

**Linking Post Office superannuants to certification and registration of death:  
Sources and methodology**

Laura Newman and Harry Smith

King's College London, Department of Geography

Corresponding author: [laura.1.newman@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:laura.1.newman@kcl.ac.uk)

Working Paper 3

Addressing Health: Morbidity, Mortality and Occupational Health in the Victorian and Edwardian  
Post Office

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# Linking Post Office superannuants to certification and registration of death:

## Sources and methodology

Laura Newman and Harry Smith

Addressing Health Working Paper 3

### Abstract

This working paper outlines the sources and methodology for linking individual Post Office superannuants to a relevant registration or certification of death. The main sources for identifying superannuants are identified together with the methodology for checking their veracity. The methodology for linking these individuals to a registration or certification of their death and checking compliance is then outlined. Systematic differences in the degree of success in record linkage for individuals is discussed, focussing on changes over time, geographical differences and gender.

### Introduction

The ability to track individuals through from their working life until their death depends on the availability of two sets of data: a record of their time at work and a record of their death. While the latter is available in the form of death certificates and other forms of civil registration of death, the former is relatively rare. In this project both sets of evidence are available and therefore we are able to track individual postal workers who retired with a pension or gratuity between 1860 and 1908 and link a selection of those to the certification or registration of their death. This allows us to explore the long-term health outcomes of postal workers for a sample drawn from the census years in which they retired from 1861 until 1901. In this working paper we explain the process by which pensioned workers were identified and then traced through to their death in these sample years.

### *Generating the Sample of Superannuants for Census Years 1861 to 1901*

Superannuants who retired in each of the census years between 1861 and 1901 were identified from two sources: the Superannuation (Public Offices) Accounts (later Estimates for Revenue Departments) from 1861-1884, then the Estimates for Revenue Departments from 1885-1902. Both data came from the published papers of the House of Commons and are referred to collectively here as the 'Parliamentary Papers'. The other source of data for superannuants was the handwritten pension list from The Postal Museum (TPM) archives (the 'Pension Index'). This list was compiled by clerks at the Post Office as a record of those who had been granted a pension. The Pension Index contains information on the name, place of work and occupation of each superannuant, whereas the Parliamentary Papers series contain additional information including the cause of retirement.<sup>1</sup>

The initial sample was drawn from the Parliamentary Paper lists of superannuants retiring in each census year. These were then supplemented by individuals drawn from the Pension Index in cases where the Parliamentary Paper lists were known to be missing individuals. The totals are shown in Figure 1. The majority of superannuants in the census-year Parliamentary Paper lists (97 per cent) also appeared in the Pension Index. This meant that a superannuant whose death certificate was traced

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the Pension Index, see Harry Smith, *Building the Addressing Health Pensions Database*, Addressing Health working paper 1 (2023), <https://addressinghealth.org.uk/working-paper-1/>

could appear in either or both of the sources. A small number (48 or 2 per cent of the total) appeared in the Parliamentary Paper lists only. As noted above, the Parliamentary Paper lists were supplemented by superannuants identified from the Pensions Index. A total of 182 additional superannuants were added to our initial Parliamentary Papers sample from the Pensions Index.

Figure 1. Counts of superannuants retiring in each census year reported in both the Parliamentary Papers and the Pensions Index, 1861-1901

Year	England/Wales	Scotland	Ireland	Total
1861	121	12	22	155
1871	218	24	25	267
1881	200	44	29*	273
1891	353	27	22	402
1901	550	41	47	638
TOTALS	1442	148	145	1735

Note: \*The report covering 1881, published in 1882, listed Irish superannuants under England for unknown reasons, Irish superannuants for that year were taken from the pension index (The Postal Museum, POST 1/175, Index to Treasury letters, 1860-1882).

#### Extracting Information from the Parliamentary Papers

Figure 4 shows the sources used to identify each superannuant whose death certificate was obtained.

#### a) The Parliamentary Papers: Superannuation (Public Offices) Accounts (1861-1884)

These records were used to generate a list of superannuants for the sample census years of 1861, 1871, and 1881.

The information about superannuants contained in these accounts recorded:

- An initial first name and surname (men)
- A full first name and surname (women)
- Occupation
- Country
- Age
- Period of service
- Salary upon retirement
- Superannuation amount
- Reason for retirement

#### Superannuation Allowances granted in the Year 1861 :

Names.	Office.	Salary on Retirement.			Age on Retirement.	Period of Service.	Cause of Retirement.	Yearly Allowance granted.		
		£.	s.	d.	Yrs.	Yrs.		£.	s.	d.
R. Rhodes	Clerk	100	-	-	60	20	Above 60 years of age	33	6	8

Figure 2. An example of an entry from the Superannuation (Public Offices) Accounts.

Source: *An Account of All Allowances or Compensations Granted as Retired Allowances or Superannuations in All Public Offices or Departments* (London: HMSO, 1862), 35. ProQuest Parliamentary Papers.

b) The Parliamentary Papers: Estimates for Revenue Departments (1885-1901)

In 1885 two important changes in recording occurred. Superannuants now appeared in the Estimates for Revenue Departments. These documents differed from the Superannuation (Public Offices) Accounts in the following ways:

1. The specific cause of retirement disappeared. Superannuants were instead sorted into categories such as 'Ill Health' and 'Old Age' (see Fig 3).
2. Retirements were no longer grouped by year but by a period of approximately 12 months. Retirements were recorded from the 1st December to the 30th November.
3. All superannuants were organised alphabetically with a specific location recorded rather than being grouped by country

With regards to (2), in order to capture the highest number of superannuants for a specific year we made the decision to also include those who retired from the 1st December of the previous year. So for our 1891 and 1901 samples, our list also includes those who retired from the 1st December 1890-31st December 1891 and 1st December 1900-31st December 1901 respectively.

Office.	Name.	Rank.	Age.		Salary.	Cause.	Am.	
			Yrs.	Yrs.			Granted.	
						£.	s.	d.
Brought forward						-	-	149,508 1 10
Allowances Granted between 1st December 1889 and 30th November 1890— <i>continued.</i>								
IRELAND :								
Dublin - - -	Lydia Lyttle -	Female Clerk -	29	10	70 - -	Ill-health - -	-	11 13 4

Figure 3. An example of an entry from the Estimates for Revenue Departments.

Source: *Estimates for Revenue Departments for the Year Ending 31 March 1892* (London: HMSO, 1891), 103. ProQuest Parliamentary Papers.

The Parliamentary Papers also included lists of Pensions Ceased for each year. These were recorded for the period 1861-1908 as these typically included dates of death for specific superannuants. These could then be used to locate the death certificates of certain superannuants and verify candidate death certificates.

*The 'Pensions Ceased' data from the Parliamentary Papers*

The Parliamentary Papers also included lists of Pensions Ceased for each year. These were recorded for the period 1861-1908 and these typically included dates of death for specific superannuants. These could then be used to locate the death certificates of specific superannuants and verify candidate death certificates. In both sets of documents there were lists of Pensions Ceased for Post Office superannuants.

The Superannuation (Public Offices) Accounts (1861-1884) record the following:

- Name
- Initial and surname (men)
- Full first name and surname (women)
- Country

- Cause of cessation
- Date of death (if applicable)
- Rank/occupation
- Superannuation amount

The Estimates for Revenue Departments (1885-1901) differ in the following ways:

- Every superannuant is given a full name and surname
- The superannuants' Post Office department (e.g. Money Order Office, Stores Department) is now recorded alongside their occupation/rank
- Superannuants are no longer grouped together by country but by location of their office (e.g. Dublin, Edinburgh, London)

#### *Using Optical Character Recognition (OCR)*

To expedite the transcription of the information contained in the Parliamentary Papers (both the pensions granted and Pensions Ceased) the project used the ABBYY FineReader OCR toolkit. ABBYY was selected due in part to its ability to automatically recognise the structure of tables. The user is then able to manually adjust columns, cells, and rows. This was then saved as an .xlsx file and imported to a spreadsheet that used standard columns before being proofed twice and corrected by hand when necessary. Each individual was given a distinct ID separate from their Pension Index ID to be able to quickly identify their location in the pensions granted lists for a year and/or their location in the Pensions Ceased list.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of superannuants</b>	<b>Numbers of superannuants linked to Pensions Ceased data (England/Wales)</b>	<b>Numbers of superannuants linked to Pensions Ceased data (Scotland)</b>	<b>Numbers of superannuants linked to Pensions Ceased data (Ireland)</b>	<b>Total number of superannuants linked to Pensions Ceased data</b>
1861	157	86	9	11	106
1871	267	154	18	24	196
1881	284	123	17	16	156
1891	402	136	14	12	162
1901	638	108	9	10	127

Figure 4. Superannuants linked to the Parliamentary Paper lists of Pensions Ceased, 1861-1901.

746 of the 1331 superannuants present in the lists of pensions granted for the census years were linked to the Pensions Ceased data. The proportion falls over time as many of the superannuants who retired in later years lived and therefore drew their pension beyond the 1901 endpoint. It would have been too time consuming to have traced these to later years. These links provided precise dates of death for the superannuants in question. The remaining superannuants had to be identified through other means, which is discussed below in the 'Confirming Death Certification' section.

#### *The Death Records (England and Wales)*

Once dates of death were obtained for each superannuant, death registration details were searched using the General Records Office (GRO) online index and FreeBMD (<https://www.freebmd.org.uk/>). Full death certificate PDFs were then ordered from the GRO website. An example of a death certificate is shown in Figure 5.

Registration District <i>Ormskirk</i>									
Sub-District <i>Starmby</i>									
1902. DEATHS in the Sub-District of <i>Starmby</i> in the County of <i>Lancaster</i>									
No.	When and Where Died.	Name and Surname.	Sex.	Age.	Rank or Profession.	Cause of Death.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When registered.	Signature of Registrar.
319	Seventeenth February 1903 44 Clifford Road Burndale G.W.	Joseph William Brickles	Male	45 Years	Telegraphist	Locomotor ataxia 8 years Paralysis of Respiratory Muscles Certified by S. Newsham M.D.	C. A. Brickett Widow of deceased present at the death 44 Clifford Road Burndale	Seventeenth February 1903	J. Carr Registrar

Figure 5. The 1903 death certificate of Joseph William Brickles.

Source: The General Register Office of England and Wales.

### The Death Records (Scotland)

For reasons of cost and convenience the project used the Statutory Registers of Deaths which appeared from 1855 onwards in Scotland in place of individual death certificates. These were sourced from [ScotlandsPeople.gov.uk](http://ScotlandsPeople.gov.uk).

1918. DEATHS in the District of <i>Rathven</i> in the County of <i>Banff</i>								
No.	Name and Surname. Rank or Profession, and whether Single, Married, or Widowed.	When and Where Died.	Sex.	Age.	Name, Surname, & Rank or Profession of Father. Name, and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Cause of Death, Duration of Disease, and Medical Attendant by whom certified.	Signature & Qualification of Informant, and Residence, if out of the House in which the Death occurred.	When and where Registered, and Signature of Registrar.
67	Alexander Hendry Master Retired married to Ann Hendry	1918 July Twenty-fifth 7 East Church Street Buckie	M	4 1/2	William Hendry General Merchant (deceased) Mary Hendry M.A. Knight (deceased)	Leuite decay. Influenza (certified by W. A. Bagnall M.D. G.W.)	Dr. J. Sanderson Neighbour 12 East Church Street Buckie	1918 July 27 <sup>th</sup> as W.A. Bagnall Assistant Registrar. July Regr

Figure 6. The 1918 statutory death register entry for Alexander Hendry. Source: The National Records Office of Scotland/ScotlandsPeople.

### The Death Records (Ireland)

For reasons of cost and convenience the project relied on the Indexes to the Civil Records of Irish Deaths which appear from 1864 onwards. These are freely available online at [irishgenealogy.ie](http://irishgenealogy.ie).

Superintendent Registrar's District <i>Lispsary</i> Registrar's District <i>Lispsary</i>										
1915. DEATHS Registered in the District of <i>Lispsary</i> in the Union of <i>Lispsary</i> in the County of <i>Lispsary</i>										
No.	Date and Place of Death	Name and Surname	Sex	Condition	Age last Birthday	Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Certified Cause of Death and Duration of Illness	Signature, Qualification and Residence of Informant	When Registered	Signature of Registrar
88	19 <sup>th</sup> August Lispsary Lispsary	Thomas Francis Callanan	M		65	Retired Post Office Official	Indigestion of 8 months duration acute nephritis certified	Dr. J. Ryan Neighbour 7 Lispsary Lispsary	10/15	W. Donohue Registrar

Figure 7. The 1915 statutory death index entry for Thomas Francis Callanan. Source: The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media/irishgenealogy.ie

In cases of deaths occurring post-1921 in the entity that is now officially known as Northern Ireland, relevant death certificate details were searched for using the website of the General Record Office of Northern Ireland (GRONI). The death certificate PDFs were then downloaded directly from the GRONI website. These represented only a very small number of death certificates from the island of Ireland (6).

## The Death Records Compared

The information contained in the death records for England/Wales, Scotland, and Ireland varied both in quantity and quality. As Figure 8 shows, however, there was a large area of commonality between all three nations.<sup>2</sup> Given the primary aim was to record the post-retirement survival rates of Post Office superannuants it was decided that because all records included information about both cause of death and age, that these were sufficient to analyse post-retirement longevity and the relationship between the specified cause of retirement and the eventual cause of death. Other information specific to each national set of death registration and certification, which was less important for this purpose, was not collected. Irish death indexes did not, for instance, commonly record the duration of the cause of death whereas those from England and Wales often did. Death certificates from England and Wales only sporadically recorded marital status, whereas this was recorded for Scotland.

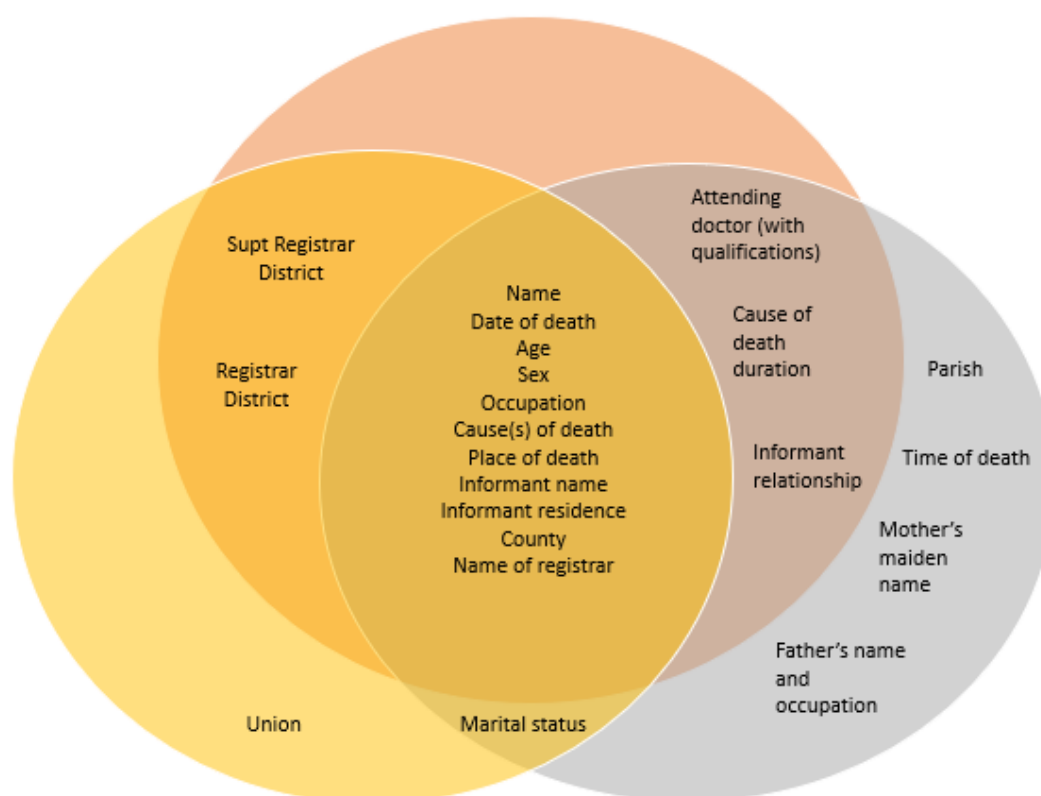


Figure 8. A comparison of the information contained in the death records across England/Wales, Scotland and Ireland

### Confirming Death Certification

With the available information on superannuants outlined above, a group of expert volunteers, together with members of the project team, were involved in tracking down the relevant individuals in each national set of records.<sup>3</sup> The volunteers were provided with a list of 771 superannuants who could not initially be identified in the death registers. These superannuants were usually those who did not have a recorded date of death from the Pensions Ceased records available in the Parliamentary Papers series. The volunteers were provided with the information recorded in the Parliamentary Papers to begin their search. Using online family history resources such as FindMyPast, Ancestry, and

<sup>2</sup> Note that these categories show features that *commonly* occur in death certificates from these countries, but not always (e.g. cause of death duration is not always recorded).

<sup>3</sup> The expert volunteers were part of a University of the Third Age learning project carried out in conjunction with the Addressing Health team. For more information on the project see: <https://addressinghealth.org.uk/resources/1901-postal-superannuants/>

others, they then proceeded to fill out a candidate death certificate form online indicating whether or not they were able to trace individuals together with an assessment of the likelihood of an accurate match. In total, this process allowed matching for an additional 572 superannuants to a relevant registration of death.

To quality check the submissions, the volunteers were asked to specify the basis for selecting the correct death certificate. It was possible to select more than one reason. The percentage shows how many of our 531 responses for England/Wales responded positively to the following:

- The age matches up (n=513, 96.2%)
- The location is the same or nearby [the retirement location] (n=356, 66.8%)
- I found a relevant death/probate listing (n=233, 43.7%)

The last question asked for any additional information the expert had discovered about the superannuant. These usually indicated that the expert had found a relevant census record for the superannuant that recorded their superannuant status in the Post Office. 102 responses for England and Wales listed finding additional relevant census, marriage, or other genealogical information to support their claim (19.1%). In two thirds of cases, there were at least two additional pieces of evidence that confirmed that the correct person had been identified which suggests that for over 90 per cent of the individuals in each census year, we were able to match their details with an appropriate death certificate.

#### *Checking for Consistency*

The kind of information we held for each superannuant differed by both year and place. Before 1885 the Parliamentary Papers did not provide specific information about the employment location of each superannuant (see above). However, matches to the Pensions Ceased data were higher for the 1861, 1871, and 1881 data (see Fig 4). Combined with the approximate dates of birth we had for superannuants, this made it relatively simple to look for the death registration details of superannuants from these sample years.

In both instances – i.e. cases where the superannuant had a recorded death date and cases where they did not – the same series of checks were conducted to test validity. These were organised into two stages: pre-transcription and post-transcription.

#### a) Pre-transcription

Upon retrieving the death certificate checks were made by a project team member. Initial checks of the death certificate against the Parliamentary Papers/Pension Index information were conducted by inspecting five separate elements, recorded here in descending order of importance: Name, recorded Post Office occupation, date of death (if available), location, age (~ 5 years).



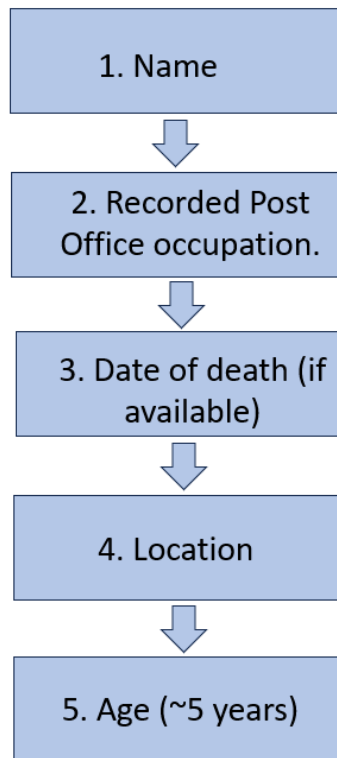


Figure 9: Decision flowchart depicting the different categories (in descending order of importance) used to judge the validity of a death certificate during the pre-transcription phase.

This method resulted in 14 death certificates from all sample years being excluded from proceeding to the transcription phase.<sup>4</sup>

#### b) Post-transcription

The post-transcription phase used record matching to concentrate on the following areas to further test the validity of the death certificates. These were: age, name (particularly in the cases of female superannuants remarrying), date of death, and location at death compared to place of work.

There were several cases where the recorded age of death was higher than what would be expected based upon the age given to the superannuant in either the Parliamentary Papers or the Pension Index. However, research has shown how common age misreporting including age heaping (usually around zeros and fives) could be in the nineteenth-century English and Welsh census,<sup>5</sup> as well as Ireland.<sup>6</sup> In cases where the difference was greater than two years, however, further checks were conducted, once again using the Pre-transcription criteria (see Fig 9) to decide whether the death certificate was likely to have been for the correct person. When necessary, the team member also looked up additional information such as census records to confirm e.g. a history of a superannuant living at the death certificate address, or a history of the superannuant inconsistently recording their age. This process removed a further 30 individuals.

<sup>4</sup> 4 from 1871, 2 from 1881, 2 from 1891, 6 from 1901.

<sup>5</sup> Long, Jason, 'Rural-Urban Migration and Socioeconomic Mobility in Victorian Britain', *The Journal of Economic History*, 65/1 (2005).

<sup>6</sup> Budd, John W., and Timothy Guinnane, 'Intentional Age-misreporting, Age-heaping, and the 1908 Old Age Pensions Act in Ireland', *Population Studies* 45/3 (1991); Ó Gráda, Cormac Tropeano, Jean-Philippe (2002), 'Infant and Child Mortality in Dublin a Century Ago', *Centre for Economic Research Working Paper Series*, No. WP02/28, University College Dublin, Department of Economics, <https://hdl.handle.net/10197/498>.

## Results

The process of matching individual superannuants to their registration of death, outlined above, yielded an overall success rate of 80.9 per cent (Fig 10). Success in matching was higher for males than females because of name changes upon marriage which makes it more difficult to trace women through archival records. Where corroborating evidence was less easily available, notably for Ireland where no census information survived, we achieved lower rates of successful matching compared to England and Wales. The rate is slightly lower for later years as less corroborating information (notably census enumerator forms) is available to confirm identities.

Year	Number of superannuants	Number of superannuants with correct death certificates	Percent successful matching
1861	155	130	83.9
1871	267	236	88.4
1881	273	228	83.5
1891	402	304	75.6
1901	638	506	79.3
TOTAL	1735	1404	80.9

Figure 10: Outcomes of matching process, 1861-1901

### *Missing pensioners: geography*

There were sixty-nine different locations recorded amongst the missing pensioners in England (n=167). Of all the missing pensioners from England between 1861 and 1901, a significant proportion (n=75, or 32% of the total missing pensioners) worked in London. Other metropolitan clusters included Manchester (n=11, or 4.7% of the total missing pensioners).

Year	Number of English superannuants identified for this year and their % share of the total number of superannuants identified	Number of English superannuants missing for this year and their % share of the total missing number of superannuants
1861	121 (78%)	25 (59%)
1871	218 (81%)	17 (56%)
1881	200 (73%) <sup>1</sup>	4 (23%)
1891	353 (87%)	17 (85%)
1901	550 (86%)	104 (83%)

Figure 11: Missing English pensioners.

Ireland is disproportionately represented amongst the missing pensioners in 1861, 1871, and 1881.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Irish superannuants identified for this year and their % share of the total number of superannuants identified</b>	<b>Number of Irish superannuants missing for this year and their % share of the total missing number of superannuants</b>
1861	24 (15%)	10 (40%)
1871	27 (10%)	9 (32%)
1881	30 (10%) <sup>1</sup>	10 (26%)
1891	19 (4%)	0 (0%)
1901	46 (7%)	6 (4%)

Figure 12: Missing Irish pensioners.

The trend for 1861 is unsurprising given that the civil registration of deaths in Ireland was only introduced in 1864. Initially it would seem that the disproportionate numbers of missing Irish pensioners for 1871 and 1881 could be a result of the historical under-reporting of deaths in Ireland, a trend that continued well into the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> However death under-reporting in Ireland was primarily confined to infants under a year old.<sup>8</sup> When we look at who is missing from our Irish sample, too, this hypothesis becomes even more unlikely when location is taken into account alongside age, as 28% of the missing Irish pensioners (n=10) were from the city of Dublin. What it does confirm – as set out in our ‘Confirming Death Certification’ section – is the importance of extant census data (census data is missing for Ireland prior to 1901) in locating death certificates, as reflected by the responses of our volunteers. Furthermore, the lower rate amongst pensioners from large urban areas is unsurprising given record linkage of this type is often more difficult in towns and cities given the high mobility of urban populations.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, with the exception of the anomalous year of 1871, Scotland witnessed a trend that saw the number of missing pensioners correspond largely in proportion to their overall share of identified superannuants for that year.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Scottish superannuants identified for this year and their % share of the total</b>	<b>Number of Scottish superannuants missing for this</b>

		<b>year and their % share of the total missing</b>
1861	13 (8%)	2 (9%)
1871	26 (10%)	3 (21%)
1881	33 (12%)	3 (9%)
1891	25 (6%)	1 (5%)
1901	40 (6%)	7 (6%)

Figure 13: Missing Scottish pensioners.

### Conclusion

The process of checking was important in matching individual superannuants with a likely death certificate. Success rates were higher when an individual appeared in the Parliamentary Paper Pensions Ceased data where a date of death was provided. Where information was not available, we searched for matching evidence based on name, age, occupation and location that could link a superannuant to the record of their death. Additional information, such as census enumerators books and probate records, were used to help match individuals about whom less certainty existed. However, overall, the process of checking allowed us to identify at least 1404 individuals out of a possible 1735 in all census years where we could match at least three or more pieces of information common to their superannuant record (using name, location, occupation, age) with a death certificate and for these we can be confident that we have been able to establish a positive match.

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