth century Essex-Scots community, 'other Scots purse their lips over them'.⁸⁹ When an outraged descendant, and Kenchington's employers, became aware that he intended to expose irregularities of this kind in a projected book, its publication was vetoed.⁹⁰

V

Like many a good story, that of migrant Scottish farmers rescuing 'derelict' Essex from depression is partly myth: a compound of fact, exaggeration, simplification, misinterpretations, and omissions. Those, including historians, who have sustained and perpetrated this legend have too willingly accepted the Scots' assessment of both their own achievements and the inadequacies of Essex men. It is emphatically wrong to deploy this as evidence that south-eastern agriculturalists failed to respond effectively to changed market conditions after 1873.

In too many accounts, descriptions of the timing and magnitude of migration appear to have been distorted. Responses to depression, as we have seen, were evident well before many Scots moved to Essex, thus their contribution to recovery was never more than supplementary. Moreover, the limited numbers that arrived between the early 1880s and the mid-1890s, fewer than came later, was insufficient to have 'rescued' Essex agriculture or to warrant talk of 'invasion'. Suggestions that the depression was so severe as to render Essex agriculture 'derelict' are similarly exaggerated; the assumption that recovery entailed little beyond substituting milk for cereals is a crude over-simplification; and claims that dairying was introduced to Essex by the Scots are simply wrong. Omitted from many accounts, and thus reinforcing the myth, is any recognition that reduced rents, relaxed leases, new railway lines, and active recruitment by landlords, encouraged both migration and recovery; that there were failures as well as successes; that high mobility in some cases was a response to questionable incentives; and that many individual successes were substantially assisted by property speculation.

It remains, of course, that the 'redeeming Scots' myth, like most good myths, contains a hard core of truth. Although their contribution to dairying expansion derived from occupational inertia, and although they reinforced, rather than pioneered, that expansion, dairying was crucial in responding to market changes and the Scots both accelerated its expansion and brought with them several specific skills, particularly in the use of temporary grasses. Some of them demonstrated the more positive aspects of 'low farming', and their reputation for hard

⁸⁸ Personal communication, F. E. Kenchington to S. J. Pam, 1977.

⁸⁹ Personal communication, F. E. Kenchington to E. J. T. Collins, 1964.

⁹⁰ Personal communication, F. E. Kenchington to S. J. Pam, 1977. He was a lecturer at The Essex Institute

of Agriculture, now Writtle Agricultural College. A grand-daughter of the bailiff mentioned above, according to Kenchington, threatened legal action and his college warned that publication would jeopardise his employment and pension.

work and ‘canniness’ was fully merited. Their achievement therefore, although short of what has been claimed, was positive and deserving of recognition.

No less deserving of recognition, although barely perceptible in the literature, is the contribution of other migrant farmers.⁹¹ Demographic evidence from the Essex parishes examined earlier suggests that long-distance migrants from the West Country, the north of England, and from Wales considerably outnumbered the Scots and began arriving at around the same time. In official reports and elsewhere – mentions of cowmen, shepherds, and other specialists in the census, for example – there is evidence also that they, like the Scots, were adaptable and hardworking, contributed to the expansion of dairying, and brought other useful skills. West Countrymen, for example, made a particular contribution to Essex horticulture, and on the remote Dengie peninsula Lancastrian farmers made butter and cheese for a Lancashire co-operative society.⁹² The main reason that so little is known of the experience of these English and Welsh migrants is that, both during the depression and subsequently, they were less conscious than the Scots of differences between themselves and the local population, less inclined to nurture this distinctiveness and links with their homeland, less disposed to marry within their own community, and less given to self-publicity.⁹³ Thus, their contribution to agricultural recovery in the late nineteenth century was, and remains, largely overlooked. The legend of the ‘redeeming Scots’, by contrast, born of robust pride in community achievement and sustained by communal tradition, still endures.

⁹¹ Besides E. L. Smith, exceptions to this generalisation include brief comments by Mingay, ‘The farmer’, p. 776; T. W. Fletcher, ‘Lancashire livestock farming in the Great Depression’, repr. in P. J. Perry (ed.), *British agriculture, 1875–1914* (1973), p. 102 from *AgHR* 9 (1961), pp. 17–42.

⁹² Rider Haggard, *Rural England*, I, p. 195; BPP, 1895,

XVI, p. 71; 1896, XVII, pp. 612–3; Smith, *Go East*, p. 28; Collins, *Orsett*, p. 69.

⁹³ On these points and the proliferation of Caledonian Societies, Scottish dancing and Burns Night celebrations in Essex, see, Wormell, *Essex farming*, pp. 57–8, 63; Horn, *Changing countryside*, p. 82; Smith, *Go East*, p. 3.