

THE FIRST CENSUS OF THE IRISH FREE  
STATE AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO THE  
COUNTRY.

By SIR WILLIAM J. THOMPSON, *Registrar-General.*

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On the 15th March, 1911, about three weeks before the Census day of 1911, I had the privilege and honour of reading a paper before this Society entitled "The Development of the Irish Census and its National Importance." On this occasion, fifteen years later and a little over three weeks before the Census day of 1926, viz., Sunday, the 18th April, I have again the honour and privilege of reading the present paper. As there are only a few here to-night who were present on that occasion, I propose, before dealing with the first part of the paper, to mention briefly certain of the outstanding historical facts that I dealt with in my paper in 1911.

The necessity for Censuses has been recognised at all times and amongst all civilised peoples. It is no new-fangled instrument of Government.

In the Old Testament we have reference not only to the Census of population but also to that of production. There are frequent allusions to "numbering of the people," and we may consider the Egyptians under the advice of Joseph took a census of production, inasmuch as provision was made from the seven fat years for the seven lean years. It is recorded also that the Greeks and Romans placed much importance on such data. This refers particularly to the latter, who four hundred

years B.C. had the two highest permanent officials named "Censors." These were responsible for taking a census every five years, in which minute details were required, such as regards houses, bond and free citizens, badly cultivated lands, etc.

Two well-known records of censuses in the middle ages were the Breviary of Charlemagne and the Domesday Book in England. It is scarcely necessary to add that the latter was compiled by order of William the Conqueror towards the end of the 11th century, and must be regarded as a wonderfully complete record, considering the period in which it was taken and the difficulties to be encountered at that time. It is almost as perfect at the present date as when it was compiled.

I also referred to the first noteworthy attempt to ascertain the population of Ireland made as far back as 1672—254 years ago—by Sir William Petty, the founder of the Lansdowne family, whose work in connection with the Down Survey is so widely known. His estimate of the population of Ireland was 1,100,000. This was made on an average of 5 to 6 persons to each family, the number of families being reckoned as about 200,000. These 200,000 families were again divided into those having no fixed hearths, 160,000; those having but one chimney, 24,000; those having more than one chimney, 16,000. Another estimate of his was that of "smoaks" or "chimneys," 250,000. Of that number single "smoaked" houses constituted 164,000. Those houses having more than one chimney had an average of about four chimneys per house and numbered 66,000. Dublin Castle had then 125 chimneys; the Earl of Meath's house in Dublin, 27; besides, there were in Dublin 164 houses having an average of about 10 chimneys each. From the number of "smoaks" in each house an attempt was made to value the house; those houses having no "smoaks" were not valued.

He further made an interesting estimate that in nature there was one in every 500 of the population either blind, lame, or under "an incurable impotence," and that the number of children under seven years was about one-fourth of the population. Even at present there is no means of forming anything like an accurate estimate of the number suffering from disease and unable to work, and according to the last Census the proportion of children, seven years and under, to the total population was 1 in 7.

He enumerated the number employed as follows:—In tillage, cowherds and shepherds, etc., and their wives as 220,000

(or one in every five of the population was engaged in agriculture). Further—

Smiths, their wives and servants ...	...	22,500
Tailors, their wives and servants ...	...	45,000
Carpenters and masons and their wives ...	...	10,000
Shoemakers, servants and their wives ...	...	22,000
Workers in wool and their wives ...	...	30,000
Tanners and their wives ...	...	10,000
Trades of fancy and ornaments ...	...	48,000

Out of a total population of 1,100,000 he has alone estimated 407,000 as employed, that is, 37 per cent. In the 1911 Census the percentage was 41. Out of the total of 407,000 employed persons he estimated 220,000 as employed in agriculture, that is, 54 per cent. In 1911 it was 46 per cent., assuming that half the labourers were employed in agriculture.

The next attempt to enumerate the people was made by Captain South in the year 1695, 23 years later, and again by Mr. Thomas Dobbs in 1712, 1718, 1725 and 1726. In 1731 the task was entrusted to the Magistracy and Established Clergy by the Irish House of Lords. Between the years 1754 and 1805 a number of Censuses were taken on different occasions. In the year 1812 an Act was passed by Parliament for taking a Census, which, to a certain extent, corresponded to the Act of 1810 passed by Great Britain. This Census is described as incomplete and unsatisfactory. It was not confined to one year, and it is recorded that portions of districts were omitted.

The first Census which gave satisfactory results was that taken in 1821, over 100 years ago, and was carried out in each county by the bench of magistrates, who appointed enumerators. These were selected from persons having personal knowledge of districts, such as local tax collectors. Great care was taken as regards the division of each county into baronies, parishes and townlands, and these divisions of the county obtained until 1901, when the divisions made under the Local Government Board Act of 1898 came into operation. On the 28th May, 1821, each enumerator, provided with "note books," commenced work, and wrote down (*a*) the name, (*b*) age, (*c*) occupation of any person in his district in these books.

The tables and extracts of this Census were presented to Parliament in July, 1823, a little over two years after Census day, which, considering the then conditions, such as transit, etc., must be looked upon as satisfactory. The population recorded in the 1821 Census was 6,801,827.

The 1831 Census was taken on the same lines, viz., note books used by enumerators; but owing to certain causes these results were not considered reliable.

The 1841 Census made an advance on the previous Census, inasmuch as the Householder's Form, known as Schedule A, was introduced. This form was to be filled by the head of the house, thus abolishing the asking of personal questions by enumerators, who, however, filled up another form as regards buildings, dwellinghouses, etc. There was then no registration of deaths, but this form supplied the want to some extent, as it showed the names, etc., of the members of the family, servants and visitors who died while residing with the family since the night of the previous census. This query was retained in the Census Form up to and including the 1871 Census, as the General Register Office was not established until 1864. The information returned under this heading although valuable, was not very accurate.

This Census was the first in which a query was asked as regards education, and five years was fixed as the education age, *i.e.*, the age at which children were supposed to be able to read and write. This age limit later on was very properly increased to seven years. Also a query was introduced regarding marriage, and additional details were asked about houses—number of rooms, windows, materials used in the construction of walls and roofs, etc. Members of the R.I.C. Force for the first time acted as enumerators.

The population as shown for 1841 was the highest ever recorded in Ireland, viz., 8,196,597.

In the 1851 Census two additional queries were asked—one in reference to those who were deaf, dumb and blind; the other as regards those who could speak (*a*) Irish only, (*b*) Irish and English. The statistics regarding agriculture were collected at the same time and were incorporated in the Census Report. The population recorded was 6,574,278, a decrease of almost 20 per cent., due to the effects of the famine years commencing in 1845, and to emigration.

The religious query was introduced in 1861, and has still remained in the A Form. It has never been asked in either England or Scotland.

County books publications were first published after the 1871 Census. The tables were presented with a certain amount of conformity to those of England, and at the same time preserved sufficient comparisons with the publications of preceding Irish Censuses. Alterations of little importance were in-

troduced in 1881, 1891 and 1901. Owing to the Local Government Act of 1898 the territorial divisions of the country required readjustments, which were duly carried out in the 1901 publications.

In 1911 three additional queries were inserted in Form A, viz., (a) duration of marriage, (b) number of children born to existing marriage, and (c) number of children living. These questions were introduced and inserted in the English and Scottish Forms, owing to the fact that in England and many Continental countries the decline of the birth rate had caused anxiety. Although Ireland was not faced with this special danger, a measure of her peculiarity of position in this respect was important. The question should throw valuable light on her emigration problems.

Heretofore the taking of the Census of Ireland has been under a special Census Act, always passed about the middle of the year prior to the Census. Even before the passing of the Act a good deal of the preliminary work was always done. On this occasion the Census is being taken under the Statistics Act by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. It was not until September last that an official committee was appointed to commence the preliminary work. A letter was addressed to each Department informing them and calling attention to the decision of the Executive Council for taking a Census in the spring of 1926, and asking for their observations and suggestions. A communication was sent to the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society, who appointed a special committee to help in the matter. The Professors of our Universities were also invited to make suggestions. Much help was thus obtained, and it is unnecessary to add that our late President in particular entered wholeheartedly into the work. Had all the suggestions from the different services been incorporated in the A Form I need hardly say that, instead of being the size it is, 23 inches by 10 inches, it would have been at least double that size. The elimination and cutting down of queries had to be done carefully and with due consideration to the present conditions and urgent economic and other problems in the Free State. Before deciding on the final form as it will be issued to the public, every avenue, so to speak, had been explored and every point raised gone into, so that certain new data required would be useful to the State, and as far as practicable be comparable to that of former Censuses. The committee entrusted with this work had also to bear in mind the danger of asking too many questions and of possibly causing confusion in the mind of the head of the house. What is wanted, and what I hope

you will agree has been done, is that the queries should be as direct and simple as possible.

SLIDES—Form used in 1911.

Present form in English.

Present form in Irish.

Two queries asked in 1911 are eliminated in the 1926 Form, viz., education and disability in deaf, dumb and blind.

The education query as asked in 1911 was elementary, viz.: "State whether you can read or write or read only or cannot read." The school age for this standard was seven years, when most children of ordinary education can answer in the affirmative. It was only those advanced in years who answered in the negative, and as this has been a diminishing number for the past three or four Censuses the query was considered less useful than any of the questions which now appear on Form A.

The disability question was also considered, but was rejected, as the information got in the past under this head was found to be unreliable. Parents do not wish to put down in writing any infirmity amongst the family, and with the usual parental love they hope that the children may get better. Last Census there were more than three times the number of deaths recorded from tuberculosis than the number returned as suffering from this disease, viz., 9,623 and 3,086. Such a question is rarely asked in other countries.

In this year's Form the query under "particulars as to marriage" in 1911 has been amplified; in its present form it brings in orphanhood and dependancy. From those queries valuable information should be acquired for a consideration of such questions as the "family wage," provision for "widows and orphans."

Particular care has been taken with the question regarding the Irish language. It has much greater prominence than formerly and has been amplified, and it is hoped will fully meet all requirements. The 1911 column under rank, profession, or occupation has been very much amplified, and two columns have been left open for these queries.

From Column "K" it is expected that definite information will be forthcoming as regards personal occupation in agriculture, trade, manufacture, material worked in, articles made, distinguishing between makers and dealers, and with unemployment. Column "I" will distinguish the number of employers from numbers working on their own account and from numbers of employed. Its principal purpose is for arriving at the number filling occupations in each industry and service.

As agriculture is our staple industry a query is asked at bottom of Form as to the acreage of the holding. From the answers to these three queries very valuable information should be forthcoming, and corresponding tables be published.

The organising of the country into suitable districts known as "Enumerators' Districts" is a matter of Departmental arrangement with the Commissioner of the Civic Guard, who, though labouring under such difficulties as shortage of force and large areas to be looked after, has unsparingly rendered every assistance possible. The present arrangement is that a Family Form will be left by members of the Civic Guard at each house, residence, tenement, hotel, club, institution, etc., a few days before Sunday, the 18th April, the night of which will be Census night. On the following Monday, 19th April, the Civic Guard will commence the collection of the Forms, and it will expedite matters if each head of the house has the Form properly completed when it is called for.

To assure the public who may in any way feel uneasy as regards the taking of the Census, it is well to state that no question should be put by enumerators for the purpose of obtaining information other than the information required by the Form. In addition, if any person connected with the taking of the Census communicates without lawful authority any information acquired in the course of his employment he will be liable under the Statistics Act to a very heavy fine and to a long term of imprisonment, together with the exercise of the ordinary disciplinary powers of the head of his department.

With these safeguards and precautions no one should feel the least timorous in answering all the questions.

The results to be obtained from the Census will be far-reaching, and many valuable deductions will be derived therefrom; hence it is important for each individual member of the public to realise this and furnish correct and accurate information.

To ensure a wide and comprehensive interest in the coming Census and a realisation of its importance from an economic and national point of view, it is proposed to get immediately in touch with organisations of employers and labour, with clergymen, lawyers, doctors, peace commissioners, chairmen of county councils, public health boards and all institutions, also other leading citizens and heads of big business concerns in order that as much publicity as possible may be given to the matter.

The Press will also be got in touch with so that the general public will be made acquainted with the details and desirability of this far-reaching and national event. It is to be hoped that by these means all may realise the importance of the occasion and will heartily co-operate, thus ensuring a successful result.

The Department of Education has been particularly helpful in this side of the work. They have sanctioned a series of lessons to be given in day schools during the week preceding the Census on the filling of the Census Form A. This must be regarded as an exceedingly important development in Census taking. The lesson can be made of considerable value both from the point of general education and of citizenship. As regards the success of the Census these lessons should prove invaluable, especially in country districts, for the pupils will be able to bring back to their homes an intelligent interest in the matter. A special memorandum is being printed for distribution to the teachers in reference to these lessons, but it is hoped that the teachers will themselves show initiation in the lessons and generally realise their unique position in this important general inquiry. Such inquiries all countries have to undertake from time to time in order to provide the best up-to-date information in regard to the numbers and conditions of the population in each locality—information essential for local and national reform and helpful for all who can take a part in the advancement of their country.

In previous Censuses all the afterwork was done by clerical labour. On this occasion machines will be introduced. Such machines have been used both in England and Scotland on the 1911 and 1921 Censuses, and have for many Censuses been in use in the United States. By this process both time and money is saved, and in addition tables can be supplied which would not be possible under the old system, which was known as the "ticking" system.

The first step is to scrutinise and examine each form after return to the Census Office by enumerators. The next step is "coding" the Forms, *i.e.*, inserting code numbers instead of non-numerical answers. Thus, while the age column "e" requiring a numerical answer has not to be coded it would be coded thus: The code number "1" will be inserted under the word "single" when it occurs, "2" under "married," "3" under "widowed," "4" under "both parents alive," and so on.

From the coded Forms the numerical answers and the new

code numbers will be transferred to cards by means of punching machines.

SLIDES of A Form Completed.  
of A Form Coded.  
of Card.  
of Card Punched.

The punched cards will then be put through the sorting and counting machines. These machines are wonderfully ingenious, and in many respects one might say almost uncanny. Each machine classifies the population and county at the rate of 16,000 cards per hour.

Having thus briefly reviewed the history of the Irish Censuses and shortly described the preparatory work necessary before the Census day, and the general work to be done before the results can be made known, we come now to discuss its national importance.

It is well to remember that it is now 15 years (1911) since a Census was taken in Ireland. We, therefore, realise that a Census is long overdue and how important it is that this Census should be taken. During that period big upheavals as regards population, social and economic conditions have occurred. From a vital statistic point of view, the population figure urgently wants revision. Every effort has been made to make as accurate an estimate of the population as the materials at hand would allow, and we are hopeful that the estimates will not be far short of correct. Even in normal conditions 15 years is too long a period without a Census, and under present Free State conditions just mentioned this urgency is necessarily greater. In addition to the population, information is required under other headings, and there is no doubt but that the two queries under personal occupation and employment will result in information which will be of the utmost value and a material asset.

The United States has, as far as is known, paid more attention to Census taking than any other country. There is at Washington a permanent Census Office and a continuation of different Censuses going on. A distinguished American professor has stated that "the taking of a Census is the most important and extensive of all State economic and political activities."

Our late President, Professor Oldham, in his carefully prepared and illuminating opening address this session, laid stress also on many important aspects which should be aimed at in the final results of this Census. Those who have been

associated with the preparation of this Census feel assured, from the comprehensive questions asked, that most useful information will be forthcoming. They look to the Sub-Committee of the Council of this Society to put forward suggestions which will be helpful in the final publications. They also welcome such like suggestions from individuals and societies, and will carefully consider any put before them. It is hoped that the final publication will be as comprehensive as possible from every point of view, and nothing will be left undone to attain this object.

From these and many other considerations it may be understood how important a Census is to any country from a national point of view, and after 15 years to us in the Free State it may be said the importance is more pronounced. For instance, agriculture is, so to speak, our staple industry, and to get accurate and reliable figures and facts regarding this will be useful, such as the numbers engaged solely in farming, partly in farming and partly at other work, etc. The same applies to the different industries. On this occasion the classifications of industries and employment after careful consideration have been revised and extended, the results of which will be an advance and an improvement on past Censuses.

It only now remains for the public to realise the importance of this Census, and to co-operate in assisting those engaged in the work. This can be done by each head of the house realising his responsibilities, and as far as he or she is able accurately filling up the forms and expediting the Civic Guards in their work.

In particular, I venture to ask each person here to-night to become a propagandist for the taking of the Census, which is of such vital importance to the country.