

METHODS OF REGISTERING AND ESTIMATING THE POPULATION OF IRELAND BEFORE 1864.

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IN the course of the present year, whilst the Old Age Pension Bill was under discussion, much curiosity was excited as to the proofs of age which would be required from applicants in this country. Whilst in England the public registration of births, deaths, and marriages had been rendered obligatory by the Act of 1836, in Ireland such registration did not come into force till 1864; consequently claimants for the pension have been obliged to make search in other directions. It was suggested to me that a paper on the means of proof of age available in this country would prove of interest to the members of this Society, and I have taken the opportunity of giving a slight sketch of such methods of ascertaining the population of Ireland, and its increase or decrease, as existed before 1864, or, in other words, to examine in what way the functions of the Registrar General were performed before that year.

The first appointment in Ireland of a Registrar General dates back to the year 1617, when Sir George Keare was appointed Public Register of births, marriages, and burials. In his patent, it was laid down that he should have four provincial deputies at Dublin, Armagh, Cork, and Galway. To these deputy registrars clergymen were to send certificates of the names of persons baptized, married or buried by them, and, in the case of baptisms, the date of birth was to be added. The three deputy registrars were to make annual returns to the deputy registrar in Dublin, who was to enter all in one principal register. The clergyman was to receive a fee of 6d. for each ceremony, of which he was to hand over 5d. to the deputy registrar. For the privilege of receiving these fees, Sir George Keare was to pay £20 a year to the Crown. This system of registration only lasted three years, as we find that only for this period did Sir G. Keare pay his rent to the Crown. But in 1620, a deputation was appointed to approach the King to urge that it would be better for the parsons to retain the 6d. in each case, and keep the registers themselves. The King referred the matter to the Lord Deputy. Nothing more is known about the matter, but as Sir G. Keare ceased to pay his rent to the Treasury, it may be presumed that his office ceased to exist. No records of such registration are

now extant, but the agitation would seem to have been effectual in inducing the clergy to keep registers of all the baptisms, marriages, and burials performed by them, for the earliest register we possess, viz., S. John's, Dublin, of the then Established Church, commences in 1619-20. A further impetus was given to this tendency by the 46th Canon of the Irish Church (1634), requiring that "in every parish church and chapel within this realm shall be provided one parchment book at the charge of the parish, wherein shall be written the day and year of every christening, wedding, and burial, etc." From this period, the registers were probably kept by most of the ministers of the Established Church, though many have perished through carelessness, or accident.

Another attempt was made in 1653 by the Cromwellian Government to institute a civil registration of births, deaths, and marriages. The so-called "Barebones" Parliament in that year enacted that in each parish a Registrar should be appointed by the Inhabitants and Householdors chargeable to the relief of the Poor, or the greater part of them present, who should keep a register and enter therein all publications of marriages, and also all births and burials, with the parents' guardians' or overseers' names. He was authorised to charge the following fees :—for publication of an intended marriage, and for certificate, 12d.; for entry of marriage, 12d.; for birth of every child, 4d.; for a death, 4d. For publications, marriages, births, and deaths of poor persons who lived on alms, nothing was to be taken. The Act came into force in Ireland from and after the first day of December, 1653. There is evidence to show that this Act was put into force, at least partially, and probably so continued till the Restoration.*

The registers kept by the other denominations in Ireland necessarily commence at a later period than those of the late Established Church. Many of the latter have, in course of time, perished through carelessness or other causes, and it is no exaggeration to say that their disappearance has caused an irreparable loss. Probably the best preserved and most perfect series of registers is that of the Quakers, which commence about the year 1650. Those of the Roman Catholic communion do not, in many cases, commence before the middle of the nineteenth century, from causes which are sufficiently obvious. The registers of the Presbyterians and Methodists are in the hands of the respective clergy, and at present it is difficult to say with what degree of care they have been preserved.

For any one who claims an old age pension, the principal evidence of their eligibility is to be found in these Parish Registers, and though the entries of baptism do not always

* Scobell's "Collection of Arts and Ordinances of general use," 1640-1656.

include the date of birth, yet, as in most cases the baptism is performed very soon after the birth, a certificate of baptism fulfils all the requirements, except in the case of those whose baptism has been delayed for some years. Under these circumstances, the absence of Parish Registers in some Parishes for the first half of the nineteenth century is much to be deplored. I should like, here, to urge the clergy of all denominations to take much greater care of such registers as are still extant. Those of the late Established Church have been considerably safeguarded by two Acts of Parliament. The majority are now in the custody of the Public Record Office, and in the case of the remainder, thief, fire and damp proof safes have been provided. But, as far as I can find, no systematised effort has been made by the members of the other communions to ensure the safety of their Registers. The Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland has recently been formed with the purpose of collecting all information about Presbyterian Registers. The importance of some central authority to look after these important documents has frequently been shown. The Public Record Office has been instrumental in recovering several registers which were thought to be irretrievably lost, and the Presbyterian Historical Society has recently recovered from New Zealand a copy of the Banbridge Marriage Register for 1756-1794. I may mention here that a Parish Register Society has recently been formed for printing the earlier Parish Registers, and so rendering them more accessible to genealogists.

If there had been a central authority to whom the different denominations had been obliged to make returns of the baptisms, marriages and burials performed in each communion, we might possibly have now been able to form a good idea of the yearly increase or decrease of the population for many years back.

Such an attempt was made for Dublin in the Old Bills of Mortality. It is impossible to say when these commenced to be kept. In London it is supposed that they were kept as early as 1517. They owed their origin to the plague, and were probably found so useful an indication of the health of the city that they were continued long afterwards. The first trace we can find of their existence for Dublin is in the City Assembly Roll for the fourth Friday after Christmas, 1658, when we find an entry directing the city treasurer to pay John Tadpole fifty shillings sterling for his employment heretofore in bringing in the weekly bills of mortality within the city and the suburbs thereof. It was the duty of this collector (licensed by the Archbishop) to go round to the various parish clerks and obtain from them the numbers baptised and buried during the week, with the causes of death. There is no evidence to show how these parish clerks

in Dublin obtained their knowledge of the causes of the various deaths, but it is not unlikely that the method employed in London prevailed here. In London, there were appointed Searchers ("ancient matrons, sworn to their office," as Graunt remarks in his *Observations*), who, upon intimation of a death, visited the corpse, and made an examination of the disease or casualty by which it had died. They then made a return to the Parish Clerks, from whom the collector obtained the lists. After arranging the entries, he took them to the King's Printer. It is a curious fact that, though these lists were printed and distributed weekly, quarterly, and yearly for over a century and a half, no trace of them is to be found in Dublin except in the newspapers. I may, perhaps, be pardoned for giving a specimen of these Bills of Mortality, as they foreshadow, though feebly, the excellent work which our present Registrar General is performing.

A YEARLY BILL OF MORTALITY FOR THE CITY AND SUBURBS
OF DUBLIN, ENDING THE 30TH OF MARCH, 1730, OF THE
DISEASES AND CASUALTIES THIS YEAR.

Age	..	99	Fits	..	291
Consumption	..	22	Flux	..	21
Fever	..	47	Fever and Measles	..	01
Spotted Fever	..	09	Gravil	..	02
Cough	..	13	Gout	..	04
Colds	..	42	Jaundice	..	04
Asthma	..	07	Infants	..	218
Ague	..	15	Killed by a Bull	..	02
By an accident	..	01	Livergrown	..	02
By a fall of a Horse	..	03	Measles	..	121
By a []	..	02	Murdered	..	03
By a miscarriage	..	02	Perished for want	..	07
By the shot of a pistol	..	01	Purple Fever	..	05
By a fall	..	04	Pleuratick Fever	..	03
By a sore leg	..	04	Palsie	..	04
Broke his neck	..	01	Pain in the head	..	01
By a shot	..	01	Purging	..	01
By a swelling	..	02	Quinzey	..	01
By a mortification	..	01	Rheumatism	..	02
Bed-ridden	..	01	Rickets	..	03
Convulsions	..	05	Small Pox	..	444
Child-Bed	..	28	Suddenly	..	28
Cancer	..	03	Stone	..	02
Colick	..	04	Stiches	..	09
Chin-Cough	..	06	Stiff'd with smoak	..	01
Convulsions in Guts	..	02	Smothered	..	01
Country-Disease	..	01	Teeth	..	276
Drowned	..	19	Tent	..	04
Dropsie	..	12			

Males Buried this Year	..	..	1927
Females Buried this Year	..	..	1279
Males Baptized this Year	..	..	0854
Females Baptized this Year	..	..	0686
* * *			*
Above sixteen	..	..	1898
Under sixteen	..	..	1308
Total Buried this Year	..	..	3206
Total Baptized this Year	..	..	1539
* * *			*
Increased in Burials this Year	..	..	506
Decreased in Christenings this Year			126

(*The Old Dublin Intelligence*, Saturday, 4th April, 1730).*

Such returns were, however, very imperfect. In the first place, the causes of death, as certified by these old women, must have been most unreliable, while the numbers returned as baptized by the clerks would have omitted those of any other denomination but that of the Established Church. The returns of deaths were probably more correct, as the church burial grounds were, with some unimportant exceptions, the only burial grounds in the city. A mere glance at the above Bill of Mortality will show this at once, as the burials amount to twice the number of births. The above return only gives the causes of death in 1,718 cases, thus leaving 1,488 unaccounted for.

I pass on now to the second part of my paper, viz., the material and methods for calculating the population of Ireland in the past.

It is a curious thing to note that in reading the histories of various nations in the past, with one or two exceptions, we are only able to obtain vague estimates as to the populations of such countries at different times, and that it is only within the last century in this country that we find any earnest endeavour to ascertain the exact number of men, women, and children who form our community. It is hard to realise that in these countries, for long after Adam Smith's time, the number of inhabitants of the British Empire could only be guessed at, while Arthur Young in 1780 strongly recommended the legislature of Ireland to order an enumeration of the whole people. The Romans, we know, were in the habit of taking a census, so as to arrange the people in their different classes for the purpose of taxation. In recent times the Southern Italians commenced taking a census as early as 1443 for fiscal purposes, while the French began in 1700 to enumerate the population, though this census was not very

* The total returns for the quarter and week have been omitted.

reliable. The Swedes also counted their inhabitants in the eighteenth century, but it was not till 1801 that the first census was taken in England. This lack of information as to the exact number of the population in England, Scotland, and Ireland, however, provided a useful spur to intelligent men filled with a statistical spirit to make guesses at truth. The idea that the enumeration of the people, and an accurate account of their increase and decrease, could be of any material use, or that the deductions to be made from such figures as to the health of the community, might in any way help to discover cures for the social sores with which such community was afflicted, only occurred to the minds of a few intelligent men possessed of a scientific bent. It has been left to recent times to recognise that many of the existing maladies are preventative, and that population and health statistics form, perhaps, the most effective guide in pointing out and locating such scourges.

The first reliable census was not taken in Ireland till 1821, so that, before that period, we have nothing but the results of the investigations of men like Sir William Petty, whose ingenious speculations are well known. This investigator stands out pre-eminently for his special aptitude for such studies, his scientific spirit, and for the opportunities he enjoyed as Superintendent of the Survey of the Forfeited lands after the disastrous rising of 1641. In his "Political Arithmetic" he simply revels in figures, and though we, accustomed to the more scientific procedure of the present age, may laugh at his methods and conclusions, his efforts to make the most of the scanty material at his disposal, to draw conclusions from his poverty-stricken collection of facts, and to check them by every means his ingenious mind could discover, must command our admiration. An additional interest in Petty will be found by the members of this Society in his ineffectual attempt to establish an Irish Statistical office.

The earliest estimate of the population of Ireland that we know of was that of Fynes Moryson who visited Ireland under Lord Mountjoy, towards the close of the reign of Elizabeth. He estimated that at the termination of the war which Lord Mountjoy brought to a close, there were only 700,000 souls left in this country. The next estimate we have is that of Sir W. Petty who concluded that in 1641 before the war broke out there were 1,466,000 people in Ireland, and that in 1652 that number was reduced to 850,000 by massacres and emigration. He gives no authority for these statements, nor does he tell us how he arrived at such data. But we find ourselves on surer ground when we come to 1659, as in this year a poll tax was taken. The original of this poll tax is in the possession of the Marquis of Lansdowne, but a copy

exists in the Royal Irish Academy. Harding came to the conclusion that it was a census, but all the evidence points to the belief that it was a poll tax taken under an ordinance "for the speedy raising of moneys towards the supply of the army and for defraying of other public charges," which was passed by the General Convention of Ireland in 1659 or 60. It provided for the imposition of a capitation tax on every person of either sex over 15 years of age. This is a valuable and interesting document, as it contains the names of the "Tituladoes," or gentry, as well as the prevailing Irish names, in each parish. Unfortunately some of the counties are missing, but Harding, after making allowances for such *lacunae*, estimated that the population amounted to 500,091 souls, to which must be added the number of children of 15 years or under, who would amount to about two-fifths of the whole population.

The materials, however, upon which Petty and others relied for their conclusions were, in most cases, the Hearth Money Returns. This tax was imposed by the 14 and 15 Car. II., c. 17, and 18 Car. II., c. 18, by which Acts a duty of two shillings for each fire hearth, etc., yearly, was granted to the Crown in lieu of the fees which it had formerly received from the Court of Wards. Several statisticians like Petty, Dobbs, Gervais Bushe, and others, endeavoured to estimate the population at different times from these returns, but Mr. Bushe, who was a Commissioner of the Revenue, was at great pains to show that these returns were very unreliable, from the fact that many of the collectors returned false returns, and that people evaded paying the tax by blocking up their hearths; also that barracks, colleges, poor houses, etc., were often omitted. Another factor to be taken into account in considering the estimates formed from these returns is that there was considerable variance of opinion as to how many people constituted a household. Thomas Newenham counted 6 to a household, Mr. Bushe 6½, Dobbs 4½, whilst Petty allowed 5½ or 5. It will easily be seen what a distracting element was allowed to enter into their calculations.

I now give, in tabular form, the results of their investigations:—

c. 1600. Fynes Moryson	..	..	..	700,000
a. 1641. Sir W. Petty	..	..	..	1,466,000
a. 1652. "	..	..	..	850,000
b. 1659-60. Poll Tax (over 15 years)	..	..	..	500,091
a. 1672. Sir W. Petty (Hearth Money Returns)	..	..	..	1,100,000
c. 1695. Captain South (Poll Tax)	..	..	..	1,034,102

a. *Economic Writings of Sir W. Petty* (Ed. Hull). Vol. I., p. 149.

b. In *Royal Irish Academy*, mis-called "Census Returns."

c. "New abridgment of *Philosophical Transactions*," Royal Society, London.

d. 1712.	Arthur Dobbs (Hearth Money Returns)	..	2,099,094
d. 1718.	"	"	2,169,048
d. 1725.	"	"	2,317,374
d. 1726.	"	"	2,309,106
e. 1754.	Thomas Newenham	"	2,372,634
e. 1767.	"	"	2,544,276
e. 1777.	"	"	2,690,556
e. 1785.	"	"	2,845,932
f. 1788.	Gervais P. Bushe	"	4,040,000
e. 1791.	Thomas Newenham	"	4,206,612
g. 1792.	Rev. Dr. Beaufort	"	4,088,226
e. 1805.	Thomas Newenham	"	5,395,456

The first real census which was taken in Ireland was for the City of Dublin only, not by the government but by a private person. In 1798, during the rebellion, an order was issued by the Lord Mayor that every householder in Dublin should affix to his door a list of the number of his family and servants then residing in the house. The Rev. Dr. Whitelaw, vicar of St. Catherine's, conceived the happy idea of recording these lists. He collected a number of assistants who went round the streets of Dublin and copied the lists on each door, and also himself made personal investigations in the lower quarters of the city. As a result, we possess two large volumes containing the name of each householder, with the number in family and servants in each house, number of house, state of repair and other interesting information. According to his census, the number of inhabitants was 172,091. From another inquiry conducted in 1803 by the conservators of the peace, Dr. Whitelaw calculated the number of inhabitants in Dublin as 169,528.*

The first census of the whole of Ireland was directed to be taken in May, 1813, by an Act of Parliament of 1812, modelled upon the similar Act for Great Britain in 1810. But whereas in England the work of enumeration was thrown upon the Overseers of the Poor, and in Scotland upon the Parish Schoolmasters, in Ireland the Grand Jury was made responsible for the work. The effect of devolving such a duty upon a body of men who only met twice a year and who had no check upon the enumerators who were obliged only

d. "Essay on the Trade and Improvement of Ireland." Dobbs calculated the number of persons to a house at 4.36, which is much too low an estimate. His figures have been corrected on an estimate of 6 persons to a house.

e. "A Statistical and Historical Inquiry into the population of Ireland," 1805.

f. See Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy, 1787.

g. "Memoir of the Map of Ireland."

*"Essay on the Population of Dublin in 1798." Rev. James Whitelaw.

to return the number, and not the names, of the population, in their districts, was disastrous. So few and unreliable were the returns made that they were deemed unsuitable to be presented to Parliament. According to this Census, the population of Ireland was estimated at 5,937,856 persons.

To remedy this defective return, another Act was passed in 1815, whereby the general supervision was vested in the magistrates at Quarter Sessions, aided by the advice of a legal coadjutor for each county. Enumerators were chosen, wherever possible, from among the collectors of local taxes. So careful were the authorities to obtain as exact as possible a return of the true state of the population that the enumerators were obliged to fill up practice returns which enabled the authorities to judge of their capabilities. These arrangements took six years to complete, and it was not till 1821 that the census was taken. The names, etc., in the enumerators books were copied into large volumes, giving the name of each householder, his occupation, age, and the names and ages of all persons in his house, together with other useful information, and were certified by affidavit before magistrates. The whole forms a most valuable record, in 258 volumes, of 6,801,827 persons. For the purposes of the claimants for old age pensions, these volumes are of little use, as it is only those of eighty-seven years of age, or upwards, who would find their names recorded.

The next census of Ireland was taken in 1831 under the Act 1 William IV., c. 19, and Mr. George Hatchell was appointed to arrange and digest the returns. Unfortunately, this Census does not record the name and age of each person, but only the name of each householder, with the number and sex of his family and servants. The number of the population was found to be 7,767,401. This Census was subjected to a further examination in 1834, and the religious belief of each householder added, at the instance of the Commissioners of Public Instruction. Neither the Census of 1831 or 1834 is of any use to claimants for pensions, as the names of the children are not set out.

The Census of 1841 was a very great improvement on the foregoing. The Commissioners appointed were Messrs. W. T. Hamilton, Henry J. Brownrigg, and Thomas A. Larcom, while Surgeon Wilde furnished an able report on the tables of deaths. Special forms were drawn up with three tables: the first table for the enumeration of the names, ages, relationships, state of education, etc., of each person in the house on the night of the 6th June in that year; the second table of all those belonging to the family who were absent on that night; and the third table, of all those members of the family who had died since the last census. This table was rendered necessary by the absence of any registration of deaths in

Ireland. Of the many points of advantage which this Census had over preceding ones, we may mention that the family forms were left at each house, and filled up by the head of the family, instead of requiring the enumerator to extract the information *viva voce*; that the Census was taken on one particular night instead of being prolonged over a period; that by the arrangement of the three tables you have every member of the family accounted for, and that for the first time, the valuable ordinance survey sheets were available for use. I have not time to refer in detail to all the different kinds of information which were obtained by this Census, which the Commissioners intended to be a social survey, and not a mere enumeration of the population. It is the results of this Census which have been found most useful in substantiating claims for Old Age Pensions. The fact that most of the claimants at this period would have been of very tender years renders all the greater the probability of their correct age being inserted. But for the preservation of these returns, many thousands of claims would be incapable of proof. Certain difficulties, however, arise which it is not always easy to solve. Where the parents have been migrants, moving about from one place to another, it is not easy to discover the precise spot they were in on the night of the 6th June, 1841; while the difference between the civil parishes, under which the results of this Census were arranged, and the Roman Catholic parishes, creates a serious obstacle, where the name of the townland is not known. I am somewhat sceptical about regarding the recollection of "the great wind" as any proof, as even those who are not quite septuagenarians must have so frequently heard of it that it is quite possible that they may have arrived at the belief that they were alive at the time of its occurrence. The number of the population in 1841 was estimated as 8,175,124, omitting the army.

Between this Census and that of 1851, by the Act of 7 and 8 Vic., c. 81, a Registrar General was appointed in Ireland for registering the marriages of those of all denominations except the Roman Catholics. This Act came into force in 1845, and entries in the early registers so kept would be presumptive evidence of the applicant being over seventy years of age.

In 1851 another Census was taken, under the management of Dr. Wm. Donnelly, the Registrar General for the time, with Dr. Wm. R. Wilde as Assistant Commissioner, on the night of the 30th March. These returns differ from those of 1841 in that, in the column for "Education," the head of the family was required to state whether the members of his family spoke Irish only, or both Irish and English; also a column was added for the enumeration of the deaf

and dumb, or blind. A note was affixed to the third table (*viz.*, of those members of the family who had died since the last Census), stating that this information was required on account of the absence of the public registration of deaths. This Census of 1851 is not at present of much use for Old Age Pensions, except in the case of claimants whose knowledge of their abode in their infancy is uncertain, but who remember where they lived some few years afterwards. But in two or three years they will constitute most valuable evidence. The number of the population in Ireland on the night of the Census was calculated as 6,552,385, a considerable falling off from that of 1841, caused by the famine and emigration.

The last Census with which my paper is concerned is that of 1861, taken on the night of the 7th April, when the population was found to consist of 5,798,967 souls. It differed from the preceding one in recording the religious belief of each person. Any interest, however, which it would have to us as providing documentary evidence of age has been taken away by the destruction of these valuable records. Through some unaccountable misunderstanding, we have thus been deprived of what, where entries of baptism have not been made in Parish Registers, or in cases where no baptism has taken place, would have proved a most valuable aid to claimants, and an efficient method of checking their claims.

At last, in 1863, a bill was brought into Parliament, and passed, for registering all births, marriages, and deaths in Ireland. The present returns of the Registrar General, though making us thankful for this belated measure, fill us with regret for the absence of the valuable material which we should now possess for statistical and social inquiry in Ireland, had such an officer been appointed at the same time as his confrere in England.

Through this appointment, however, in about a quarter of a century there will be no difficulty in proving claims of septuagenarians for Old Age Pensions; but, until then, we shall have to rely on the parish registers and such Census Returns as still exist.