The Population of County Tyrone 1600-1991

Introduction

At the beginning of the seventeenth century the population of County Tyrone was probably not more than 20,000 persons. Virtually all of this population would have been native Irish. By the middle of the seventeenth century the population had risen to around 37,000 of which approximately a third would have been British colonists. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the population had doubled to approximately 70,000 persons; by the middle of the century the population had not increased by very much but at the end of the century it had risen to approximately 200,000 and by 1841 it had reached a peak of 312,956. As a result of the Great Famine the population of the county fell by some 18% between 1841 and 1851 to 255,819. Each decade after 1851 saw the population fall further: by 1901 it had fallen to 150,567, half of what it had been on the eve of the Great Famine. At the outbreak of World War II it had dropped to 127,586. The post-war period has seen a recovery in the number of persons living in the county and at the last census in 1991 a total of 157,570 persons was enumerated.

Table 1 [Excel File] gives details of the number of persons living in Tyrone at various dates between 1600 and 1991 and the trends are illustrated graphically in Figure 1.1

The purpose of this paper is to describe and explain the growth, decline and recovery of the population of the county over a period of almost four hundred years.
As the estimates in Table 1 show the population of the county increased at least three-fold during the seventeenth century. This spectacular growth reflected not only the official Plantation of the county during the first half of the century but also the continued immigration particularly during the latter years of the century. As Robinson has shown in chapter x the Plantation of Ulster led to the introduction of British settlers during the first few decades of the seventeenth century. By 1630 it was estimated that there were at least 30,000 British settlers within the province of Ulster as a whole. County Tyrone would have accounted for at least 3 to 4,000 of these. Colonisation continued after 1630 but suffered a setback during the 1641 rebellion. However the Cromwellian reconquest and the subsequent flow of both Scottish and English settlers to the province boosted the planter totals and the Hearth Returns of the 1660s provide us with some evidence as to the numbers living in the county at that time. The grand total of 1179 British households listed in the county Hearth Returns for 1666 was certainly an under-estimate of the planter population. Assuming there was an average of 4.5 persons per household this would produce a total British population of some 5300 persons. Carleton has shown that because of extensive exemption and evasion the early Hearth Returns were grossly inaccurate. This inaccuracy may have been even more extreme in the case of counts of native Irish households. Thus there could have been as many as 10 to 12,000 planters in Tyrone by 1666 and since the Irish population at that time would have been greater than the Planter population, it is probable that the Irish population could have been of the order of 20 to 25,000. This would suggest a total population for the county of 30 to 37,000.

Assuming that Tyrone had a total population of say 37,000 during the 1660s and assuming that this grew naturally at an annual rate of 0.5% this would have produced a figure of 47,955 persons in 1712. In fact estimates from the Hearth Returns for that year would suggest that the total population at time was probably of the order of 72,000 This leaves a shortfall of some 24,000 persons - a third of the 1712 population. Clearly this shortfall represents the British immigrants who entered the county during the second half of the seventeenth century. Some of these came during the 1670s and early 1680s but this flow experienced a sharp setback when economic confidence slumped following the accession of James II in 1685 and the subsequent Williamite war. With the cessation of hostilities refugees who had fled during the war began to return and these were joined by a new wave of immigrants from Scotland encouraged, as in the 1650s, by the availability of cheap land. In addition a series of very bad harvests in Scotland between 1695 and 1698, which did not affect places like Tyrone, helped to boost the numbers coming from Scotland. Contemporaries estimated that as many as 80,000 Scots came to Ulster in the years following the Williamite Wars. How many of these came to Tyrone it is impossible to say. Certainly the estimates used here would suggest that their numbers were significant. Clearly the continued flow of colonists during the second half of the seventeenth century was an important factor in maintaining and expanding the British population in the county.
Early Eighteenth Century

The early eighteenth century saw a slowing down of population growth. Immigration was no longer a factor, indeed some emigration may have already begun to the American colonies. Thus the demography of County Tyrone came more into line with that of other pre-industrial areas of Western Europe, viz. periods of growth thwarted by periods of decline. The Hearth Returns for the period 1712 to 1752 indicate that the population of the county increased by 12% in the forty years between 1712 and 1752. Clearly the growth would have been greater if it had not been for significant periods of decline as evidenced by the figures for 1732 and 1749 (see Table 1).

The fall in house numbers in 1732 reflected a period of famine and disease which resulted from seriously deficient grain harvests in 1726, 1727 and 1728. Typhoid and dysentery accompanied famine and there was also a particularly severe smallpox outbreak at that time. Added to this was emigration of persons to the American colonies during the 1720s. It is not surprising therefore that house totals should have fallen significantly by 1732.

Conditions improved during the 1730s and as the figures show house totals recovered during the 1740s but dropped significantly by 1749. The 1740s saw two major famines - the first during 1740/41 and the second in 1744/45.

The first of these famines was caused by an exceptionally severe winter in 1740/41 followed by a very cold spring and a dry summer. The severe frosts of that winter decimated the stocks of potatoes stored from the harvest and the cold spring and dry summer of 1741 affected the subsequent grain harvests. Specific evidence relating to Tyrone is difficult to locate. The severity of frosts was evidenced by large numbers of fish being found dead along the shores of Lough Neagh and folk walking from the Tyrone shore of Lough Neagh over ten miles of ice to the Antrim market in mid-January 1741. The long dry summer of 1741 led to an outbreak of town fires throughout Ireland - a fire in Omagh razed almost the whole town to the ground, leaving little more than a church, the gaol and the court-house standing. Most historians believe that this famine, which has been likened to the Great Famine of the 1840s, was at its most severe in Munster, the south Midlands and Connaught. Certainly the fact that there were no significant reductions in house totals between 1732 and 1744 would lend support to the view that Ulster emerged from the crisis earlier and less badly scarred than elsewhere on the island.

Unfortunately the same cannot be said for the later famine of 1744/45. J. Rutty, a medical historian writing in 1770 stated that in the counties of Armagh, Tyrone and Derry their distress was much greater than in the great frost of 1739. Certainly a fall of 18% in the number of recorded hearths in Tyrone between 1744 and 1749 would substantiate such a view.

Such catastrophic famines coupled with periodic famines of a lesser nature and outbreaks of disease served to keep populations in check or at best allow moderate growth. If such a pattern of stop and start had continued after the 1740s then the population of Tyrone would have probably continued to rise slowly over the next fifty years. Instead the population increased almost threefold to about 200,000 by 1800.
Later Eighteenth Century

Between 1753 and 1791 the population of the county probably doubled. Such growth, although typical of Ireland as a whole during this period, was certainly not characteristic of other Western European countries at that time. Here growth was substantial but certainly not as spectacular as that of Ireland.

Why then did such unprecedented growth occur in Tyrone during the second half of the eighteenth century? In searching for causes immigration can be dismissed as a factor; indeed until the 1770s Ulster was losing migrants to America. We need, therefore, to look to either a fall in mortality or a rise in fertility or some combination of both as the direct cause of growth. At the same time these direct causes need to be considered within the wider economic and social context of which they were a part.

In order to establish the direct causes of the growth we need precise information on how many people died year by year throughout the eighteenth century, the number of people marrying, the age at which they married and the size of their families. Such data is not generally available in Ireland until well into the nineteenth century when official statistics on these matters were collected by government. Instead we have to rely on fragments of information contained in those parish registers of marriages, baptisms and burials which survive from the eighteenth century. In general these are few and far between and even when they do exist they often do not contain entries for a sufficiently long period in which to identify individuals and families so that their life histories can be traced from baptism to burial.

We are fortunate that within the county of Tyrone there is one parish - Killyman, south east of the town of Dungannon, which has a register of marriages, baptisms and burials for the Church of Ireland population which allows us to reconstruct how this population behaved demographically. There is also some supporting evidence from the nearby parish of Donaghmore.

Killyman lies within a wider area which, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was dominated by the linen industry. Because of this the region was characterised by very small farms and cottier/weaver houses resulting in high densities of population; by 1841 there were 582 persons per square mile in the parish. The register gives the occupations of the fathers of the children baptised from 1837 onwards and of 317 families identified, 147 of the heads of households were weavers, 132 were farmers, 31 were in various trades, 15 were labourers, 5 were listed as professional, 1 was a servant, and 1 was a beggar.

The register runs from 1745 to 1845 and beyond and this provides a sufficiently long period in which to identify individuals and families and trace their life histories from baptism to burial. This means that the age at which both men and women married could be calculated with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

Throughout the entire period of the register investigated (1745-1845) the age at which men married was constant at around twenty-five to twenty six. The average age at which women married throughout the same period was almost twenty-three. Whilst this does not seem to be as early as the marriage ages suggested by Connell, it is much younger than women married...
in other areas of Western Europe. Furthermore, the averages for the whole period hide differences between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, particularly for women. During the period 1771-1810 the mean age when women married was just under twenty two and at that time almost a half of women marrying were twenty years old or younger. During the period 1811-1845 the average age at which women married was closer to twenty-four with only a quarter of women twenty years old or younger.

Analysis of the nearby Donaghmore Church of Ireland register for the period 1800-1850 suggests a mean age at marriage for males of just under twenty-seven and for females of around twenty-two to twenty-three. The indifferent quality of the Donaghmore register during the second half of the eighteenth century coupled with the fact that the parish was divided in 1775 in order to create the new parish of Pomeroy, made it almost impossible to trace many marriages in the 1780s and 1790s.

Unfortunately the information on burials is not as good as that on baptisms or marriages. Nevertheless there is a suggestion of falling mortality, especially amongst children, and this would be consistent with Morgan’s findings for Blaris and Clarkson’s analysis of Armagh. If in fact mortality was declining from around the middle of the eighteenth century and if the saving of lives was principally amongst children then, as Clarkson has suggested, the effects would be cumulative as increasing proportions of children survived to become parents themselves. Thus in Killyman if this was the case, and given that there had no appreciable change in celibacy or an influx of outsiders, then some increase in persons marrying in the parish might be expected by the 1770s and 1780s.

The marriage register for Killyman clearly shows three points at which the number of marriages contracted in the parish rose significantly - 1770s/1780s, around 1800 and again in the 1820s. If, as was suggested in the previous paragraph, the saving of lives was principally among children, then a sharp rise in the number of marriages would follow some twenty years later and the effects of such a process would be cumulative as increasing proportions of children survived to become parents themselves. Thus the increase of some 45% in the number of marriages in the 1770s and 1780s was the result of the survival of increasing numbers of children after the 1750s/1760s. The bulge of children produced by the marriages of the 1770s and the 1780s was reflected some twenty to twenty-five years later when the number of marriages rose sharply around 1800. In turn these marriages produced their bulge of children around the 1820s. By the late 1840s, emigration and the devastating effects of the Famine had removed the next potential bulge.

Thus, the evidence from Killyman would suggest that the trigger factor which caused the upward surge in the population of Tyrone from 1750 onwards was a fall in mortality levels (particularly of children and infants) coupled with already existing high fertility rates resulting from lower ages at marriage (particularly of women) relative to other parts of Western Europe. The slowing down of annual growth rates towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries was caused by an increasing delay in the age at marriage and a rise in the numbers emigrating from the county.

Such an explanation would be consistent with the chronology of growth outlined by Dickson, Daultrey and O'Grada as a result of their re-interpretation of the County Hearth Returns.
They have argued for significant annual rates of growth in the period 1753 to 1790 and a gradual reduction in annual growth rates during the period 1791 to 1821.\textsuperscript{19} This is in contrast to Connell’s view that growth came much later - after 1780 and continued at a relatively high level almost up to the Famine.

The explanation is also consistent with the model of Irish economic development suggested by Cullen and would help to explain why mortality levels began to fall. Cullen has argued for a period of substantial economic development from at least the 1750s and probably as early as the 1730s.\textsuperscript{20} The main engine of economic development in many parts of County Tyrone at that time would have been the linen industry.\textsuperscript{21} Its expansion led to the commercialisation of the economy and this commercialisation affected all levels of society. The better-off smallholders engaged in weaving; the poorer families in spinning. This extra money could in better times allow the more substantial tenants to buy luxuries, but more importantly it allowed the poorer sections of the community to buy food when times were bad. It is significant that although during this period there were minor famines it was the 1840s before a famine of similar proportions to the 1740s struck again.

At the same time epidemics would have caused mortality rates to rise from time to time but even these crises and the periodic emigration which took place throughout the second half of the eighteenth century did little to halt the upward surge of population. The population of the county in the period 1753-1791 was growing in excess of 1.5\% per annum and could, at times, have reached 2.0\% - growth rates presently experienced in some countries in Africa today.

This growing population was housed by subdividing existing holdings and moving the population on to fresh ground on the hillsides and bogs. The economic boom caused by the Napoleonic Wars towards the end of the century further fuelled subdivision. The potato, the domestic spinning of linen yarn and linen weaving made it possible for such activities to take place. The linen industry meant that a family could be supported on a very small piece of ground and weavers could often outbid farmers for plots of land. A contemporary, John McEvoy, writing in 1802, was in no doubt:

\textit{that the linen manufacture is daily increasing….. there cannot be greater proof of the increase of the linen trade than the great rise of flax land. Another circumstance clearly points out the increase of the linen trade: common labourers, who were not so much in the habit of weaving some years ago, generally work out two or three yards of linen at night in the winter time…}\textsuperscript{22}

McEvoy estimated the population of the county in 1800 to be some 172,224 persons.\textsuperscript{23} Using the corrections to the Hearth Returns proposed by Dickson, et.al. and applying their suggested annual growth rates to the 1791 population figure for the county, the total population in 1800 was more likely to have been of the order of 200,000.
Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century in Tyrone opened with population still increasing. Official census figures became available from 1821 thus making it possible to trace, with more accuracy, the changes in population from decade to decade. Table 2 [Excel File] shows that the overall population of the county rose by 16% between 1821 and 1831 but only by 3% between 1831 and 1841 and several parishes - Clogher, Donacavey, Aghaloo, Clonfeacle, Arboe, Ballyclog, Cappagh, Longfield, Skirts of Urney, Ardstraw, Camus, Leckpatrick and Termonmaguirk witnessed decline. Figure 2 shows the pattern of population density within the county on the eve of the Famine.

The overall density pattern partly reflected the basic geography of the county in that the least densely populated areas were in those parishes, such as Bodoney, Termonamongan and Lissan, which contained large tracts of upland. The largest overall area of dense population was to be found in the lowlands in the eastern part of the county where the finest linens were woven. Here the density of population was always in excess of 300 persons to the square mile and reached levels in excess of 500 persons in parishes such as Killyman.

The map on the next page gives details of the location of parishes within the county at that time.
Population declined almost everywhere during the Famine decade. Table 2 shows that the population of the county fell by 18%. At the same time the decline was not uniform across the county. Some parishes, particularly those containing large upland tracts did not decline as much. Within these parishes there were townlands that did not lose any population, in fact some saw an increase in population during 1841/51. For example, in the parish of Bodoney Lower 46% of the fifty townlands in the parish saw modest increases in their population during the Famine decade. In neighbouring Bodoney Upper 36% of the fifty-three townlands did not lose populations. In two other upland parishes, Termongamongan and Lissan, the equivalent figures were 40% and 44% respectively. By contrast, lowland townlands, with a few exceptions, lost population during the Famine decade.

Decline continued during the decade 1851/61 but at a lower level than the Famine decade - the overall fall in population for the county was 7%, in contrast to the 18% of the previous decade. The rest of the century saw the population fall decade by decade with a significant peak in decline again during the years 1881 to 1891. By 1891 the county had lost 45% of its population in the space of fifty years.

The prime causes of this decline throughout the nineteenth century (particularly after the Famine) were emigration and a falling birth rate. Apart from the immediate years of the Famine the death rate was not a key factor in explaining the decline. Emigration was probably the most important factor in hastening the decrease of population during the second half of the nineteenth century. Before the Famine Mokyr estimated the annual rate of emigration from Ulster to have been of the order of 8.4 to 9.4 per thousand. This rose
significantly after the Famine and according to Clarkson was running at about 15.0 per thousand between 1851 and 1871 in County Tyrone.\textsuperscript{27} It then fell to 12.6 per thousand during the decade 1871/81 but rose again during 1881/91 to 14.8. By the end of the century it had fallen back again to 12.3. The birth rate, which in Pre-Famine times had reached a high of 39 births per thousand of the population, fell significantly during the Post-Famine period. During the years 1864-71 it stood at 25.0 births per thousand and by 1881-91 it had dropped to 20.0.\textsuperscript{28} This fall in the birth rate was caused by a rise in the age at first marriage and a decline in nuptiality arising from a rise in celibacy and the effects of emigration.

The prime causes of population decline were, themselves, the result of two key changes in the economy of Tyrone during the nineteenth century. The first of these was a worsening situation in the domestic linen industry and the second was the fact that both landlords and farmers began to consolidate farms rather than subdivide them.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the rural community of County Tyrone (over 90\% of the population) depended heavily on the linen industry. We have already seen McEvoy’s reference in 1802 to its importance within the county at the turn at of the century.\textsuperscript{29} The 1821 Census enumerated 63\% of the working population in the Barony of Dungannon as being engaged in manufactures or handicrafts and the corresponding figure for the county as a whole was 56\%.\textsuperscript{30} The Ordnance Survey Memoirs for the county make mention of its importance in the 1820s and 1830s and point to the fact that in the most north-easterly parishes of the county which bordered on County Londonderry some were weaving cotton as well as linen.\textsuperscript{31}

The best years of the industry for the handloom weavers had been in the eighteenth century. Since the 1790s there had been a decline in the real wages of weavers and 1811 had seen a major slump in the industry within Ulster. The industry recovered from this slump but a particular body blow was dealt to the rural community after 1825 with the introduction of the wet spinning process for linen. This led to the factory spinning of much of the yarn used for weaving and most of the factories were located in the east of the province, the exception being the Herdman mill at Sion Mills which began operating in 1835.\textsuperscript{32} The introduction of mill-spun yarn not only made home-spun yarn uneconomical it also made it difficult for weavers remote from the factories in the east of the province to obtain supplies of mill-spun yarn. The result was that not only were spinning households forced out of work, but many weavers were also obliged to abandon their trade.\textsuperscript{33}

As a result of these changes in the linen trade many persons, particularly young males, were forced to emigrate.\textsuperscript{34} The introduction of cheap fares to America from 1818 onwards facilitated this process.\textsuperscript{35} Clearly the removal of a substantial number of young males had a negative impact on marriages and births which, in conjunction with the emigration, would help to explain the slowing down of growth in the decades immediately prior to the Famine.

Although the Famine itself would have accelerated the removal of many of the poorer, linen weavers and spinners from the land, there were still considerable numbers engaged in linen in 1851. The Census Returns for Tyrone in that year show that there were still 43,659 male weavers (aged 15 years and upwards) of damask and linen and 21,096 female weavers in the county.\textsuperscript{36} There were 8,560 male weavers of muslin and cotton and 4,107 female weavers.
There were also 14,740 female spinners of flax and 79 male spinners. Of course these figures probably conceal the number of farmers and labourers who would also have engaged in the linen trade but would have not returned themselves as weavers in the Census Enumerators’ Returns. However, by 1871 the census statistics on employment for persons aged 20 and upwards make no mention of spinning and a total of 1054 males and 801 females are returned as workers in flax, linen manufacture and a further 501 males and 1988 females as weavers (not otherwise described). This decline reflected the increasing industrialisation of the linen industry and its geographical concentration in the east of the province.

Thus, the economic environment of County Tyrone in the Post-Famine period offered linen weavers and/or cottiers little prospect of any kind of employment in the rural area which would allow them to marry and set up a household. The lack of any real employment in the local towns meant that the members of this group were forced to migrate to Belfast or further afield to the growing industrial cities of Britain or America. Thus as the century progressed this cottier/smallholder group formed a much smaller percentage of the community than had been the case earlier in the century.

The second major factor which contributed to the decline in population, particularly after the Famine, was the consolidation of holdings. Because the linen trade was so inextricably linked to farming the average size of holdings in Tyrone was relatively small. Statistics for 1849 show that 52% of the holdings in the county were 15 acres or less, only 20% were greater than 30 acres and these tended to be found in those areas of the county dominated by upland. For example in Strabane Barony, which contained considerable tracts of upland, 41% of the farms were over 30 acres. By contrast Dungannon Barony, situated in the eastern lowlands and heavily engaged in the linen trade, 92% of the holdings were 30 acres or less and as much as 70% were 15 acres or less.

The nineteenth-century agricultural market favoured livestock over crops. Smaller holdings were not ideal in such an economy. Most landlords having regained control of their estates during the early decades of the nineteenth century were no longer giving long leases and all were discouraging subdivision of holdings whilst at the same time actively promoting the consolidation of holdings. As the statistics on sizes of holdings in 1849 show, consolidation had proved difficult before the Famine. Furthermore the boom in the linen industry during the 1860s which led to an expansion of the flax acreage in the county, may have further delayed consolidation. But, collapsing agricultural prices from the 1870s followed by some bad harvests finally convinced many of the smaller farmers to seek a better life in America or Australia. The fact that they could sell their tenant right for cash provided them with not only their fare but also some capital for their new life abroad. The significant fall of 13% for the county as a whole between 1881 and 1891 was a result of these worsening conditions in agriculture.

The demographic consequences of a farming community dominated by consolidation rather than subdivision was that no longer could more than one son be accommodated on the land, the others had to find employment elsewhere. If the family could afford it and a son was willing, there was the possibility of education and a profession such as law, medicine or the church. Another possibility was an apprenticeship in the town to the grocery trade, the drapery trade, etc. with the more long-term view of setting up a business. These options were
not available to the sons of less substantial farmers and they were forced to choose emigration to Britain, America or Australia.

Furthermore, the age at which the son who inherited the farm married was often controlled by the death of his parents, particularly his mother. The result of this was that few farmers' sons were married before their late twenties or early thirties and indeed some chose the path of celibacy. Recent research has shown that even before the Famine substantial farmers often married later than cottiers, weavers and labourers and after the Famine such a practice became more common amongst all farmers. Given the fact that farmers formed a much higher percentage of the Post-Famine population than they had in Pre-Famine times it is not surprising that their demographic behaviour led to a substantial fall in the birth rate.

Thus, the demographic experience of the nineteenth century was one of readjustment by both farmer and cottier to the changing economic conditions of the time. Whilst there were certain factors which were common, such as the impact of the Famine and the agricultural depression of the latter part of the century, the way in which this readjustment worked itself out in individual parishes and townlands within the county was often a reflection of the socio-economic mix of that townland and the landed estate in which it was located. It is clear that in many of the lowland townlands where population pressure had reached saturation point by the early nineteenth century, the process of readjustment had already begun before the Famine. By contrast in certain upland townlands where sub-division of land persisted, vestiges of the old population patterns lingered on. But, by the end of the century both sorts of townlands had lost around a half of their Pre-famine population.

As Tyrone approached the turn of the century Kennedy’s observations on the Ulster economy at the beginning of the twentieth century could well be applied to Tyrone:

*Labourers had shrunk to an almost insignificant proportion of the rural labour force. Rural industry, once a pervasive feature of people’s working lives, had either withered away or been replaced by factory-based production in urban centres, chiefly located around Belfast Lough and in the Lagan Valley. The small family farm, worked and increasingly owned by its members, dominated the rural economy. A century earlier, a much more complex pattern of work, property and class relationships had prevailed.*

Clearly, such an economy would not have been capable of supporting the sort of demographic regime that had characterised the earlier part of the nineteenth century and the latter part of the eighteenth century.

**The Twentieth Century**

The demography of the early decades of the twentieth century was similar to that of the latter years of the nineteenth century. Population data in the twentieth century continued to be collected at townland level but it was aggregated using different administrative units. The
parish and barony divisions were replaced by district electoral divisions and urban and rural districts which reflected the boundaries laid down under new local government legislation of the 1890s. Since the new administrative units within the county were not geographically contiguous with the older units, the population figures for the twentieth century outlined in Table 3 [Excel File] do not go below the levels of urban and rural districts. As Table 3 shows Tyrone entered the new century with a total population of 150,567 persons which was approximately half of what it had been some sixty years earlier. Table 4 [Excel File] indicates that only 11% of that population lived in towns of 2000 or more and these were Cookstown, Dungannon, Omagh and Strabane. The equivalent percentage for Ulster as a whole at that time was 35%. Even if the towns of Fintona, Newtownstewart, and Sion Mills were included the percentage living in towns was a mere 14%. Indeed, if all of the villages that were listed as separate settlements in the census (and each of these contained less than a thousand persons) were included the figure still only reached 21%. The location of the major towns and villages in the county are shown in Figure 4.

The four major towns had shown some increase during the second half of the nineteenth century but as Clarkson has pointed out, after the Famine towns west of the Bann did not grow to the same extent as those east of the Bann. Apart from the coming of the railway, few of these towns attracted many industries. With one major exception, the new linen factories tended to be attracted to towns such as Lisburn and Banbridge. The exception was the Herdman spinning mills at Sion Mills. As Table 4 shows Sion Mills did not figure in the census until 1851 when it is listed as having a population of 659 persons. By 1881 its population had increased to 1077 where it more or less stayed until after the Second World War. In this respect Sion Mills was in complete contrast to places such as Augher which had a population of 753 in 1841 but continually lost people during the rest of nineteenth century until by 1901 the population had dwindled to 278. Likewise: Clogher where population fell from 702 in 1841 to 225 in 1901; Caledon 1,046 in 1841 and 614 in 1901; Moy 857 in 1841 and 486 in 1901.

Lack of industrial development, the further consolidation of farms, and the harsh economic conditions of the inter-war period, particularly the late 1920s, continued to drive people off the land. Celibacy, particularly amongst the heads of farming households, probably became a more significant factor and this in conjunction with emigration led to further reductions in the population. By 1937 on the eve of the outbreak of World War II the numbers of people living in the county had fallen to 127,586. The last time that the county would have registered a figure as low as that would have been some time around 1770. The main difference, however, was that in 1770 the population of the county was in the early stages of a period of sustained growth which, unfortunately, culminated in the tragedy of the Great Famine. In 1937 the figure of 127,586 was the culmination of a period of population decline which had been going on for almost a hundred years.

After the war the population began to hold its own and in more recent decades there has been an increase to 157,570 persons, a figure similar to that found at the beginning of the twentieth century. Without detailed analysis of births and deaths it is impossible to be certain as to the demographic causes of this increase. Emigration still continues but it is noticeable that since 1961 virtually all towns and villages have seen significant increases in their population. The drift from the land still continues but, unlike the immediate Post-Famine period, a reasonable
proportion of this drift is to the towns and villages within the county rather than further afield. The post-war period has seen the introduction of some industrial and commercial enterprises into the county as the results of government agencies. At the same time, Tyrone being west of the Bann has not benefited to the same extent as those counties east of the Bann.

The most significant urban growth has been in Omagh where the population has more than doubled since 1961. This reflects the increasing dominance of the town as the county town and a major administrative centre. Another feature worth noting is the growth of many villages, such as Ballymagorry near Strabane, which are now acting as dormitory towns for persons working either in the nearby towns or indeed further afield. The fact that the town of Dungannon has not increased in size as much as Omagh could be a reflection of the fact that it is surrounded by a large number of smaller villages. The Dungannon area lies at the western end of the M1 Motorway which makes it very accessible to Craigavon and the Greater Belfast area. This, combined with the recent penchant for living in the ‘country’ but not too far away from the amenities of an urban culture, has probably made such villages attractive places to live for many commuters.

Despite all of this migration to towns County Tyrone still remains a rural county, its largest town Omagh still has a population of less than 20,000 persons. By the standards of the rest of the United Kingdom or the European Union generally, where the more industrialised countries have 80% or more of their populations living in urban areas, Tyrone still has only 35% (just over a third) of its population living in towns of 2000 or more. Even if we include all settlements that are listed as separate entities, just over half of the population of the county still lives in the countryside proper.

Throughout Western Europe the trend since the late nineteenth century has been a continual drift from the land to the towns and in more recent years a trend towards agribusiness in rural areas. Does the fact that at this point in time Tyrone has still a large proportion of its population living in rural areas mean that its population will stabilise at these proportions or does it mean that as the county enters the new millennium the drift from country to town will continue. The answer to this question depends on how the social and economic forces operating at both a European and global level will interact with local conditions and the extent to which individuals and governments can control and manage those forces. The only thing which is certain is that, as we have seen over the last four hundred years or so, the social and economic conditions within which demographic variables operate rarely stand still for too long.

W. Macafee
University Of Ulster
30th November 1998.
Notes and References

1 The notes accompanying this table explain how the figures, particularly for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, have been calculated. It needs to be pointed out that these statistics, particularly those for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, must be treated with caution. The seventeenth and eighteenth century figures are based on Hearth Returns and can only be seen as estimates. Indeed those for the seventeenth century should be seen as educated guesses. Figures from the nineteenth century onwards can be taken as more accurate but even then some caution needs to be exercised when dealing with the early nineteenth-century, official census figures. Whilst the early estimates can never be seen as precise counts of population, the long term chronological pattern revealed by the statistics is consistent with what is known of economic and social developments over the same period.


3 P.R.O.N.I., T.307A, Hearth Money Rolls for County Tyrone.


5 Such a figure would be consistent with estimates for surrounding counties based on the more accurate Poll Tax data for 1660 (S. Pender, ed., A Census of Ireland, circa 1659 (Dublin, 1939)). The Poll Tax Returns suggest that Londonderry most probably had a population of circa 35,000, Fermanagh c. 25,000, Armagh c. 25,000 and Donegal c. 40,000. Unfortunately only fragments of the Poll Tax Returns are extant for Tyrone, thus the need to fall back on the less accurate Hearth Returns when attempting to estimate its population in the 1660s.

6 A Discourse concerning Ireland (London, 1698), p. 34.

7 For an account of emigration from Ulster during the eighteenth century see R. J. Dickson, Ulster Emigration to Colonial America 1718-1775 (Reprinted, Belfast, 1988). See also chapter 8 by P. Fitzgerald in this volume.

8 These figures have been taken from Appendix, Table I of D. Dickson, C. O’Grada & S. Daultrey, ‘Hearth Tax, Household Size and Irish Population Change 1672-1821’, Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, 82C (1982), p. 178.


10 Ibid., p. 57.


13 Since this register refers exclusively to the Church of Ireland population, some doubt could be raised as to its representativeness. It was precisely for this reason that Connell dismissed Church of Ireland registers as a useful demographic source, believing that members of the Church of Ireland ‘differed from the remainder in
occupation, custom and wealth’. More recently J. Mokyr & C. O’Grada, ‘New Developments in Irish Population History, 1750-1850’, *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xxxvii (1984), p.473 have re- emphasised this point, suggesting that studies using primarily Church of Ireland records ‘may not reflect the demographic characteristics of the Catholic majority’. Certainly the socio-economic data derived from the Killyman register would challenge the contention that the Church of Ireland population differed from the rest of the community in occupation and wealth. Furthermore, since they formed 46% of the total population in the parish, it can hardly be said that they were an insignificant part of the area.

14 K. H. Connell, *The Population of Ireland, 1750-1845* (Oxford, 1950). Connell who was the first historian to offer a serious explanation of Irish population growth before the Famine was of the opinion that the major cause of that growth was an increase in fertility resulting from a fall in a age at first marriage. He believed that both men and women married exceptionally early, with many marriages contracted when women, especially, were in their teens.

15 M. W. Flinn, *The European Demographic System, 1500-1820* (Brighton, 1981) pp. 124-127. Flinn suggests that the mean age at first marriage for women were: England, 24.2; France, 26.7; Germany, 27.5; Belgium, 27.9; Scandinavia, 29.8.

16 V. Morgan, ‘A case study of population change over two centuries: Blaris, Lisburn, 1661-1848’ *Irish Economic and Social History*, iii (1976), pp. 5-16.


18 Ibid., p. 35.


23 Ibid., p. 142.

24 It is generally agreed that, whilst much more accurate than the Hearth Returns, these early Irish Censuses were still not a precise statement of the population at that time. Conventional wisdom was that the 1821 underestimated the population and 1831 overestimated the population. J. Lee, ‘On the Accuracy of the pre-Famine Irish Censuses’ in L. A. Clarkson, ‘Irish Population Revisited, 1687-1821’ in J. M. Goldstrom & L. A. Clarkson, eds., *Irish Population, Economy and Society: Essays in honour of the late K. H. Connell* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 36-56 has argued that the three censuses of 1821, 1831 and even 1841 underestimated the population by varying degrees - the 1821 by 5%, the 1831 by 2% and the 1841 by 2%. Since these suggested corrections relate to the total population of Ireland it is difficult to be sure that similar adjustments should be made at regional, particularly county level, so it has been decided to work with the raw figures for the purposes of this essay. If adjustments similar to those postulated by Lee were made to the raw figures it would have the effect of lowering the percentage changes for the 1821/31 decade and would have no effect on the 1831/41 decade.
Before the Famine the death rate for Ulster as a whole was probably around 21 deaths per thousand of the population. According to Clarkson, ‘Population change and urbanisation’, p. 148, the death rate for County Tyrone during 1864 to 1871 was 15.3 deaths per thousand of the population. Between 1871 and 1881 it was 16.1; between 1881 and 1891 it was 16.6 and it rose during the next two decades to 17.9 and 18.2. This return to slightly higher death rates from the 1870s was probably a reflection of the fact that emigration throughout the century was removing more of the younger members of the population, leaving behind a more ageing population.


Ibid., p. 149.


B.P.P. (1824) XXII, pp. 310-311.

A. Day & P. McWilliams, eds., Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland: Parishes of County Tyrone (Vol. 5, Belfast, 1990) and (Vol. 20, Belfast, 1993). Reference is made to the importance of the linen trade in virtually all parishes. Cotton was being woven in Artrea, Arboe and Tamlaght and was probably connected to the cotton factory at Castledawson in County Londonderry.


B. Collins, ‘Proto-industrialisation and emigration’, Social History, 7, No.2 (1982), pp. 139-140. She has shown that the 21-30 and the 31-40 age cohorts of males in the 1841 population of Tyrone were some 20-25% less than they should have been, even allowing for natural loss through normal mortality. The inference is that this shortfall represents the emigration of young males from the county.

W. F. Adams, Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World from 1815 to the Famine (New York, 1932), pp. 93-94.


B.P.P. (1874) LXXIV, p. 925.


Clarkson, ‘Population change and urbanisation’, p. 151, suggests that such a practice was not uncommon in certain parts of rural Ulster.


There were other attempts at opening factories to spin flax e.g. George Vesey Stewart built a flax mill at Lisdoart, near Ballygawley, in 1864 which operated until circa 1900 see J. Johnston, ‘Flax and Linen in the Clogher Valley, Clogher Record xi, No. 2 (1983), pp. 289-290.

Notes on Tables

Table 1

This table gives details of the population of the county for various years between 1600 and 1991.

The 1666 figure is an estimate based on the Hearth Returns for that year (P.R.O.N.I., T.307A, *Hearth Returns for County Tyrone, 1666*). On the basis of surname evidence there were 1,179 planter households and 1,462 Irish households listed in the Returns. Assuming an average household size of 4.5 and a correction factor of 2 (100%) for Planters and 4 (300%) for Irish this would produce populations of 10,611 and 26,316 respectively. This gives a total population of 36,927. This has been rounded to 37,000.

The high correction factors are based on the assumption that both exemption and evasion were high during the early years of the collection of the Hearth Tax. The Tax was first introduced in 1662. The revised act of 1665 led to less exemptions but evasion was probably still considerable. Carleton’s analysis of the Co. Antrim Hearth Returns for 1666 and 1669 would suggest that even in a county where Planters were dominant the 1666 Returns enumerated considerably less households than those of 1669. (S. T. Carleton, *Heads and Hearths: The Hearth Money Rolls and Poll Tax Returns for County Antrim 1660-69* (Belfast, 1991). Evidence from the parishes of Aghaloo, Donaghedey, Urney and Termomaguirk would suggest that the enumeration of Irish households was even worse. (P.R.O.N.I, T.458/8 and T.1365/3.)

The 1600 figure is an educated guess calculated on the basis of the 1666 figure. It is assumed that a population of 20,000 growing at an average annual rate of 0.4% would produce a population of approximately 26,000 Irish by 1666. An annual growth rate of 0.4% would be regarded as about average for a pre-industrial population. Arguably, given the violent times in Tyrone at the end of the sixteenth century and the 1641 rebellion, the growth rate could have been lower. If, for example, the average annual rate of growth was of the order of 0.3/0.2% then, in order for the 1666 population to have been 26,000, the population in 1600 would have to have been 22/23,000.

The estimates for 1712 to 1753 are also based on the Hearth Returns. The raw figures were taken from D. Dickson, C. O’Grada & S. Daultrey, ‘Hearth Tax, Household Size and Irish Population Change 1672-1821’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 82C, 177-178. In line with Dickson, et.al.’s suggestion, a household multiplier of 4.7 has been used for the years 1712 to 1749 and a multiplier of 4.8 for 1753. Dickson, et.al. suggested that the 1712-1753 series of Hearth Returns should be increased, nationally, by a figure somewhere between 14 and 34% to allow for exemption and evasion. Their adjustments for Ulster suggest that here they were using a correction factor of 12 to 30%. For the purposes of this paper the County Tyrone figures have been increased by 30%.


The remainder of the figures are taken from the Official Census of Ireland for the years 1821 to 1911. The figures from 1926 to 1991 are taken from the Official Northern Ireland Census.
Table 2

This table gives the total population of each parish and barony within the county for the period 1821-91 and shows the percentage change in population by decade. It also shows the percentage change in population between 1841 and 1891.

The barony and parish totals are taken from the Official Census of Ireland for each of the years shown. Population figures were collected and published on a townland, parish and barony basis until 1891.


The parishes have been arranged by barony. The parishes of Errigal Keerogue and Errigal Trough have been grouped together because the 1821 and 1831 figures for these two parishes were given as one. The parish of Magheracross, which is a very small parish, has been included with Kilskeery.

Table 3

This table gives the total population of each urban and rural district within the county for the period 1891-1991 and shows the percentage change in population by decade. It also shows the percentage change in population between 1891/1971 and between 1891/1991.

Population figures were collected and published on a townland, district electoral division, urban/rural district basis between 1901 and 1971. There were some minor boundary changes from time to time, especially after 1920, but these were not of significant enough proportions to invalidate comparisons between various dates. Since 1971 the figures have been collected and published on the basis of newly-created local government districts.

The figures for 1891, 1901 and 1911 are taken from the Official Census of Ireland. The figures for 1926 to 1991 are taken from the Official Northern Ireland Census. Although Northern Ireland and the Republic did not come into existence until after 1920, for the sake of comparison between 1891 and 1991, the 1891 to 1911 Ireland figures have been allocated to the six counties of Northern Ireland and the twenty-six counties of the Republic.

Strictly speaking, because of substantial boundary changes, the 1991 rural figures cannot be assigned to the earlier rural districts. However, the four urban districts are reasonably comparable.

Table 4

This table gives the total population of towns and villages within the county for the period 1821-1991 and shows the percentage change in population between 1841/51, 1851/1911, 1911/37 and 1951/91. It also shows the number of persons in the workhouses and gaols in the county in 1851.

Urban has been defined in a number of ways. The Official Census of Ireland 1821-1911 gave separate figures for any settlement which had twenty houses or more. This explains why some settlements appear to go in and out of the census, so to speak. From 1926 a settlement was only included separately if it had fifty houses or more. Both of these definitions will, therefore, include villages as well as towns. With regard to the definition of what might be regarded as a town, the figures of 1000+ and 2000+ have been used. On the basis of these definitions various calculations have been made with regard to the percentage of the population which, at any one time, could be classified as ‘urban’.

The figures for 1821-1911 are taken from the Official Census of Ireland. The figures for 1926 to 1991 are taken from the Official Northern Ireland Census.