

Evidence and Enquiry: Using the census information in the Leaving Certificate History classroom

Part two - Dunlavin, County Wicklow: six historical essays.

Introduction

This unit is aimed at both teachers and students of senior history. Students will be aware from junior certificate C.S.P.E. that a census is taken in the Republic of Ireland every five years and that it counts all the people in the country. However, the census does more than just count the people. It contains lots of information about many aspects of life in Ireland and it gives us a picture of the social and economic conditions of the country and in all the localities that make up the country. Thus, by researching and studying the information contained in past censuses, students of history can find out a lot about the social and economic conditions of the past.

Background

In the past, the census of Ireland was not taken every five years, but every ten. The first real census of Ireland was taken in 1821, but both the 1821 and the 1831 censuses lacked detail. The census of 1841 was the first really detailed census of the country and included information on many aspects of social life such as literacy, while statistics about the number of Irish speakers first appeared in 1851. Census data was presented in manuscript census returns forms and in printed reports. Many of the manuscript forms from the nineteenth century have not survived, but they do exist for the censuses of 1901 and 1911. There was no census in 1921, due to the War of Independence, and manuscript returns from 1926 onwards cannot be examined for legal reasons, so only printed reports can be studied for the years after 1926. The type of information contained in the censuses is very varied. As well as actual numbers, there is information on population structure, housing, religion, education, occupations, literacy, emigration and a host of other areas. Any one of these could form the basis for a student's research study report.

In this unit, six historical essays on the use of the census data about Dunlavin, County Wicklow, give teachers and students an indication of how the use of census material may be applied to any city, town, village or rural area in the country.

Essay one: Religion and education in Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow in 1881 and 1901

Essay two: Life in the village of Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow in 1901.

Essay three: The family of Sarah Lawler, Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow in 1901.

Essay four: The level of building and the impact of the railway's arrival on Dunlavin in Co. Wicklow, 1881 to 1901

Essay five: The population structure of Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow in the late nineteenth century.

Essay six: The effects of the Great Famine on the Dunlavin region in Co. Wicklow.

Note: the use of graphs in the research study booklet.

Essay one: Religion and education in Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow in 1881 and 1901.

This research study examines religion and education in one locality between 1881 and 1901. The study concentrates on Dunlavin in County Wicklow. The information given in this study is all taken from the primary source of the census figures of 1881 and 1901 respectively. The study contains pie charts, which have been drawn to show the situation represented by the data more clearly.

In 1881 there were 506 Roman Catholic males and 457 Roman Catholic females in Dunlavin, while there were 132 Church of Ireland males and 126 Church of Ireland females. Apart from one Presbyterian, no other denominations were represented in the parish. So, at parish level in 1881, Protestants made up 21% of the population. By 1901, the percentage of Protestants had increased to 23%, but this is a small increase.

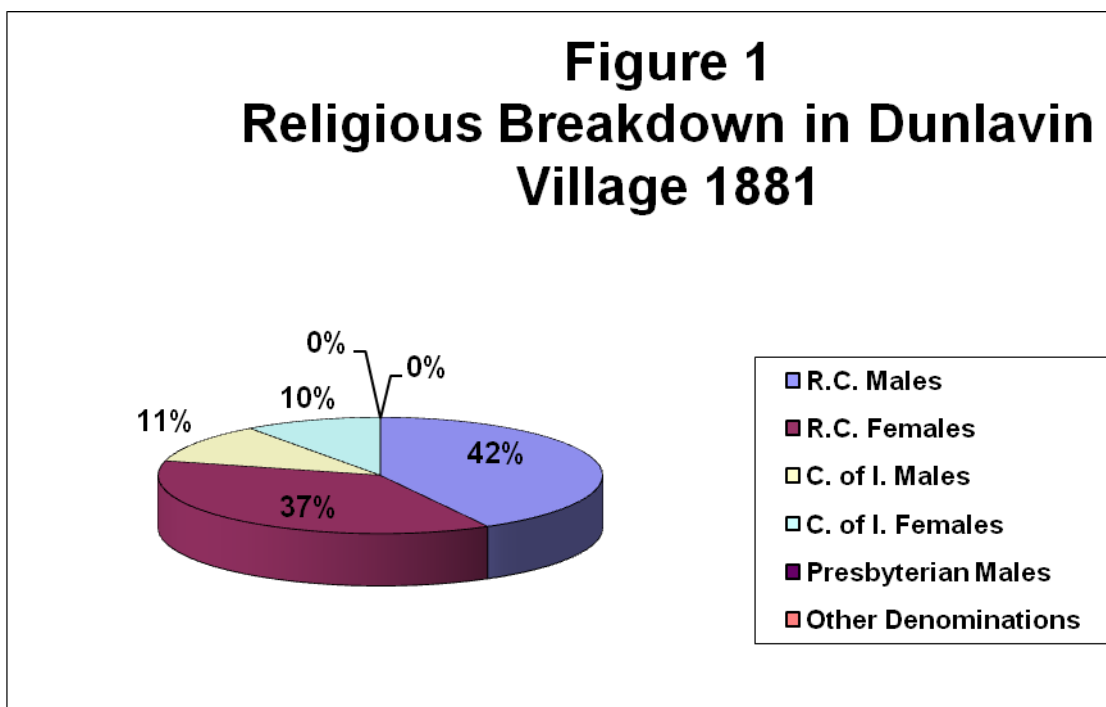


Figure 1 shows the religious breakdown in Dunlavin parish in 1881. It is interesting to note that while Protestants comprised 21% of the population, the illiteracy rate among Protestants was quite small (7.7% for males and 7.0% for females). The figures regarding literacy are taken from the 1881 census and from the people over five years old.

Figure 2
Literacy of Protestant Population > 5
years old 1881



The amount of illiterate Protestants in 1881 is shown on the pie chart in figure 2, and is much smaller than the percentage of illiterate Catholics in 1881 (21.1% for males and 21.3% for females) shown on the chart in figure 3.

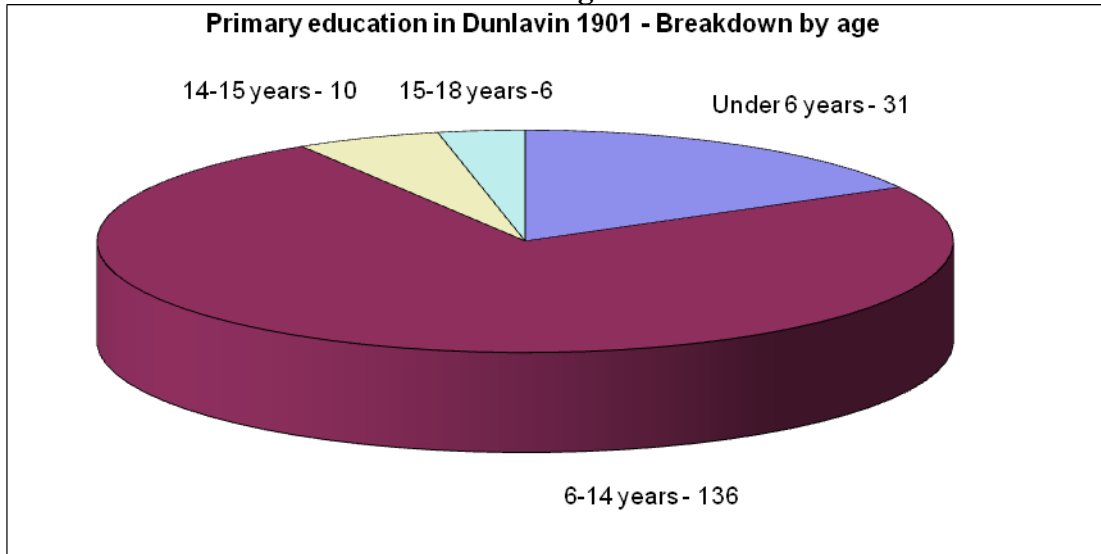
Figure 3
Literacy of Roman Catholic Population
> 5 years old 1881



Catholic children were approximately three times more likely to be illiterate than protestant children in Dunlavin parish in 1881. So Catholic children were probably more likely to be kept out of school, to skip school and to leave school at an early age. The low status given to education among families from a poorer social background was probably also more likely to affect Catholic families.

The study will now proceed from the 1881 census figures to the situation in 1901. Figure 4 shows the breakdown of students in Dunlavin in 1901 by their ages.

Figure 4



Obviously, most students left school by the time they were 14. Only 16% of the students fall into the 14 and over categories. It was not until much later that large numbers of students continued their education beyond their early teens. Of course, some students may have gone on to secondary education, but the vast majority left school to take up employment.

One big disadvantage of this pie chart (Figure 4) is the very large age heaping in the 6-14 age bracket. This is unavoidable in this study as this is the age heaping used in the 1901 census.

Figure 5

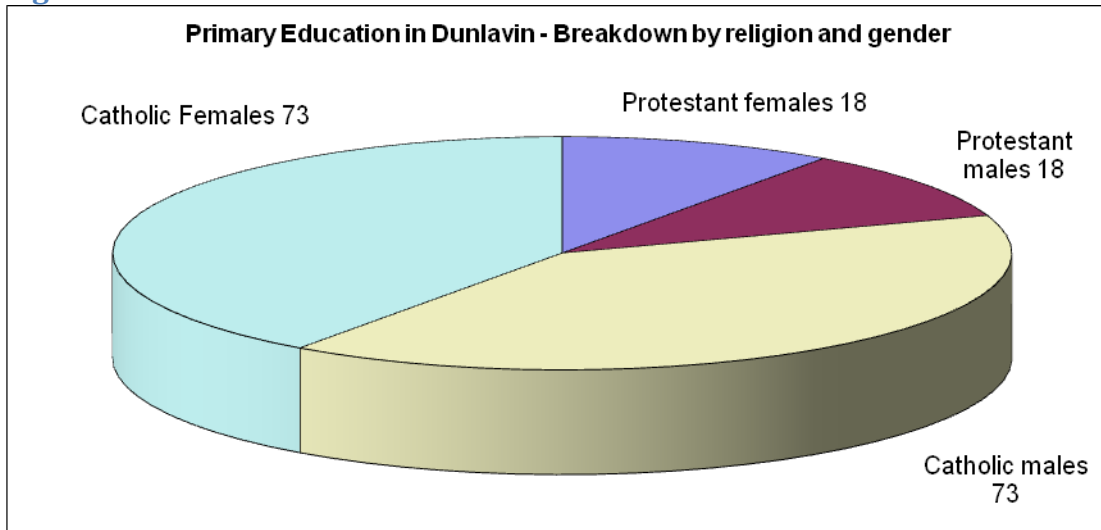
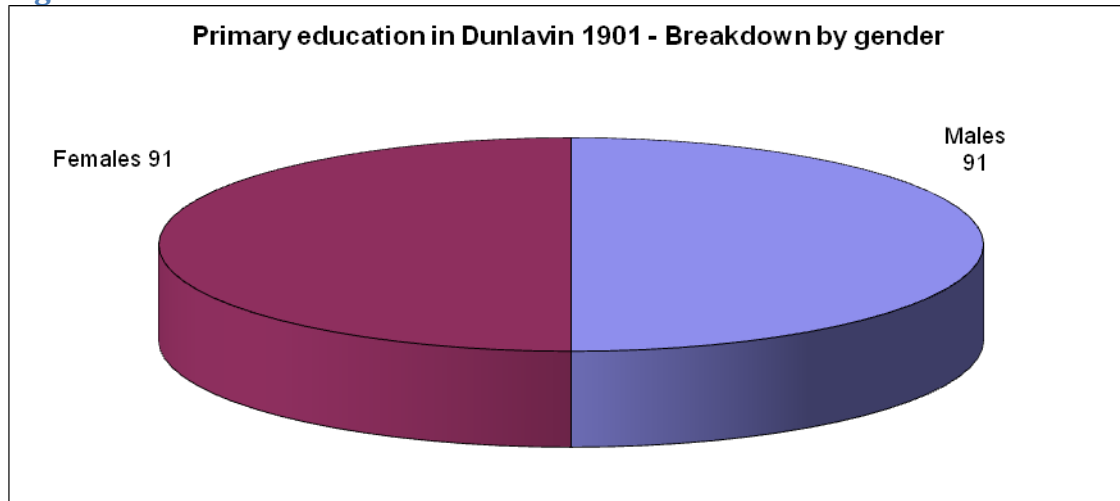


Figure 5 shows the breakdown of students in Dunlavin by religion and gender. Protestant children made up nearly one quarter of the school going population. This is quite close to the 23% of Protestants in the total population figures for 1901, and indicates no great difference in birth rates between Catholics and Protestants.

Figure 6



The very symmetrical nature of the pie chart in Figure 5 led me to include Figure 6 in this study. This figure shows the breakdown of students in Dunlavin by gender in 1901. The pie chart in Figure 6 is evenly halved between males and females. At first glance, this means that there was no gender-based discrimination in education at this time. However, census statistics do not tell the full story. The real anti-female discrimination was to be found in the teaching and curriculum at the time. Boys and girls studied different subjects in school at this time.

This research study has used material for the census of 1881 and 1901 to show the religious division of the community of Dunlavin in County Wicklow at the time of the study. The breakdown of the population into Catholics and Protestants has been noted and graphed. The education and literacy rates of both Catholics and Protestants in 1881 have also been examined and the results graphed. The numbers of both religions attending school in 1901 have also been investigated and graphed. In addition, the breakdown of boys and girls in school in Dunlavin in 1901 has been noted and graphed. There were even numbers of boys and girls in school, but they did not do the same subjects. The graphs in this study help us to see what the overall situation was in relation to religion and education in this place at this time, and the study shows that just over one fifth of the population of Dunlavin was Protestant at this time and nearly a quarter of the schoolchildren of Dunlavin were Protestant, with better literacy rates. The village also had a large majority of Catholics, and no other churches at this time.

Sources:

1. Census of Ireland 1881, County Wicklow, table xxx, p. 1161.
2. Census of Ireland 1901, County Wicklow, table xxxiii, p. 98.

Essay two: Life in the village of Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow in 1901.

This research study will examine part of a village community from the past. Census returns from the 1901 census will be used to build up a picture of this community. The research study centres on the village of Dunlavin, a village in west Wicklow. The full village would be too big to include in this study, so it will concentrate on the inhabitants of one row of houses along the main street. The census enumerator had to fill in a form called 'Form B' to show the returns for the street and each individual household had to fill in a 'Form A' to show the situation in their own house. This study uses both forms A and B to form a partial picture of Dunlavin village in 1901.

The census forms offer a personalised form of local history, and reading them (in the original handwriting) is like opening a window onto another age. Rather than do a full report on the town in 1901, this study concentrates on one street (Main Street) and then looks at six randomly chosen household case studies. Form B (i.e. the street form) from 1901 gives us much information. Seventeen houses are marked in for the street (all built – none building). All the houses are either first or second class. No third or fourth class houses existed here in 1901, which was a big improvement on the pre-famine situation, when there were many third and fourth class houses. The following table summarises the Main Street situation in 1901:

Head of Family	Type of House	No. of Rooms	No. in Family	Class of House
Sarah Lawler	Public House	8	10	1
William Byrne	Shop	7	2	1
Joseph Waldron	Private House	3	2	2
Kerry L. Supple	Private House	10	2	1
Henry Hoey	Hotel	17	3	1
John Hawkes	Bank	8	4	1
Henry Coleborn	Shop	6	6	2
Peter A. Doran	Hotel	10	7	1
Peter B. Coleman	Private House	8	3	2
James Gordon	Private House	2	0	2
James Keogh	Lodging House	4	6	2
Edward Wall	Private House	4	4	2
Philip Doran	Private House	4	8	2
James Kelly	Shop	6	13	2
John Thomas	Private House	6	2	2
Michael Moore	Private House	2	6	2
Peter Masterson	Private House	2	6	2

Every house on the street reported that only one distinct family lived there – again this was an improvement on the pre-famine situation, when houses were often occupied by more than one family in an over-populated village.

The study will now concentrate on a random sample of half a dozen Household Return Forms (Form A) and examine them in detail. These are the households headed by Sarah Lawler, Joseph Waldron, John Hawkes, Henry Coleborn, Peter A. Doran and Edward Wall on that census night in 1901.

HOUSEHOLD OF SARAH LAWLER						
Name	Relationship to Head	Age	Married	Born	Religion	Profession
Sarah Lawler	Head	54	Widow	Co. Wicklow	Catholic	Merchant
James Lawler	Son	29	Married	"	"	Merchant
Marie Lawler	Daughter	24	Married	"	"	-
Agnes Lawler	Daughter	26	Single	"	"	-
Nicholas Lawler	Grandson	2	Single	"	"	-
John Lawler	Grandson	9 mth	Single	"	"	-
Sarah Mapes	Servant	23	Single	"	"	Domestic
Maggie Fay	Servant	17	Single	"	"	Nurse
John McGough	Shop Assistant	17	Single	"	"	Shop Assistant
Eddie Whittle	Servant	20	Single	"	"	Porter

HOUSEHOLD OF JOSEPH WALDRON						
Name	Relationship to Head	Age	Married	Born	Religion	Profession
Joseph Waldron	Head	50	Yes	Co. Wicklow	Church of Ireland	Plasterer
Frances Waldron	Wife	52	Yes	"	"	

HOUSEHOLD OF JOHN HAWKES						
Name	Relationship to Head	Age	Married	Born	Religion	Profession
John Hawkes	Head	40	Yes	Co. Cork	Church of Ireland	Bank Manager
Lizzie Hawkes	Wife	35	Yes	Co. Tipperary	"	
May Hawkes	Daughter	12	No	Co. Cork	"	
Kate Rielly	Maid	18	No	Co. Wicklow	Catholic	Domestic

HOUSEHOLD OF HENRY COLEBORN

Name	Relationship to Head	Age	Married	Born	Religion	Profession
Henry Coleborn	Head	40	Yes	Hants	Irish Church	Jeweller
Sarah Coleborn	Wife	40	Yes	Co. Wicklow	"	
Maud Coleborn	Daughter	18	No	Hants	"	
Walter Coleborn	Son	14	No	Co. Wicklow	"	Scholar
Mabel Coleborn	Daughter	6	No	"	"	Scholar
Henry J. Coleborn	Son	1	No	Co. Wicklow	"	

HOUSEHOLD OF PETER A. DORAN

Name	Relationship to Head	Age	Married	Born	Religion	Profession
Peter A Doran	Head	26	Married	Co. Kildare	Catholic	Publican
Brigid Doran	Wife	22	Married	Co. Wicklow	"	Publican
Robert Miley	Assistant	45	Single	"	Protestant	Shop Assistant
Peter O'Toole	Assistant	24	Single	"	Catholic	"
Kate Archibald	Servant	24	Single	Co. Kildare	"	Domestic
Maggie Ennis	Servant	24	Single	Co. Kildare	"	"
Edward Yaul	Servant	35	Married	"	"	Servant

HOUSEHOLD OF EDWARD WALL

Name	Relationship to Head	Age	Married	Born	Religion	Profession
Edward Wall	Head	62	Yes	Co. Wicklow	RC	Car Owner
Kate Wall	Wife	60	Yes	"	"	
William Wall	Son	34	No	"	"	Car Driver
Edward Wall	Son	30	No	"	"	Car Driver

In all houses, all the adults were down as being literate. Education was obviously improving since the establishment of the national schools in the nineteenth century. Most of the people mentioned were born in Co. Wicklow. In those days home births were common and the local midwife would attend. Very few of the people from the sample households had moved any distance from the town – Dunlavin is only one mile from the border with County Kildare. One exception was the bank manager, John Hawkes, who was born in County Cork. His wife was a native of County Tipperary. They had probably moved into Dunlavin for professional (job) reasons. Another exception was the Englishman, Henry Coleborn, but he had obviously married a local girl.

Every household tells a story. The widowed Sarah Lawler, with her family ranging from her eldest son James (who probably ran the pub as he was described as a ‘merchant’) to her nine month old grandson; the middle-aged Waldrons in their three-roomed house; the professional Hawkes family; the Coleborns who had moved from England to start a new life in Dunlavin. On the other hand, the street also contained the young couple, the Dorans, with their premises listed as a hotel, but who describe themselves as ‘publicans’ (which gives rise to doubts as to which was their most lucrative line of trade), who had five servants all older than Brigid Doran – would they be classed as ‘upwardly mobile’ nowadays? Finally, the car-owning Wall family, whose two sons were in their thirties and unmarried. Perhaps this was a local example of a national trend, as the average age of marriage was increasing in Ireland at this time.

We can imagine all of these people walking the streets of Dunlavin at the turn of the last century. Their names are indelibly etched on Dunlavin – and on their census forms. The census certainly provides a vital source of information for local historical studies and this research study has re-created a small part of a past village community. The information from both street and household returns – forms A and B – has been used to provide information about the people of Dunlavin, their houses, their families, their religion and their occupations in 1901. The study has brought the pages of the census to life and has added to our knowledge of the small west Wicklow village of Dunlavin at this time, and to our understanding of the local history of Co. Wicklow.

Sources:

1. Census of Ireland 1901, County Wicklow, (Dunlavin), Form A files.
2. Census of Ireland 1901, County Wicklow, (Dunlavin), Form B files.
3. F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland since the famine, London 1971.
4. R. F. Foster, Modern Ireland 1600-1972, London 1988.

Essay three: The family of Sarah Lawler, Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow in 1901.

The census of 1901 was a very detailed survey of all of Ireland and every single household in the country had to answer questions and fill out a form. The answers to the questions were filled in on a form called 'Form B' and the head of each household had to fill in a different form called 'Form A', which contained information about all the people who were in the house on that census night in 1901. This study will focus on one household in the village of Dunlavin in the west of County Wicklow and will try to build up a picture of the household and its inhabitants on the night that the census was taken.

The household at the centre of this study is that of a lady called Sarah Lawler. Sarah was fifty four years old in 1901 and her house was quite large, containing eight rooms. She ran a public house in Dunlavin village and she described herself as a 'merchant', so the pub may have sold some other things as well as alcohol. The size of the house meant that Sarah's house was described as a 'first class' house. This meant that it was the best type of house. Sarah's position as a merchant and publican probably meant that she was fairly wealthy, so she would be able to afford to live in a good house like this. She may not have owned the house, as many houses at this time belonged to local landlords, but she could still afford to pay rent on a first class house because of her position among the business community of Dunlavin village.

Sarah Lawler had a large family. The census form B states that there were ten people in her family. There may have been, and census form A certainly shows that there were ten people staying in her house that night. However, not all of these people were members of her family. Some of them only worked for Sarah, but she still had three of her own children and two grandchildren in the house that night. Her eldest son, James, was twenty nine years old and was also described as a merchant. He may have been a partner in the business or even run the pub, because he is the only one of Sarah's children described as a 'merchant' like herself. James was married, but there was no mention of Sarah's daughter-in-law on the census form. James's wife was not in the house that night – for whatever reason; she may have been elsewhere or even dead.

Sarah also had two daughters staying in the house that night. Marie and Agnes were both in their twenties. Marie was twenty four and married; Agnes was twenty six and single. There was no mention of Marie's husband. Once again, he may have been elsewhere. The form A definitely states that Marie is Sarah's daughter, but in some ways the structure of this household would be easier to understand if she were a daughter-in-law and married to James. However this study can only work from the information given in the primary source document.

The two children, Sarah's grandsons, were both very young. Nicholas was two and John was only nine months. The Lawlers were an example of three generations of the one family living in the same house. Such arrangements were quite common in Ireland at this time. The Lawler family were typical in another respect too. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the development of a strong and wealthy Catholic middle class. In the countryside, strong farmers emerged, but in the villages and towns the wealthy Catholic middle class was represented by the business people.

The Lawlers were a Catholic family who were wealthy enough to employ four people. The size of the house and the nature of their business and family meant that these four people 'lived in' on the premises. Sarah Mapes was described as a domestic servant. She was twenty three years old and a single girl who probably acted as a housekeeper and perhaps a cook for the Lawler family. Maggie Fay was a seventeen-year-old girl who was employed as a nurse, so she probably looked after the two young children. At that time, very few seventeen year olds went on to secondary school, so Maggie was typical of many young girls who went into service for wealthy families. John McGough was also seventeen, but he worked in the pub. He was described as a shop assistant, and this may be further evidence that the Lawlers sold more than alcohol. The final servant was twenty-year-old Eddie Whittle. He was described as a porter, so he probably did a lot of fetching and carrying for the business and for the wealthy Lawler family in general.

The Lawler family of Dunlavin were Catholics and so were all the servants that they employed. This may not show religious discrimination in their hiring however, as there was a large majority of Catholics in the village at this time. All the servants were local as they were all born in County Wicklow, as were the Lawlers themselves. In those days, many local businesses were self-sufficient and took on local employees. The wealthy Lawler family were among those self-sufficient villagers in 1901.

This research study has used the census returns of 1901 to build a picture of a Dunlavin household at a particular point in time. The census provides an excellent source of information for a local research study. History is not just about the famous, powerful and rich. It is about ordinary people too. Studying one household in depth can add to our overall knowledge of history. This study has examined a Dunlavin household, and added to our knowledge of the local history of Co. Wicklow in 1901.

Sources:

1. Census of Ireland 1901, County Wicklow, (Dunlavin), Form A files.
2. Census of Ireland 1901, County Wicklow, (Dunlavin), Form B files.
3. F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland since the famine, London 1971.
4. R. F. Foster, Modern Ireland 1600-1972, London 1988.

Essay four: The level of building and the impact of the railway's arrival on Dunlavin in Co. Wicklow, 1881 to 1901.

This research study will analyse data regarding the number of buildings in one local area over a thirty-year period from 1881 to 1901. The area at the centre of the study is Dunlavin district electoral division (D.E.D.) in the west of Co. Wicklow. This data is obviously an indicator of population levels, but also may be taken as an indicator of economic and social conditions. Hence large numbers of houses being built, for example, could indicate economic prosperity; while large numbers of uninhabited houses could indicate economic decline and emigration. Figure 1.

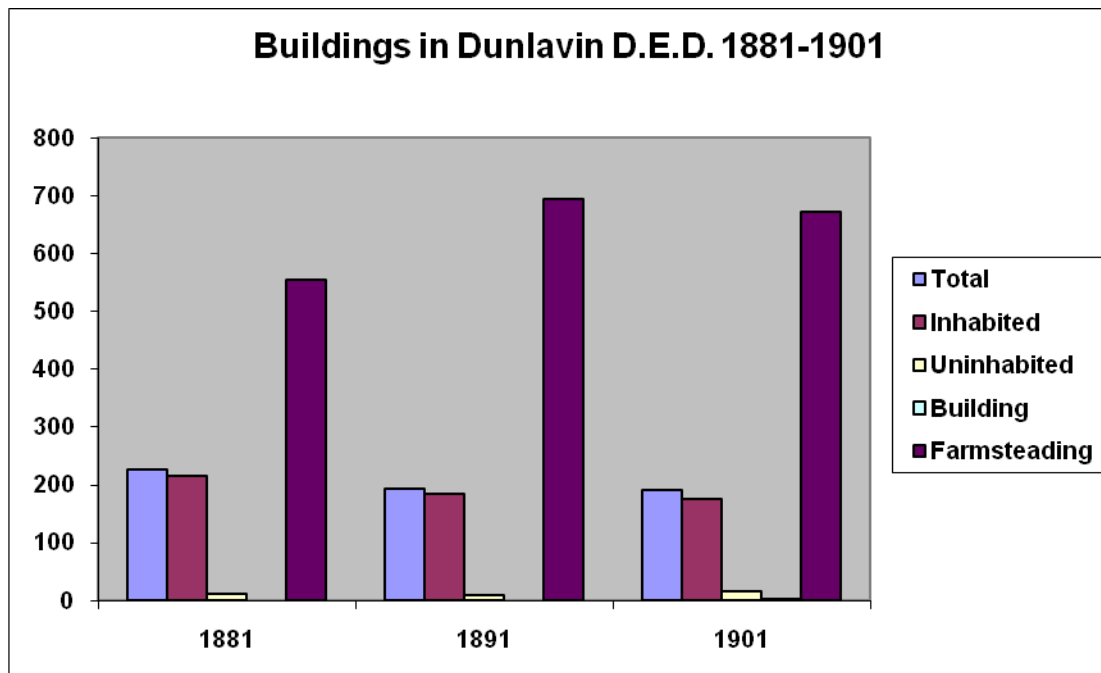


Figure 1 is a bar graph denoting the number of buildings in Dunlavin D.E.D. at three points in time – 1881, 1891 and 1901. The graph is divided into five sections for each year. The total number of houses declined from 226 in 1881 to 194 in 1891. This represents a 15% fall in the number of houses in the D.E.D. Perhaps more importantly the number of inhabited houses shows a very similar fall – from 215 in 1881 to 185 in 1891 (a 14% drop). The similarity of these percentage falls shows us that the number of houses in the D.E.D. is a good indicator of population change within the D.E.D. Despite this significant fall in the total number of houses between 1881 and 1891 however, the number of uninhabited buildings also drops – from 11 to 9. The small figures here make a percentage drop almost meaningless, but this study will try to explain this trend in the uninhabited house figures. There are two possible explanations. Firstly empty houses were probably quickly tumbled to clear land and so they may have disappeared off the landscape and off the graph. Secondly, many houses in Dunlavin D.E.D. at this time contained more than one family, as the number of families exceeded the number of houses in all three censuses. Hence, migration from the area may have had the effect of relieving overcrowding without actually emptying some of the houses.

There were no houses being built in Dunlavin D.E.D. in either 1881 or 1891. This does not mean, of course, that no houses were built here between those dates, but the lack of any building in the area in both 1881 and 1891 has to be seen as an indication of rural decline in Dunlavin D.E.D. during this period.

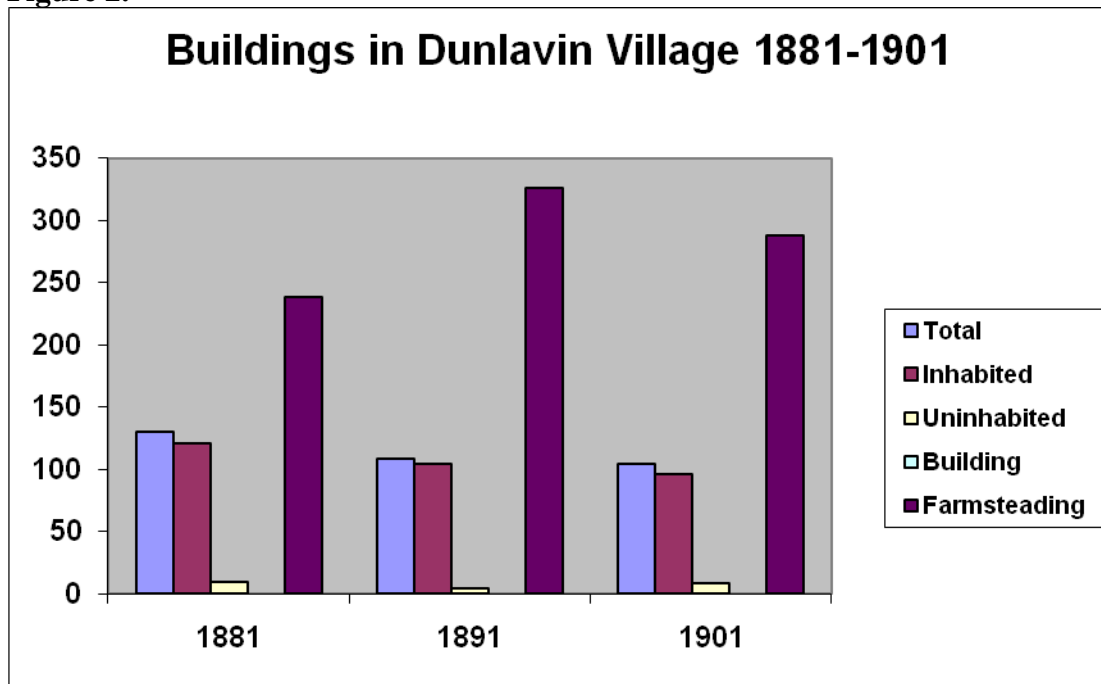
However, it is not quite accurate to refer to 'the lack of any building in the area'. Obviously sheds ('out offices and farmsteadings' on the graph) were being built at quite a pace during the period 1881-1891. Numbers in this column increase sharply from 555 in 1881 to 694 in 1891. Given the overall 'circle of decline' in the area at this time, this is surprising. Why were more sheds being built? Two things spring to mind here. Firstly, because of the improving situation after Gladstone's Land Act of 1881 (and its later amendments) and again after the Ashbourne Land Act of 1885 (and its later amendments) tenant farmers were no longer afraid to build sheds or make other improvements on their farms. Indeed, as some families left the area, it is quite possible that their old cottages became sheds for the stronger tenant farmers that were emerging here at this time. This practice might also be a cause of the small number of uninhabited houses in 1891 as any such buildings would surely now be recorded as out offices and farmsteadings in the 1891 census.

However, there could be another reason for the 20% increase in the number of sheds by 1891. This was the arrival of the railway in the village. The Tullow branch of the Great Southern and Western Railway reached Dunlavin in 1885. With goods trains now coming to the town, bulk buying by local people was facilitated and this would create a need for increased storage space. All kinds of goods were brought into the village by train and many of these were obviously housed in sheds and stores before being sold on or used. This coming of the railway was at least partly responsible for the 20% increase in the numbers of sheds in Dunlavin D.E.D. between 1881 and 1891.

Moving on to examine the census data for 1901, the trend of decline seems to be continuing. The total number of houses now stands at 191. However, though there has been a further fall here, this figure represents only a 1.5% fall between 1891 and 1901 compared to a 15% fall between 1881 and 1891. Thus, the rate of decline has actually decreased tenfold. The village may have been smaller than before, but the building and housing situation in Dunlavin D.E.D. was now stabilising. The number of inhabited houses has fallen from 185 to 175, a 5% fall (in comparison to a 14% fall for the previous decade). The rate of decline has slowed here too obviously. There are 15 uninhabited houses in 1901 against 9 in 1891. This increase in uninhabited houses probably shows continuing emigration. The appearance of only one house in the 'building' column for 1901 is not enough to reverse the overall picture of out-migration either! People continued to leave the area and more houses were becoming derelict than were being built.

The number of sheds is still high at 672, but has decreased from 694 in 1891. This 3% fall would indicate that the boom in shed building had stopped despite better conditions for the tenants and the advent of the railway. There was obviously a limit to the number of sheds that could be built, especially in a village where the overall situation was one of economic decline. Continuing out-migration was probably a cause of this 3% decline in the number of sheds as well.

Figure 2.



Having examined at the numbers of buildings in Dunlavin D.E.D. in 1881, 1891 and 1901, this study will now look at the corresponding figures for Dunlavin village during the same period. This would indicate whether or not the circle of decline experience was different in the urban area of Dunlavin town and the surrounding rural area that makes up the rest of the D.E.D. The graph for Dunlavin village is shown in Figure 2. This graph is obviously very similar to Figure 1. The pattern is similar for all columns of the graphs. There are no houses building in any year, but space for building new houses within the 41 acres that comprised Dunlavin town in 1901 would have been hard to find. The percentage increase in the number of sheds built between 1881 and 1891 is greater in the village (29%) than in the D.E.D. as a whole (20%). One reason for this may be that shopkeepers benefited even more from the bulk buying allowed by the new railway link than other classes of people did, so the expansion of storage space happened on a larger scale within the village, where the shops were situated. The percentage fall in the number of sheds between 1891 and 1901 is also greater in the village (14%) than in the D.E.D. as a whole (3%). Continuing economic decline and out-migration would affect the local businesses badly, and so the storage sheds would not be needed as businesses folded. In fact this closure of local businesses, shops and services is part of the circle of decline. Much of rural Ireland was experiencing economic hardship at this time, and the census data for Dunlavin reveals that the village was in line with the overall rural economic trend.

This research study has used primary source data from three censuses – 1881, 1891 and 1901 – to construct a picture of the level of building in a local area in the late nineteenth century. The study has graphed the results on bar graphs. The graphs for Dunlavin village (urban) and Dunlavin D.E.D. (rural) are very similar. The overall trend is one of decline, but there was an obvious increase in the number of sheds in the area during the study period. This was probably due to better conditions for tenant farmers and the coming of the railway to Dunlavin village, which also impacted on the number of sheds. This census data relating to buildings in Dunlavin D.E.D. also tells us something of the economic situation, and the study has shown that despite the continuing decline, there was some economic stabilisation in the area by 1901.

Sources:

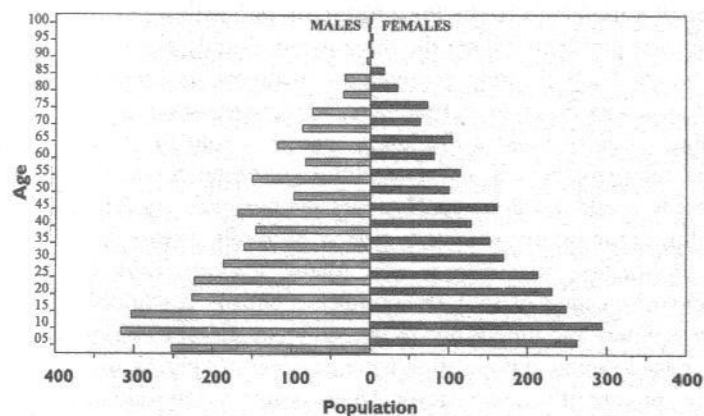
1. Census of Ireland 1881, County Wicklow, table vii, p. 1118.
2. Census of Ireland 1891, County Wicklow, table vi, p. 1093.
3. Census of Ireland 1901, County Wicklow, table vii, p. 8.

Essay five: The population structure of Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow in the late nineteenth century.

This research study applies the geographer's tool, the population pyramid, to examine the population structure of a local area in the past. The locality at the centre of this study is the village of Dunlavin, in the west of County Wicklow. The information given in this study is all taken from the census figures of 1881, 1891 and 1901 respectively. Population pyramids provide a method of studying the age and sex structure of any population in a given place at a given time. The pyramids are divided into males and females and are subdivided into five-year age groupings on each side.

Figure 1 shows the population pyramid for Dunlavin district electoral division (D.E.D.) in 1881. The total population of the D.E.D. in 1881 was 5,114. This was made up of 2,661 males and 2,453 females. Given that females nowadays tend to outlive males, these totals may indicate a higher rate of female mortality in 1881 than is the case these days. One possible reason for this would be that larger families were the norm in 1881. One would expect a higher rate of female deaths in childbirth in 1881 than would be the case today.

Figure 1. Dunlavin D.E.D. population pyramid 1881.



Another very obvious fact that leaps to the eye from a glance at the pyramid is the sharp drop in birth rate. This was a very recent drop in 1881; indeed the 5 – 10 age group is the largest single group in the whole pyramid for both males and females (316 and 294 respectively). The under-five figures are significantly less for both sexes (252 and 263 respectively). This would indicate that the drop in birth rate occurred in the late 1870s. Economically, these were bad years and the fall in agricultural prices, which had begun about 1876, had been accompanied by several bad harvests.

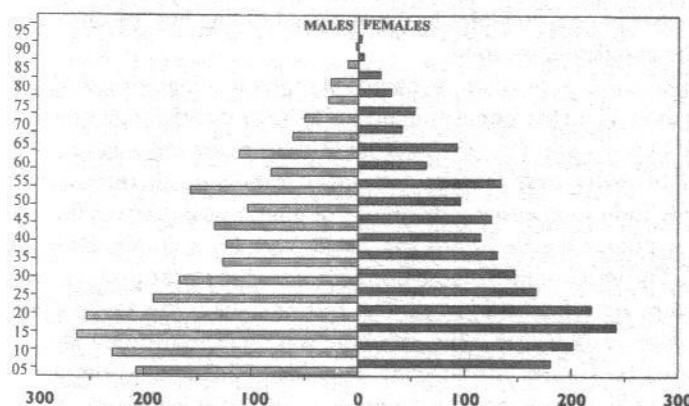
In the late 1870s, Dunlavin D.E.D. experienced an economic downturn and this led to the 15.6% drop in the birth rate seen in the 1881 population pyramid. There may have been other factors (emigration, later age of marriage and childbirth etc.), but there is no doubt that economic factors do influence the birth rate, especially at a time when many people remembered the Great Famine.

Mention of famine leads us on to some other characteristics of this population pyramid. The 35-40 age grouping appears quite small on this pyramid (for both sexes) wedged as it is between the larger 30-35 and 40-45 groupings. Thirty five years before 1881, the year was 1846. The Great Famine of 1845-1850 decimated the birth rates nationwide, but this population pyramid provides evidence of how a national event – indeed a national catastrophe – impacted at local level in Dunlavin D.E.D. Indeed, the columns in the 30-35 age group are not much bigger than the 35-40 age group, indicating that the low birth rate in the D.E.D. continued through the famine years and up to 1851. Of course, other factors like emigration and non-famine related deaths must also be taken into account, but the famine was the major cause of the small numbers of both males and females appearing in both the 30-35 and the 35-40 age groupings on this 1881 pyramid.

The age groups above 65 years show a constantly diminishing trend as one moves upwards in age, but natural deaths would account for such a trend, particularly given the fact that life expectancy was lower in nineteenth century Ireland than it is nowadays. However, the pyramid clearly shows that the bulk of the population of Dunlavin D.E.D. in 1881 was quite young, with 42% of the total population in the 20 or less age group. Another use of the population pyramid by the geographer entails using the pyramid as an indicator of the population's social and economic development. The older and younger age groups (<15 and >65) are generally economically unproductive and must be supported by the middle group, which includes the wealth producing labour force. This 1881 population pyramid for Dunlavin D.E.D. shows a productive sector of 59% supporting a non-productive sector of 41%. The non-productive sector was quite large, and the presence of the two largest groups in the non-productive sector (5-10 and 10-15 age heapings) increased the economic strain on the community.

Figure 2 shows the population pyramid for Dunlavin D.E.D. in 1891. The first fact evident from a study of this pyramid is that the overall population has dropped from 5,114 in 1881 to 4,394 in 1891. This represents a 14% drop in the ten-year period between the censuses. This represents a mean decline of 1.4% per annum. The rate of decline was higher on the female side (15.6%) than the male side (12.8%), but this need not indicate increased female emigration, as there are less females than males in both the 0-5 and 5-10 age heapings (181 to 207 and 202 to 229 respectively).

Figure 2. Dunlavin D.E.D. population pyramid 1891.

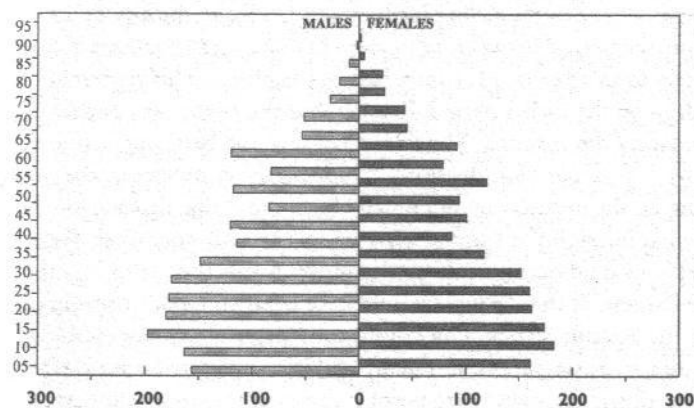


The lower birth rates have continued through the 1880s. In fact, this population pyramid is a classic example of what geographers refer to as a ‘regressive age structure’. It shows low birth and death rates, reflected in its beehive shape. The narrow base indicates the low birth rates and the low mortality rate is shown by steep sides until the over 65 age group is reached. At this point the pyramid tapers sharply, illustrating the increase of the death rate through ageing. In fact this regressive age structure is compatible with what geographers refer to as “stage three” of the demographic transition model, which indicates that although the overall population of the D.E.D. fell between 1881 and 1891, the economic situation improved during that time. Lower numbers in the D.E.D. meant that the available wealth was better distributed, and the family size at this point was falling, hence the lower birth rate.

Another indication of better times economically in the D.E.D. in 1891 is to be found in the fact that the productive sector of the population (15-65 year olds) has now crept above the 60% mark and stands at 62% supporting a non-productive sector of 38%. While the 1891 situation does not represent a great increase in the productive sector, there was still an increase, and so the overall economic situation improved between 1881 and 1891. Despite the lower birth rate, the 1891 population pyramid for Dunlavin D.E.D. is still weighted heavily in favour of the young, with 41% of the total population falling into the age heapings below 20. This represents only a 1% decrease on the 1881 situation, but obviously the 10-20 groups are a lot larger than the 0-10 groups and it would probably take some more years of lower birth rates to have an impact on the lowering of the overall percentage made up by the under 20s.

Figure 3 shows the population pyramid for Dunlavin D.E.D. in 1901. Once again the total population has declined – from 4,394 in 1891 to 3,815 in 1901, representing a 13% drop in population. While this 13% drop is only 1% less than the 14% decrease recorded between 1881 and 1891, it is significant that the rate of decline was slightly less in the 1890s and represents a further stabilisation of the economic situation in Dunlavin D.E.D. during this period. Once again the pyramid is a regressive one with continuing lower birth rates in evidence. The fact that the 20-30 groupings do not significantly outnumber the 10-20 age bracket (as the 10-20 age heapings significantly outnumbered the 0-10 age heapings ten years before) indicates continued large scale out-migration of both sexes in search of work.

Figure 3. Dunlavin D.E.D. population pyramid 1901.



This 1901 population pyramid is more stable than the other two, and the percentage of people under 20 years of age has now dropped to 36%. This figure represents a 5% drop on the 1891 percentage and it is obvious that the continued lowering of the birth rate is having an effect on the age structure of the population. Indeed, this continuing drop in the birth rate is also responsible for the fact that this 1901 pyramid shows that a 65% productive sector is now supporting a 35% non-productive sector. Once again this figure is an improvement on both the 1881 and 1891 figures for the non-productive sector (41% and 38% respectively). The whole shape of the 1901 pyramid (more rectangular in the lower age heapings especially) indicates a much healthier economic situation. The population has stabilised, as has the rate of population and economic decline. However, the price of the increased prosperity for the people who resided in Dunlavin D.E.D. in 1901 was continuing emigration (especially shown in the 20-30 age groups in this pyramid as noted already), leaving those who remained behind a bit wealthier overall – or at least on average.

This research study has used primary source data from three censuses to construct population pyramids for Dunlavin D.E.D. in 1881, 1891 and 1901. The study has investigated population totals, birth rates and other economic indicators. The years between 1881 and 1901 saw great economic changes. These economic changes were both causes and consequences of the actual population decline, and they ensured that the population pyramid for Dunlavin D.E.D in 1901 had a much more developed look to it than the 1881 pyramid.

Sources:

1. Census of Ireland 1881, County Wicklow, table xiii, p. 1152.
2. Census of Ireland 1891, County Wicklow, table xiii, p. 1127.
3. Census of Ireland 1901, County Wicklow, table xv, p. 47.

Essay six: The effects of the Great Famine on the Dunlavin region in Co. Wicklow.

This study examines the effects of the Great Famine at a local level. The locality at the centre of this study is the village of Dunlavin, in the west of County Wicklow. In 1837, Lewis's Topographical Dictionary described Dunlavin as a 'market and post town and parish... containing 2,528 inhabitants, of which 1,068 are in the town. The census of 1841 gives us a slightly different, but more detailed picture of the area.

Area	Houses Inhabited	Houses Uninhabited	Building	Families	Population	Males	Females
Town	143	6	0	197	990	486	504
Hinterland	229	2	6	274	1,604	817	787

At first glance, this table shows a very healthy picture. The market and post town had a population of 990 and the hinterland supports even more people, 1,604. However, closer inspection reveals evidence of over-population. In both the town and the surrounding area, the number of families exceeded the number of houses, so two or more families often shared the same house.

This study will concentrate on six individual townlands in the Dunlavin area as being representative of the whole area. The six randomly chosen townlands are

1. Loughmogue Upper
2. Lugatryna
3. Cowpasture
4. Milltown
5. Tornant Upper
6. Dunlavin Lower

The figures given in the census of 1841 for these townlands read thus:

Area	Houses Inhabited	Houses Uninhabited	Building	Families	Population	Males	Females
Loughmogue Upper	18	0	0	29	131	69	62
Lugatryna	8	0	0	9	42	24	18
Cowpasture	9	0	0	10	71	33	38
Milltown	26	1	1	33	159	75	84
Tornant Upper	6	0	0	10	52	24	28
Dunlavin Lower	12	0	0	13	67	36	31

The townlands of Loughmogue Upper and Milltown were especially populous. The local landlord's house and demesne were located in Loughmogue Upper and Milltown had its mill as a source of employment, so settlement in these areas was particularly heavy. Every single townland in the study had a higher number of families than inhabited houses, so overpopulation was obviously widespread.

The famine struck in 1845 lasted until approximately 1850. The next census was taken in 1851, and it paints a very different picture of the Dunlavin area to 1841.

Area	Houses Inhabited	Houses Uninhabited	Building	Families	Population	Males	Females
Town	139	11	0	167	757	379	378
Hinterland	169	4	0	189	984	520	464

The 1851 census shows a drop in the total population, and a decrease in the numbers of both families and houses, with a rise in the number of uninhabited houses. This is especially true in the 'hinterland' columns and the rural area surrounding the town obviously suffered very badly during the famine years. The situation becomes clear when we refer back to the six sample townlands.

Area	Houses Inhabited	Houses Uninhabited	Building	Families	Population	Males	Females
Loughmogue Upper	11 (18)	0 (0)	0 (0)	14 (29)	71 (131)	40 (69)	31 (62)
Lugatryna	3 (8)	0 (0)	0(0)	4(9)	16 (42)	11 (24)	5 (18)
Cowpasture	9 (9)	1 (0)	0 (0)	9 (10)	22 (71)	13 (33)	9 (38)
Milltown	3 (26)	0 (1)	0 (1)	5 (33)	30 (159)	15 (75)	15 (84)
Tornant Upper	6 (6)	0 (0)	0 (0)	8 (10)	42 (52)	21 (24)	21 (28)
Dunlavin Lower	5 (12)	0 (0)	0 (0)	5 (13)	20 (67)	10 (36)	10 (31)

The above table shows the figures for 1851, in the aftermath of the famine (the first figure in each column) juxtaposed with the figures for 1841, before the famine (the second figure in brackets in each column). Every townland in the study recorded a decrease in population. This decrease was due to starvation and emigration. The townland of Milltown was particularly badly hit. The townland lost just over 80% of its population, which declined from 159 to 30. Even the least affected townland, Tornant Upper lost approximately 20% of its population as the figures declined from 52 to 42. The average population decline in the six sample townlands was just over 60%, with overall totals falling from 522 in 1841 to 201 in 1851. This represents a huge proportion of the population who simply disappeared from the area, due to death and out migration between 1841 and 1851. The rural hinterland of Dunlavin was obviously devastated by the Great Famine.

Despite this devastation, only small increases were recorded in the number of uninhabited houses in the Dunlavin area. Given the massive drop in population, one would expect a large increase in uninhabited houses, but this was not the case. The material contained in the census returns provides an answer to this apparent discrepancy also. The census of 1851 divided the houses of Ireland into four classes:

1. Fourth class – one roomed mud cabins.
2. Third class – better cottages with between two and four rooms.
3. Second class – good farmhouses, or houses in streets, with between five and nine rooms.
4. First class – all houses better than the preceding classes

The people who suffered most during the famine were the poor, the small farmers, labourers and cottiers. They were the ones who lived in the worst houses, and many of the houses surrounding Dunlavin were fourth class. As people died or left the area, these mud cabins and small cottages were simply knocked down to clear the land for other uses. Many historians maintain that the famine nearly wiped out the cottier class. Certainly, it was a huge blow to these poorer people, and a study of the numbers of houses in the Dunlavin area reveals that the famine obliterated some traces of their existence in this locality as well.

This research study has examined the effects of the Great Famine in one locality. Primary source material from the census of 1841 and the census of 1851 has been used to paint a demographic picture of the Dunlavin area in west Wicklow. The number of houses (both inhabited and uninhabited), the number of families and the size of the overall population in the area in both 1841 and 1851 have been noted. In addition, six sample townlands have been chosen within the Dunlavin area and an in-depth study of the situation in these townlands has been presented.

The pattern of population loss is evident in all these townlands, though some suffered more than others during the famine. Another trend that is evident from the census data is the decline in the numbers of houses, with four of the six townlands showing a drop in the number of inhabited houses and the other two townlands retaining the same number of inhabited houses in 1851 as they had in 1841. Many fourth class houses were tumbled, so the number of uninhabited houses did not rise significantly in 1851. This study has shown that the Great Famine had a devastating effect on the Dunlavin region, and proves that large scale population losses were not confined to the west of Ireland. West Wicklow suffered badly too, and the census data from before and after the famine has provided a very useful source to examine the extent of this suffering.

NOTE: The ‘Hinterland’ column in the census tables includes the following townlands: Annalecky, Blackhill, Boherboy, Brewershill, Cowpasture, Decoy, Dunlavin Upper, Forristeen, Lorrug, Merginstown*, Plezica, Toberbeg, Uppertown, Ballylea, Dunlavin Lower, Knockandort, Knocknagull, Loughmore (Upper and Lower), Lugatryna, Milltown, Rathbawn, Tornant (Upper and Lower).

*Merginstown is in three divisions.

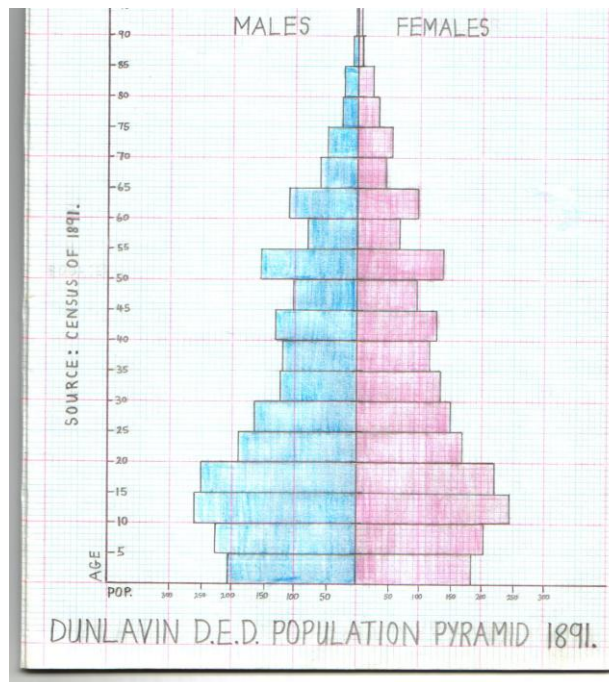
Sources:

1. Census of Ireland 1841, Irish Microfilms edition, Fiche 3, pp 140 –141.
2. Census of Ireland 1851, Irish Microfilms edition, Fiche 11, pp 360, 364, 366.
3. Samuel Lewis, A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland, i (London 1837) p.583.

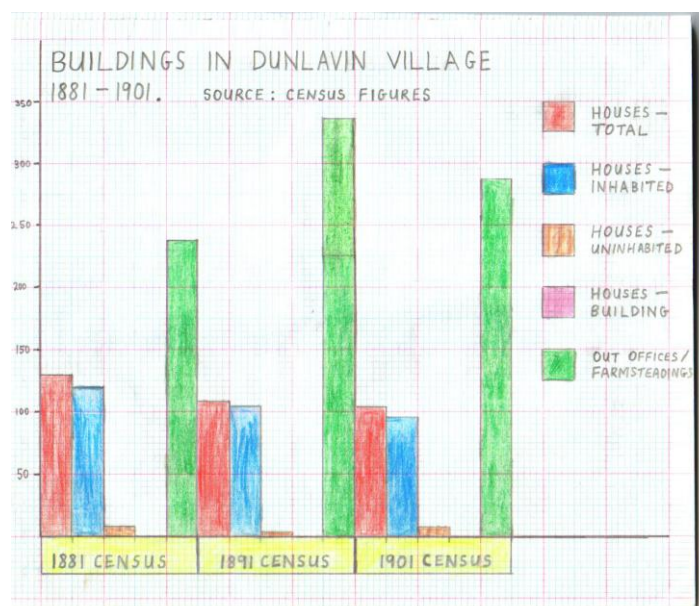
Note: The use of graphs in the research study booklet.

Graphs can be drawn by hand directly into the official answer books, as the sample scans of a population pyramid, a bar graph and a pie chart below illustrate.

Dunlavin D.E.D. population pyramid 1891.



Buildings in Dunlavin Village 1881-1901.



Primary education in Dunlavin – Age breakdown.

