

Benjamin Milner

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EDUCATION

PhD in Economics, University of British Columbia, 2020
MA in Economics, Queen's University, 2013
BA Honours in Economics (Mathematics minor), University of Saskatchewan, 2012

RELEVANT EMPLOYMENT

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, University of Alberta
July 2020 – Present

Teaching Assistant at University of British Columbia
September 2014 – December 2014, September 2016 – April 2019

Research Assistant for Professors Kevin Milligan (University of British Columbia) and
Tammy Schirle (Wilfrid Laurier University)
June 2017 – April 2020

Research Assistant for Professor Joseph Henrich (University of British Columbia)
Summer 2015

Teaching Assistant at Queen's University
September 2012 – April 2013

Research Assistant for Professor Eric Howe (University of Saskatchewan)
Summer 2012

RESEARCH

The Impact of State-Provided Education: Evidence from the 1870 Education Act (*Economic Journal*, 2025)

How does access to public education affect occupational outcomes and intergenerational mobility? The UK's 1870 Education Act, which introduced a public education system in England and Wales, provides a unique historical context in which to explore these questions. Using newly digitized historical records, I find that the Act resulted in significant improvements in school supply and attendance, which in turn improved adult outcomes. In particular, analysis using a regression kink design suggests that public school access improved a child's chance of obtaining an occupation requiring literacy in adulthood by as much as 17 pp. I use a triple difference specification to show that the effect extended to children further removed from the kink, and that the quality of occupational outcomes increased with each additional year of schooling. To study the reform's effect on intergenerational mobility, I link father-son pairs across time, matching nearly 4 million individuals using full-count historical censuses. I find that by targeting the lower classes, public school introduction significantly improved intergenerational mobility across numerous measures, with the adult outcome gap between high- and low- class children decreasing by over 10% in some cases.

The Long-term Effects of Child Labour Legislation: Evidence from Britain's 1860 Mining Act (Forthcoming in the *Journal of Economic History*)

While many previous works have examined the immediate efficacy of child labour laws, without linked data they have been necessarily silent on how they affected the adult outcomes of treated children. This paper breaks new ground in tracing the effects of historical child labour reform from childhood through to adulthood. I first show that by decreasing the opportunity cost and increasing the returns to schooling, Britain's

1860 Mining Act led to increased human capital acquisition among the children of coal miners. Then, using full-count census records linked across decades, I demonstrate that positive effects extended well into adulthood, as these same children became significantly more likely to obtain high skill, human capital-intensive occupations.

Compulsory Schooling and Minority Language Preservation: Welsh and the 1870 Education Act (Working Paper)

Language decline is the fear of many a minority in multiethnic states across the world, with the perennial question being whether the minority's youth will carry on the linguistic torch of their forebears. Given this, it is unsurprising that language policy often sparks fierce debate, particularly in the context of child education. Yet empirical work examining the long-term casual effects of education policy on language transmission has been sparse. This paper seeks to address this deficiency by studying how the introduction of the 1870 Education Act affected the propensity to speak Welsh. Welsh nationalists have long suggested that the 1870 Act – a landmark piece of legislation which introduced compulsory schooling in many areas for the first time, and also greatly increased funding in others – did grievous damage to the Welsh language. Using individual-level census data and a difference-in-differences design, I find that exposure to either of these consequences of the Act decreased a child's likelihood of becoming a monoglot Welsh speaker in adulthood. However, exposure also initially increased the total number of Welsh speakers, driven by those raised in Anglophone households becoming more likely to become bilingual. Within a generation, though, the negative impact on total Welsh speakers was significant, as the children of those treated were less likely to speak any Welsh.

Post-Conflict Outcomes: Studying Community-Level Effects of WWI Deaths in Post-War England and Wales (Working Paper)

During the First World War, death rates of local soldiers experienced by English and Welsh communities varied widely. Using this variation, I examine the effect of soldier mortality on changes in postwar poverty and employment outcomes. I find higher conflict death rates are associated with a fall in local poverty, with the effect appearing to be stronger among men than women. I also find weak evidence suggesting employment rates rose where death rates were higher, particularly among women. Together, these results suggest that while high death rates improved labour market conditions for those left behind, widowed women were likely forced into the labour market to avoid poverty. Finally, I demonstrate that war-induced falls in the ratio of marriage-aged males to females resulted in an increase in out-of-wedlock births, confirming previous findings showing that men often utilize marriage market bargaining power to shirk childcare responsibility.

Clergy Income and Religious Dissent: Evidence From a Long-Running Randomized Experiment in 1700s Britain (Work in Progress)

Co-author with Matt Lowe and Cory Smith.

English Industrialization and (the right kind of) Protestantism (Work in Progress)

The Impact of World War I on Female Labour Force Participation in England and Wales (Work in Progress)

Co-author with Victor Gay.

AWARDS & GRANTS

- 2025 Austin Robinson Memorial Prize: best paper (*The Impact of State-Provided Education: Evidence from the 1870 Education Act*) published in *The Economic Journal* by an author within five years of receiving PhD.
- 2023 SSSR Jack Shand Research Grant, “Clergy Income and Religious Dissent”
- 2022 SSHRC Insight Development Grant, “Clergy Income and Religious Dissent”
- 2021 Alexander Gerschenkron Prize Finalist, awarded by the Economic History Association for the best dissertation in economic history on a non-North American topic.
- 2018 University of British Columbia Graduate Student Research Award
- 2017 CIDE Innovative Data Grant for “The Impact of State-Provided Education: Evidence from the 1870 Education Act.”
- 2013 University of British Columbia Four Year Doctoral Fellowship
- 2012 SSHRC Joseph-Armand Bombardier Master’s Scholarship
- 2012 Queen’s University Graduate Award and Teaching Assistantship
- 2012 University of Saskatchewan Copland Prize in Social Sciences: most distinguished graduate receiving a Bachelor of Arts Four-year or Honours degree or certificate in the Social Sciences.
- 2012 Lewis C. Grey Prize: outstanding graduate in economics at the University of Saskatchewan
- 2011 Popoff Scholarship: outstanding student in third or fourth year of economics at the University of Saskatchewan
- 2010 Fowke Award: outstanding economics essay by an undergraduate student at the University of Saskatchewan

PRESENTATIONS

- 2025 Canadian Network of Economic History (Montreal, QC)
- 2024 Wilfred Laurier Economics Seminar (Virtual), Canadian Economic Association Conference (Toronto, ON)
- 2023 University of Saskatchewan Economics Seminar (Saskatoon, SK)
- 2022 Vancouver School of Economics Seminar (Vancouver, BC), World Economic History Congress (Paris, France), Northwestern Economic History Seminar (Evanston, IL), Canadian Network of Economic History (Fredericton, NB)
- 2021 Economic History Association (Tucson, AZ), University College London Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration (CReAM) Seminar Series (Virtual), Yale Economic History Workshop (Virtual), Canadian Economic Association Conference (Virtual), VSE Culture and Persistence Seminar Series (Virtual), “Rise of Education in Historical Perspective” Seminar Series (Virtual)
- 2020 Nuffield Historical Social Mobility Seminar Series (Virtual), Economic History Association (Virtual)
- 2019 Canadian Network of Economic History (Thunder Bay, ON), NBER Workshop on Income and Life Expectancy (Cambridge, MA)
- 2018 Social Science History Association (Phoenix, AZ), Economic History Association (Montreal, QC) (Poster)

REFERENCES

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