Ian White works for the Office for National Statistics (ONS). He has worked at ONS (and its predecessors, the Office for Population censuses and Surveys, and the General Register Office) since 1970, and has been involved in every UK census (in one way or another) since then (five censuses in all). He is the last remaining active member of the ONS staff who worked at Somerset House, the home of the very first General Register Office (GRO) Census in England and Wales in 1841. Ian has a wealth of experience on census matters. He headed the work on UK legislation for the 2001 and 2011 censuses and has been involved in working within Eurostat and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe on international census matters.

Ian has written a book on the history of the census in the United Kingdom (census and Sensitivity) to be published by Palgrave Macmillan next year. This chapter contains material extracted from the book and presents a look at the history of the census throughout Ireland before 1921 and in Northern Ireland since 1926.

Ian was supported in his writing of this chapter by Mr Uel McMath from NISRA’s Census Office. Uel has worked on the last four censuses in Northern Ireland since 1981 with an occasional inter-census sabbatical. Uel managed the Field Operations elements of both the 2001 and 2011 censuses and holds a wealth of experience of the recent censuses and also of the legislative basis of the census in Northern Ireland.
2.1 The all-Irish censuses: 1813-1911

1813

2.1.1 The 1800 Population Act that provided for the first census in Great Britain obtained Royal Assent on 31 December, just one day before passing of the Act of Union. This, together with a very much different local administration in Ireland meant that the 1801 Census did not extend across all parts of the new United Kingdom. However, to make amends for this, a Bill to take a census in Ireland was presented to Parliament on 31 January 1806 by James Fitzgerald, the MP for Ennis, County Clare.

2.1.2 He noted, thanking the Speaker for allowing time to introduce such a measure, that a census in Ireland would help to “... assimilate the laws of and regulations of Ireland to those of this country, as far as it is just and expedient”.

2.1.3 Fitzgerald echoed arguments that Charles Abbott MP had made in the House of Commons in support of the 1800 Bill:

“It must indeed be obvious to every man conversant with the subject that to ascertain the population of a country is a grand desideratum in political economy, whether considered with regard to its physical force, its agricultural produce, or its financial capacities”.

2.1.4 He observed, however, that in Ireland there was no mechanism equivalent to English poor law administration, for enumerating the population. Instead he proposed that the Bill should give the responsibility to

“... the magistrates of the City of Dublin with the advice of their recorder, and the magistrates of the other Irish counties aided by the advice of the assistant barristers, at a general quarter session, to appoint one or more householder, according to necessity, for each barony, parish or such other district as may be deemed expedient, for the purposes of collecting a list of the inhabitants of such districts, the expense arising from such appointments to be defrayed by the assessment of the grand juries of the several counties in the same manner as presentment for roads etc, are now provided.”

2.1.5 Fitzgerald was concerned to give the House the fullest opportunity of examining the Bill, and to that end he proposed that he should not move the second reading until after the Easter recess. However, having been given the opportunity to do so, the House clearly thought that the desideratum was not strong enough, since the Bill failed to get through its next Parliamentary stage and was dropped. And it was only during the debate on the next Population Bill for Great Britain in 1810 that the proposal for a census in Ireland was again raised.

2.1.6 This led to a second Bill introduced on 29 January 1812 by Sir John Newport MP, who expressed his surprise that

“...a measure should have been so long deferred which would enable Parliament to ascertain the number of persons for whom it is to legislate. Twice since the Union has the population of Great Britain been calculated, but in this respect, as well as in others, the natives of Ireland have been totally neglected.”

Report of the Commissioners appointed to take the Census of Ireland for the year 1841

“Many inquiries of a similar nature, might no doubt, have been pursued with an advantage to a correct knowledge of the condition of the people. We felt, in fact, that a census ought to be a social survey, not a bare enumeration, but we were restrained by the apprehension that jealousy and prejudice might be excited if we made our inquiries too searching and too minute... People are slow to see that questions relating to themselves and their households can have any bearing on the general good, and forget that, in accounts of large numbers, the individual is wholly lost sight of in the average, but that averages can only be obtained by an accurate knowledge of all that pertains to the individual.”
2.1.7 He considered it an absurdity that all Bills did not automatically cover the whole of the United Kingdom and that it was left to the individual introducing them to determine what parts of the kingdom should be included. He noted that Ireland was more often than not excluded.

2.1.8 Conducted under the supervision of William Shaw Mason, the 1813 Census attempted to follow the mode of the 1811 Census in Great Britain, but with an administrative system rather similar to that set out in the aborted 1806 Bill. The Enumerators were drawn from the barony constables and parish officers, which led to some hostility from the local population. The resulting conflict, combined with poor administration, led to the submission of very incomplete returns. Mason valiantly extended the Census until 1815 at which point he finally gave up the attempt to collect any further returns. No results were published at the time, but in the Report of the subsequent census of 1821, Mason wrote of the 1813 enumeration:

“At the expiration of two years employed in trying to accomplish the object of the Legislature, it was found on examining the returns, that out of the forty Counties and Counties of Cities into which Ireland is divided, ten only furnished complete returns; in four, no steps whatsoever were taken in pursuance with the Act; and those of the remaining twenty six were inaccurate or defective. The Act therefore may be considered to have been wholly inoperative as to its main objective, that of ascertaining the number of souls by actual enumeration. By the aid of comparative calculations founded on previous inquiries and on the partial results of the Act, the amount of population in 1813 has been conjectured to be 5,937,856”.  

Whitelaw’s 1798 Census of Dublin

2.1.9 It was of particular disappointment to Mason that the City of Dublin was one of the districts for which no returns were collected, not least because this was clearly the most populous, but also because of the earlier prodigious, and far more successful, effort to enumerate the city by the Reverend James Whitelaw in 1798. In a footnote to the 1813 Census figure quoted in the 1821 Report (and which was estimated on the basis of some rather spurious statistical calculations, and is generally regarded as unreliable), Mason added:

“Although in a recapitulation of this general nature, the attempts of ascertaining the population of particular districts are not properly admissible, yet it would be scarcely justice to the memory of a most intelligent and persevering character, the late Rev. James Whitelaw, to suffer his account of the population of the city of Dublin to pass wholly unnoticed. The peculiar circumstances of that city, during the rebellion of 1798, led him to undertake an account of the population by actual enumeration. At that period every householder was obliged to affix on the outside of his door, a list of the names of every person then residing in the house. The numbers were then collected by Mr Whitelaw, and published by him, together with a comparative statement of the numbers, taken in 1803, by the conservators of the peace, after the insurrection in that year. The totals, in both cases, were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Houses</th>
<th>Inhabitants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1798</td>
<td>16,401</td>
<td>172,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1804</td>
<td>15,958</td>
<td>169,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in six years</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>2,563</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1.10 Indeed, Whitelaw (though he little realised it at first) had set himself a daunting task, but one only made possible, ironically, by the disturbed state of the country resulting from the United Irishmen Rebellion of 1798. As a security measure at that time the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Thomas Fleming, ordered that a list of inhabitants be fixed to the door of every house in the city. Thus the task of census-taking seemed to Whitelaw at first to be a fairly straight-forward matter of merely collecting the number of names.
2.1.11 Fuelled by the lack of any reliable data on the population of the country, Whitelaw had been motivated to contemplate such an innovative exercise in the first place for much the same reasons that had driven John Rickman to propose a census in England, in his 1796 pamphlet on Thoughts on the utility and facility of a general enumeration of the people of the British Empire. (Rickman would, of course, go on to oversee the first four censuses in Great Britain.

2.1.12 Referring to the population controversy that had been raging in England throughout the latter half of the 18th century, Whitelaw wrote in his report to Philip, Earl of Hardwicke, the Lord Lieutenant General and Governor General of Ireland

"Struck with this strange diversity of opinion, anxious to ascertain the truth, and influenced, perhaps, by a laudable ambition of being the first to offer to the public what is often wished for in vain, an accurate well-arranged census of a considerable capital, I availed myself of the favourable opportunity offered by the unhappy situation of this city at the commencement of the late rebellion; and with the sanction of the Government, but at my own private expense and toil, began a census of the inhabitants of the city of Dublin, early in the month of May, 1798."\(^3\)

2.1.13 He initially anticipated no real difficulty, believing that he would have little more to do than transcribe carefully the list of the inhabitants posted on the doors. Indeed, in more prosperous areas there was generally some individual member of the family competent enough to do the task, and, there, Whitelaw found the lists to be correct (though he did not explain how he verified this). But it was clear that among poorer families that formed by far the majority of the population, the case was very different. There, he reported

"The lists on the doors were .......... frequently illegible, and generally short of the actual number by a third or even a half."

2.1.14 Thus he resorted to a more intrusive enquiry

"In order effectually to obviate the difficulty, my assistants and I, ................., explored, in the burning month of the summer, every room of those habitations, from the cellar to the garret, and on the spot ascertained their population."

2.1.15 He expected opposition but experienced none, and found that

"... everyone was ready to cooperate."

2.1.16 Whitelaw put this down to a combination of a fear and dread that the authorities would take punitive action against anyone showing any form of disaffection, and a belief by the inhabitants that he was employed by the Government to help prepare some sort of system for the relief of their conditions. He noted that, in the course of the whole survey, only one Enumerator had been assaulted, when

"... in attempting to remonstrate with a butcher of Ormond Market on the incorrectness of his list, the butcher flung at him a quantity of blood and offal."
2.1.17 The method for carrying out the enumeration that Whitelaw described proved to be a model that subsequent census takers could only aspire to, in particular, the lengths he took in the training and supervision of his field staff. He was initially very much concerned about the ability of his Enumerators to carry out the task:

“I was, at first, much embarrassed by the inexperience of my assistants. I employed them therefore in taking surveys of the streets that I had already surveyed myself, until I discovered that they had attained a sufficient degree of accuracy. I never relied on their returns with implicit confidence, but made them frequently act as checks on each other. Two or more of them frequently surveyed the same street in succession, without any communication with each other, and if any material variation occurred, I investigated it myself on the spot.”

2.1.18 In addition, Whitelaw himself re-enumerated the hardest-to-count populations living in the poorest streets, as he expected these to produce the most error. Thus he was able to report

“... in the poorer parts of the city, there are few streets that have not been twice, and some, even three times surveyed.”

2.1.19 Whitelaw was particularly concerned with determining the density of population, not only to highlight the extent of deprivation in the poorer districts, but also to produce an algorithm which could be applied to calculate the populations of other European capital cities.

2.1.20 His figures revealed, for example, that the parishes within the old walled part of the city were much more densely populated than the newer suburbs, ranging from an horrendously overcrowded 439 persons per acre in St Michael’s (opposite Christchurch) to a more comfortable 87 per acre in St Thomas’s (around the Sackville Street/Gardiner Street area – now known as O’Connell Street).

1821 and 1831: improving the count?

2.1.21 Following the failure of Mason’s first enumeration, another Act had followed immediately in 1815 leading to a rather more successful attempt in 1821 to carry out the census throughout the whole of the island at the same time. The Act provided a more stable administration for the census than its predecessor, and overall responsibility was transferred from the Grand Juries to the Bench of Magistrates.

2.1.22 The Enumerators were mostly appointed from the pool of tax collectors, who, like the Poor Law officials in England, would be familiar with the area and with its inhabitants, and for the first time in the United Kingdom the Enumerator was instructed to write down the details about each individual in a record book. The information collected included the name, relationship to head of household, age, occupation, number of acres for landholders, and any observations. The census was taken on 28 May 1821, as it was elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

2.1.23 Much of the improvement in this census was due to the fact that the tabulations were carried out centrally, leading to uniformity of the returns of families. However, the resulting total population figure of 6.8 million may still have been somewhat of an undercount, since not only were the Enumerators inexperienced (though they may well have been familiar with their area), but a general lack of public confidence in the Government made householders reluctant to disclose to the authorities information that they believed might then be used as the basis of further oppression, and rendering them liable to tax duty and/or service in the militia.

2.1.24 However, by the time the 1821 Census was taken, relations between the Government and the public seemed easier than they had been for some years before, or were to be for some years after, and the Catholic clergy ameliorated some of the public’s concerns, encouraging their church members to give accurate information. Not without some success it would seem since, in the Report of the 1841 Census³, the Census Commissioners, while they thought that the 1821 was indeed likely to have produced an undercount, did not regard it as defective enough to make the difference
between it and the 1831 Census figure (14.2 per cent) an inaccurate representation of population growth over the decade. Nevertheless, much of the information collected in the 1821 Census remained unpublished.

2.1.25 The 1831 Census itself was an enigmatic enquiry. Very little commentary from it exists, and we can only make conjectures from the limited results that were published and the few comments made in the reports of subsequent Irish censuses.

2.1.26 The census was undertaken by George Hatchell, designated, according to the only report published as ‘The Officer appointed by the Chief Secretary of the Lord Lieutenant for digesting and arranging the Population Returns of Ireland’. The Report, however, gives neither an introduction nor any details of enumeration procedures adopted - not even the date of which the census was nominally supposed to have been carried out. It is likely, however, that a procedure similar to that employed in 1821 was followed, where Enumerators, recruited from the pool of local tax collectors, recorded information by means of door-to-door visits. Certainly there would have been little time to develop a significantly different approach since the relevant legislation for it was only passed on 30 March that year.

2.1.27 The questions asked were along the lines of those included in the 1831 British Census, and omitted the question on age. Interestingly, however, one surviving return, for the parish of Dunboe in County Londonderry records information on religion, separately identifying ‘Church of Ireland’, ‘Roman Catholic’, ‘Presbyterian’ and ‘Other’, though there is no reference to any such information in Hatchell’s Report. It is possible therefore, that such information was recorded by the Enumerator as part of his ‘observations’ and was, thus, not universally collected – and would not therefore have been officially reported.

2.1.28 It is generally thought that, whereas the 1821 Census under-estimated the population, the 1831 figure of 7.8 million was an over-count arising from the fact that, in the event, the enumeration, according to the Report of the 1841 Census, was taken

“… at different dates, at different times extending over a considerable period. It is understood, too, that the enumerators considered that they would be paid - and in many cases were paid - in proportion to the numbers they enumerated, the obvious tendency of which would be to augment the total numbers.”

2.1.29 Certainly the figures were, at the time, considered unsatisfactory since they were subject to a further examination and correction in 1834 by the Commissioners of Public Instruction for their 1835 Report.

1841: a pioneering effort

2.1.30 In 1841, while use was being made of the recently created Registration Service in England and Wales, in Ireland a new network of the officers and men of the Dublin Metropolitan and Constabulary police force were employed as the field force for this and subsequent censuses.

2.1.31 The 1841 Census in Ireland was, in comparison both with the two preceding censuses and with the corresponding enumeration in Great Britain, a remarkable achievement, not only in the method of the collection of data but in the range of questions covered. In addition to the topics included in England and Wales, the Irish census form enquired into members of the family who were absent and who had died since the previous census, and a separate form collected information to assess the quality of the housing stock and some agricultural statistics.

2.1.32 The authority for the census was the Census (Ireland) Act, 1840 passed the day after the corresponding legislation for Great Britain on 10 August 1840. At first Parliament had agreed that the census should be taken

“…on one or more consecutive days in the month of July 1841”,

with the actual date(s) to be determined by the Lord Lieutenant; a date of 1 July eventually being
fixed. But following some adverse reaction to such a comparatively late date, the decision was subsequently taken, at the suggestion of the Statistical Society of London, to bring the enumeration forward to 6 June so that it should be simultaneous with the census in Great Britain. A further Act was passed, accordingly, to amend the earlier legislation.

2.1.33 The Act was considerably less specific in detail than the corresponding Act for Great Britain; but this led, ironically, to the more detailed question content. It required Enumerators to

“... take an account, in writing, ... of the number of persons dwelling therein, and of the sex, age, and occupation of all such persons, distinguishing the persons born in the place or parish, and county in which they shall be then dwelling; and shall also take an account of the number of inhabited houses and of uninhabited houses, and of houses then building, within such districts respectively; ... and shall also take an account of all such further particulars as by such instructions they may be directed to inquire into; such particulars and instructions having no reference to the religion of any person or persons.”

2.1.34 This gave a relatively free hand to the Irish authorities to include any additional questions as they wished. Though the collection of information on religion was specifically prohibited, other information considered to be of value could be collected on the authorisation of the Lord Lieutenant, who delegated this responsibility to the Chief Secretary, who in turn passed the task of carrying out the census to a group of Commissioners, namely William Tighe Hamilton, Henry J Brownrigg, William Robert Wills Wilde and Thomas Aiskew Larcom. Each was chosen because of the responsibilities they held in other areas of Irish public administration.

2.1.35 Hamilton, the Chief Commissioner, was a civil servant in the Chief Secretary’s office, holding the purse strings and providing authority for the collection of the unspecified information. Brownrigg was Inspector General of the Constabulary, and, as such, controlled the personnel necessary for the enumeration. Wilde (father of Oscar) played a key role as a medical and cultural commentator in the 1841 and subsequent Irish censuses (for 1841 he was employed particularly to analyse the data on deaths which would be collected at the census for the first time). And Larcom, a career soldier, was working at the Ordnance Survey of Ireland and responsible for providing statistical, social, geological and topographical guides for Ireland.

2.1.36 In addition to paving the way for a much larger census, with more questions in order to enquire into the ‘condition of the people’, Larcom, and his fellow Commissioners also introduced a number of other important innovations to the Census, none of which had been carried out, either in Ireland or in Great Britain, before.

2.1.37 The Enumerators (mainly constables) were instructed first to complete a survey of the houses in their district, recoding information for each on;

- whether it was built or being built;
- whether the walls were constructed from mud, stone or brick, and whether the roof was slated or thatched;
- whether it was a private dwelling, public building, manufactory, hotel, public house, lodging house, shop, school etc;
- whether inhabited or uninhabited; and
- the number of stories (including basement) rooms (exclusive of closets) and front windows.

2.1.38 This enabled a four-fold classification of dwellings derived from the number of rooms and windows, and durability (as assessed by the material used in the constructions of their walls and roofs), to be produced which would, the Commissioners hoped

“... throw some useful light upon the general condition of the community, as there can be no more obvious indication of the advances and condition of a people than improvement in the comfort of their residence.”"
2.1.39 For farms, information was also collected on:

- the number of acres (distinguishing between arable, pasture and waste); and
- numbers of livestock (horses, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and poultry)

and for all properties, the Enumerators were required to record:

- the number of families in the house; and
- the name of the head of each family.

2.1.40 A definition of families was given for the first time, being

“…either one individual living independently in a house, or part of a house, on his or her own means of support, or several individuals related to each other, as parents and children, brothers or sisters etc, with the addition of servants or visitors, living together in the same house, or part of a house, upon one common means of support. A lodger, or family of lodgers, who do not board with the family of the house, should be treated as a distinct family. Where such do board with the family of the house, they should be treated as one with it”.

- a description which we easily recognise as the basis for the definition of a household today.

2.1.41 The information recorded on the housing schedule relating to families and heads of families was then used by the Enumerator as a check on the information collected from the household form, which (as in Great Britain) was to be completed by the head of family for the first time. Blank copies of these were supposed to be distributed to each family in each house in the week before the census by the Enumerator, who was instructed to ensure that the house number used in the housing form was written on the household form.

2.1.42 The latter contained three ‘tables’ for each head of family to complete. The first asked for information relating to each member of the family on:

- age, sex, and marital status;
- relationship to head of family;
- year of marriage(s);
- occupation;
- school attendance and literacy (recording either ‘Read’, ‘Read and write’ or ‘Cannot read’); and
- birthplace.

2.1.43 For those living on farms further information was collected on the number of day’s employment and the level of wages.

2.1.44 The occupation data collected allowed Larcom to derive an occupational classification somewhat more developed than those adopted by John Rickman and William Farr in Great Britain.

Firstly, families were classified according to their ‘pursuits’ in a way that distinguished between those dependent on ‘agriculture’ and those on ‘manufacture and trade’, and which provided a reasonable comparison with the figures presented for Great Britain (and for Ireland from the previous census). Secondly, they were classified according to their ‘means’ thus creating three groups which could be said to represent upper, middle and lower social classes. Thirdly, people were classified according to how they ministered to the wants of others.

2.1.45 The second ‘table’ sought to record name, age, sex, relationship, occupation, and place of residence for those family members absent on census night, which, thereby, anticipated the collection of information on all residents in Great Britain by some 90 years. The Commissioners’ Report, using such information, together with that on occupation, devoted much space to commenting on migration, both long-term and short-term, and both internal and external. In commenting on the phenomenon of economic migration, for example, they wrote

“It is gratifying to see that a considerable amount of productive labour is afforded by the counties in which the manufacture of linen and cotton prevails. Antrim, Down, Armagh and
Londonderry by the prevalence of bleachers, indicate their peculiar proportions. In almost every county a considerable number of male strangers appear to be weavers, and of females, spinners. Shoemakers appear to migrate more than tailors, but both are numerous. Artificers in building would seem to be everywhere in demand, and form a moveable class.”

2.1.46 And in commenting on the reasons for including a question on absent residents specifically, the Commissioners noted (describing a sort of 19th century e-Borders)

“... We had taken measures to obviate certain inconveniences which we had reason to apprehend would arise from the lateness of the season at which the census was taken. Of these the principle arose from the fact, familiar to everyone acquainted with Ireland, that in the month of June the agricultural population is in a state of considerable movement; the labourers resorting, in search of work, to neighbouring counties, which require more labour than the resident population can supply, and many proceeding to England or Scotland for the purpose of reaping the harvest. The numbers thus migrating to Great Britain having been variously stated, we required from the police at every port, an enumeration of all deck passengers who embarked on board the various packets during the summer of 1841. For this purpose a competent officer was stationed at each packet office, and each person as he received his ticket for embarking was asked from what country he came.”

2.1.47 The third ‘table’ was to record information on all people who had married, and those who had died in the family residence, during the previous decade. Name, age, sex, relationship to the current head of family, occupation, and cause and date of death, were required, and the responses provided a mass of statistical data to enable William Wilde to report in some depth, in a second volume of the Census Report, analyses of mortality in Ireland in a manner that Farr was only able to emulate in England and Wales with the benefit of civil registration after the establishment of the General Register Office. Wilde’s report certainly overshadowed much of the remainder of the published census output.

2.1.48 The amount of information collected and analysed in the 1841 Irish Census was thus by far the greatest ever attempted anywhere in the British Isles – but it might have been even larger but for the Commissioners’ concerns about not making the Census too intrusive. They noted in their Report

“Many inquiries of a similar nature, might no doubt, have been pursued with an advantage to a correct knowledge of the condition of the people. We felt, in fact, that a census ought to be a social survey, not a bare enumeration, but we were restrained by the apprehension that jealousy and prejudice might be excited if we made our inquiries too searching and too minute”.

2.1.49 And in observing the public’s lack of understanding of the nature and purpose of the census, which is no less prevalent today, the Commissioners added:

“People are slow to see that questions relating to themselves and their households can have any bearing on the general good, and forget that, in accounts of large numbers, the individual is wholly lost sight of in the average, but that averages can only be obtained by an accurate knowledge of all that pertains to the individual.”

2.1.50 The Census produced by far the most accurate count of population in Ireland to that date.

1851-1871: a period of population decline

2.1.51 Three years after the 1841 Census, the Irish Marriages Act 1844, created the General Register Office in Ireland and the post of Registrar General. William Donnelly was the first appointee and held office until 1876, and was responsible for conducting the next three censuses. However, the Registrars thereby appointed to register non-Catholic marriages and to solemnise civil
forms were produced to facilitate better coverage, specifically, in workhouses, hospitals, schools and colleges, barracks, prisons, and at ports. The process for completing the schedules was still left, however, to the Enumerator, suggesting that either at least this element of the enumeration process was not unsuccessful in 1841, or that there was no viable alternative.

2.1.57 The Commissioners were pleased to be able to report to the Lord Lieutenant in June 1856 that

“... owing to the zeal and diligence of the Superintendents, and the good feeling of all classes, we received within a reasonable time from the 30th March, the returns from every Constabulary district in Ireland complete, with only very few exceptions, in which the parties at first refused to fill in the forms. In these cases a remonstrance from us had the desired effect of procuring the returns, so that in no instance had we to resort to the compulsory powers... in order to obtain the necessary information.”

2.1.58 Nevertheless, despite a seemingly universal coverage, Donnelly and Wilde had to report a much decreased population of some 6,552,385. This was almost 20 per cent fewer than in 1841 – a decline attributed to migration and famine during the decade, following on from the continued widespread failure of the potato crop, particularly in 1841 and 1844, and, far more catastrophically, in the years after 1845. Only in the major urban areas of Dublin, Belfast, Galway, Limerick, Waterford, Cork, Kilkenny and Drogheda were increases in population recorded.

2.1.59 The 1861 Census, carried out on 7 April that year (again, as elsewhere in the UK) counted even fewer souls, just 5,798,967, but Donnelly and Wilde were able to report, more encouragingly that

“The causes which led to the diminution of the population between 1851 and 1861 were, happily, not of the twofold character to which the decrease was to be attributed between 1841 and 1851. In the latter decade it may be said to have been owing to the great mortality marriages, were not given the same enumeration responsibilities as their counterparts in England and Wales. In Ireland, therefore, the machinery of the field operation was again left principally to the police.

2.1.52 The Census (Ireland) Act 1850 took effect in late July that year, and prescribed a census in 1851 to be taken on 30 March (the same day as in Great Britain) that would be much the same as the previous enumeration. And, again, it left the decision whether or not to include additional questions, in effect, to the discretion of Donnelly, as Chief Commissioner, and William Wilde, who had been retained as Assistant Commissioner.

2.1.53 It is very probable that ill health, at that time, prevented Larcom from taking up the post of Registrar General and Chief Commissioner, but he later went on to become Under Secretary for Ireland and, in that role, was influential in ensuring that the civil registration was extended to births and deaths in an act passed in 1863.

2.1.54 More new questions were, indeed, added to the schedule by Donnelly and Wilde. The household form added both a column to identify persons who were deaf and dumb or blind, and an instruction to the education question that

“The word ‘Irish’ is to be added in this column to the name of each person who speaks Irish, but who cannot speak English; and the words ‘Irish and English’ to the names of those who can speak both the Irish and English languages.”

2.1.55 The latter thus had anticipated, by twenty years, the question on Gaelic speakers in the Scottish census, and by thirty years the equivalent enquiry in Wales. The 1850 Act continued, however, to prohibit, specifically, any enquiry into religion.

2.1.56 A new separate form was introduced to collect information on persons who were

“...afflicted with insanity or idiocy”,

and, reflecting the difficulties experienced in 1841 in enumerating institutions, a variety of other
and emigration which originated with the famine consequent upon the failure of the potato crop for several years, commencing with 1845. The diminution between 1851 and 1861 may be said to have directly due to emigration, no fatal epidemic, we are happy to state, having prevailed during that period. 46

2.1.60 Indeed, the total number of emigrants from Irish ports in the decade leading up to the 1861 Census according to the Registrar General’s returns was 1,208,350, being some 97 per cent of all persons departing from UK shores in this period. However, it should be remembered that the Census was, at that time, still the only source of mortality data in Ireland, and the Commissioners acknowledged the estimates of the annual numbers of deaths reported were likely to have been less than the actual occurrences.

2.1.61 Despite this loss of population, particularly among the agricultural classes, what surprised the Commissioners was that the amount of arable land had increased significantly from 13.5 million acres in 1841 to 15.5 million in 1861, and made up some 74 per cent of the total land area of Ireland at the time of the Census – though they noted that the amount of arable land that was recorded as being ‘under crops’ was more or less unchanged in the decade 1851-1861.

2.1.62 In form and content, 1861 differed significantly from the previous census only in that, for the first time, the Act prescribing it allowed a question on religion to be included. After making specific provisions prohibiting the inclusion of such a question in the legislation for the previous four censuses, Parliament had to be convinced that to allow it this time was both justified and safe. As had been shown to be the case in Great Britain in 1851, it was clear that there was no lack of interest in the topic (though the reasons for the enquiry in Ireland were very much different), and the analysis of the responses to the question, together with the enquiry into education, required a whole volume to itself. Moreover, in Ireland the question was included on a mandatory basis, and became an integral component of the Irish census throughout the rest of the century.

2.1.63 Both in the 1861 and 1871 Censuses, Donnelly and Wilde gave much attention to the analysis of religious profession and education in combination. The General Report to the 1871 Census alone devoted some 90 pages to the subject. In introducing the commentary, they noted (rather smugly perhaps)

“We now come to deal with the two elements – religion and education – whose presence serves more than anything else to distinguish the Irish Census returns from those of Great Britain, and to bring them, into harmony with the census returns of all the world beside. It is no duty of ours to speculate upon the reasons which have determined the Legislature to maintain for Great Britain an isolation, which, in this respect at all event, entitles the statisticians of the world to qualify the inhabitants of the sister Island as ‘Penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos’.

There were sufficient reasons we doubt not; but whatever those reasons may have been, it is the fact, meanwhile, that every principality in the world with a claim to civilisation – England and Scotland alone excepted – takes careful note and register of the confessional differences of its subjects. The self-governing Colonies, great and small, of our Empire are at
one in this respect with all the Governments of Christendom; and while forbearing to discuss the policy that excepts Great Britain from the general rule – a policy which we have no commission to examine – we cannot forbear congratulating ourselves that Ireland has been exempted from the application of that policy.”

2.1.64 They went on to note the importance of having accurate counts of the numbers within each religious denomination on which to reach “safe conclusions based on authentic figures” rather than having to rely, as Great Britain did, on “valueless conjecture”.

2.1.65 Such was the considered importance of obtaining accurate returns for the question on religion in Ireland, that in both the 1861 and 1871 Censuses, where responses were unclear (for example, when the simple response ‘Protestant’ was given) follow-up enquiries were instigated in order to find out the particular denomination in each case. However, this was not always successful, and the Commissioners had to admit that

“In a very few cases the entries were facetious, and although we afforded, through our queries, an opportunity to the persons so returning themselves, of making a more becoming return, we did not think it necessary or judicious to reproduce their silliness here.”

But, in reassurance, Donnelly and Wilde noted:

“The number of entries characterised by levity or eccentricity was, exceedingly small, nor can there be any doubt that, upon the whole, the returns were made under a proper sense of responsibility, and are therefore entirely trustworthy”.

2.1.66 The 1871 Irish Census very much followed the 1861 model in almost all other aspects also. However, in reporting the results the Commissioners expanded Larcom’s 1841 classification of dwelling type by subdividing the fourth class and distinguishing those whose walls were constructed from mud, from those where brick or stone were used. They also decided to code and tabulate occupations according to the classification adopted in England and Wales.

1881-1901: few further developments

2.1.67 In their concluding remarks on the General Report of the 1871 Census, Donnelly and Wilde recommended that, in the absence of any likelihood that the responsibility for the census in Ireland would be taken up by a statistical office, as was becoming the case in continental Europe, the appointment of the Commissioners before the next census should be made at least eight months before Census day to allow sufficient time to enable all the preliminary work to be completed. As Commissioners, the 1871 Census had been their third, and they recognised that

“The difficulties attendant upon the execution of so great a work as ours by a temporary Commission were, no doubt, materially lessened in our own regard by the circumstances that the Commissioners brought a large experience to the performance of their duties...”

2.1.68 The same Commissioners clearly did not expect to direct a fourth census, and indeed the new Registrar General, Dr Thomas Wrigley Grimshaw, appointed as such in 1879 in succession to William Malachy Burke, took up the post of Chief Commissioner on 8 December 1880. While this was not as early as the eight months that Donnelly had suggested (Census Day would be 3 April 1881), Grimshaw had in fact discussed arrangements for the Census with the Treasury as early as October 1879 even before the Bill for Census had been presented to Parliament.

2.1.69 The 1881 Census (and the 1891 Census also conducted by Grimshaw), again followed the 1861 model. There were no new topics, but Grimshaw had to report a continued decline in population to the level of just 5.1 million - barely above that of the figure estimated from the incomplete 1813 Census – though he noted that the percentage decrease had declined in each successive decade since 1841-51, being just 4.4 per cent since 1871. 

47
2.1.70 Grimshaw did, however, introduce a special enquiry into agricultural holdings, including the value of the land, at the suggestion of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland as a means of collecting information on the number of people on farms of different acreages. He regarded the benefit of this survey as

“...providing a standard of comparison for those who desire to compare the results annually published by the Registrar General in his report on the Agricultural Statistics of Ireland, with the actual condition of the agricultural holdings and their occupiers.”

2.1.71 Occupational coding was again carried out along the lines of the Census in England and Wales. However, the classification had been significantly revised since the previous census, and the delay in receiving the details of the new classification from the English Registrar General, George Graham, (just days before Census itself) meant that considerable effort was involved in quickly revising the Irish indexes and instructions for the clerks in time for the coding to start on 1 June that year. However, Grimshaw experimented with the introduction of a social classification of occupations for the city of Dublin that preceded that developed by T H C Stevenson in England and Wales by some 30 years.

2.1.72 The publication of all the main tabulations by the end of the following year was a considerable achievement for the new Commissioners. But Grimshaw was even more industrious at the next Census of which the General Report9 was submitted to the Lord Lieutenant General, the Earl of Zetland, as early as 23 June 1892, less than 16 months after Census day. Again, no new questions were included this time, but the special study into agricultural holdings was repeated. Indeed, this enquiry was becoming a distinctive and valuable element of the Census in Ireland, not comparable with any other part of the UK.

2.1.73 The 1891 Census was otherwise uneventful - save for one thing. During the enumeration there was an outbreak of smallpox in the northern counties which necessitated special disinfection measures to be taken for any persons who were expected to handle the census forms. Grimshaw held emergency discussions with Medical Commissioner of the Local Government Board, the Secretary of the General Post Office and officials at the Stationery Office and Department of Public Works in order to install disinfecting equipment at the Census Office and to prepare impervious covers in which to wrap each census form in order to prevent the spread of the infection. These were, happily, successful, and Grimshaw was able to report that no case of smallpox occurred among his staff during the course of the Census.

2.1.74 As was the case in Great Britain, the first census of the new century in Ireland in 1901 offered few changes, but in reporting on it in June 1902, the Commissioners, who were now Robert E Matheson, the new Registrar General, his deputy Robert J Brew, and T J Bellingham Brady, commented on the difficulty in planning the enumeration resulting from the complete re-arrangement of the territorial divisions following the Local Government (Ireland) Act in 1898. This required the necessary preparatory work to start significantly earlier than usual, and, indeed, a complete plan for the census was submitted to the Government, together with an estimate of costs, as early as 3 November 1898, some five months before the Census Office was officially re-established in April the following year.

2.1.75 But little else seemed to have troubled the new Commissioners. Though they had to report a continued decline in Ireland’s population from 4,704,750 to 4,458,775 in the ten years since the 1891 Census, this percentage reduction at 5.2 per cent was only a little more than half the decline over the previous decade10. The rate of population decrease was slowing – and would continue to do so thereafter.

1911: the last all-Ireland Census

2.1.76 The last census (so it turned out) to be carried out in what was an unpitioned
Ireland, was, much like the 1901 Census had been, little different in conduct and content to its predecessors, other than the addition of the same fertility enquiry that was being carried out for the first time in Great Britain. The 50 pages of the Commissioners’ commentary in the *General Report*[^1], published in February 1913, was, consequently, rather perfunctory; even the new fertility data did not demand much attention and, as in Scotland, there was no separate Report.

### 2.1.77
The number of forms and schedules to be completed either by an Enumerator or the householder had, however, now grown to almost unmanageable proportions. There were some 27 different types of document that required completion for each of the 208 enumeration districts:

- Form A. Family return
- Form B1. House and building return
- Form B2. Return of out-offices and farm-steadings
- Form B3. Shipping return
- Form C. Return of the sick
- Form D. Return of lunatics and idiots, not in institutions
- Form E. Return of paupers in workhouses
- Form F. Hospital return
- Form G. College and boarding school return
- Form H. Return of military, R. I. constabulary, or metropolitan police, in barracks
- Form I. Return of lunatics and idiots in public institutions and private lunatic asylums
- Form K. Prison, Bridewell, and police station return
- Form L1. College and boarding school return
- Form L2. Return of scholars attending schools
- Form L3. Return of children on school roll
- Form L4. University and college return
- Form M1. Return of agricultural holdings
- Form M2. Enumerator’s abstract of returns relating to agricultural holdings
- Form M3. Amalgamation of holdings in occupation of same person
- Form N. Enumerator’s abstract for a townland or street
- Form O1. Enumerator’s summary
- Form O2. Enumerator’s summary of houses, by classes
- Form P1. Names of Enumerators
- Form P2. Townlands, etc., in enumeration district
- Form P3. Enumerator’s return showing material discrepancies in the houses, and the population of the townlands, etc
- Form Q. Schedule of forms
- Form R. Statutory declaration return

with copious notes and instructions accompanying them. The processing of all the data contained therein remained essentially a clerical operation. Mechanical data processing would not be introduced in any part of Ireland until the 1920s.

### 2.1.78
The Parliamentary debate caused little fuss, certainly in comparison with the hours of argument that were simultaneously ensuing over the legislation for the census in Great Britain. Most of the few points that were raised were resolved amicably and with relatively little discussion. John Boland, Irish Parliamentary Party MP for South Kerry, for example, had, at the Bill’s second reading, questioned the collection of information on literacy relating to children as young as five; he felt that such returns would swell the figures to an extent that would mask the true level of illiteracy in Ireland. He observed that in America the minimum age for measuring illiteracy was ten. At first, Augustine Birrel, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, accepted the point and agreed to consider the matter, but in Committee, two days later, he explained that the tabular results would be able to show levels of literacy by any age, thereby making ready comparison with other countries possible.

### 2.1.79
Thomas Scanlan, Irish Parliamentary Party MP for North Sligo, was concerned about the continued use of members of the Irish constabulary as Enumerators, citing instances in England when the enquiries of the Distress Committee had largely broken down because the investigations had been...
entrusted to the police, and noting that in Ireland the constabulary was far more unpopular since it represented, what he considered to be, a “foreign garrison”. He tabled an amendment to have the Bill require that the

“...officials to be appointed by the county councils for the several districts under their respective jurisdictions, and by the local authority of each borough and urban district which is without the jurisdiction of a county council”

should act as the Enumerators instead. Birrel responded by reminding the House that the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police had carried out the enumerations in Ireland since 1841 without any particular obstruction from the public, and that a Treasury Committee, appointed in 1890 to consider the way in which the Census could be improved, while hearing testimony of some inefficiency in the manner in which the enumeration was carried out in England, had, thanks to Grimshaw’s evidence, singled out Ireland for special commendation, and had reported that it had been “uncommonly well done”.

2.1.80 The Registrar General had traditionally commented on marriage and fertility rates in the Irish Census reports (using his own vital registration data), so the inclusion of the new fertility enquiry was generally welcomed by Members, particularly by Birrel himself, who saw the benefit of collecting consistent information across the UK. However, in reporting the re-introduction of the question on duration of marriage, that had been asked in earlier Irish censuses but had since been abandoned, he sardonically observed

“... it was found, as anybody could have foreseen, that it is rather difficult to rely upon the value of statistics which you get from a somewhat hazy memory. I could not myself tell anybody how long I have been married without considerable research, though my memory is still strong enough to say with some confidence the age and the number of my children”.

2.2 The pre-war Northern Ireland censuses

The delayed census in 1926

2.2.1 At the time when the preparations for the Great Britain 1921 Census started – towards the end of 1919 – particular emphasis was laid on the need to harmonise the census questions across all parts of the United Kingdom. To this end a Census Joint Committee was entrusted with the task of achieving the maximum degree of comparability in census statistics in each constituent country. Their efforts to do so were however balked by the political conditions in Ireland that rendered it impracticable to proceed with the census there as planned.

2.2.2 Even at the time when the Census Bill for Ireland was introduced in the Commons, there were serious concerns about its viability. Joseph Montague Kenworthy, Liberal MP for Central Hull believed that most people in the south and west of Ireland would certainly refuse to take part. He asked the Attorney General for Ireland to tell the House

“... how many tanks he will require for the collection of the census forms”.

2.2.3 Captain William Wedgewood Benn, Liberal MP for Leith outside Edinburgh agreed that it would be totally impracticable to do so. Nevertheless, the Bill proceeded along its due course. In Committee there was very little discussion on the content of the census, but more on the risk of expending government funds on such a risky venture. The Rt Hon Sir Donald Charles Hugh Maclean, then leader of the Liberal Opposition, in particular, did not believe that any sane person would think for a moment that there was any chance whatsoever of a census taking place in Ireland. He said

“If conditions arise in Ireland under which a census can be taken, then there will be an Irish authority for taking it, and not this House. Ireland is now in a state of chaos, if not of de facto civil war, and the Government are asking this House to support them by giving authority for the expenditure of £94,000.”
2.2.4 And though the Bill was approved, Maclean’s foresight proved astute. Following threats from Dáil Éirean - the parliament set up in Southern Ireland in 1919 - to boycott the census, the British government decided, on 4 April 1921 that it would take the advice of the Census Commissioners in Ireland to postpone the census there indefinitely. Just a month later the Government of Ireland Act 1920 came into force and separate jurisdictions were established in the north and the south of the island. It was not until 10 November 1925 that separate legislation for the census in Northern Ireland took effect.

2.2.5 In the course of the debate on the 1925 Bill for the first census in Northern Ireland, the Minister for Finance, Hugh MacDowell Pollock, noted that it had been nearly 15 years since the last census in Ireland, and that intervening events such as the Great War and the 1918-19 influenza epidemic had affected the demographic picture of the country, and thus required a census to be taken. It was eventually held on 18 April 1926 on the same day as the similarly delayed census in the Republic of Ireland.

2.2.6 Northern Ireland continued to have specific legislation for each new Census until the 1969 Act provided a legal framework similar to the permanent 1920 Census Act in Great Britain.

2.2.7 The schedule for the 1926 Census in Northern Ireland, conducted by its first Registrar General, L A Bullwinkle, had basically the same content as the 1911 Census except that the fertility enquiry was dropped (as it had been in the 1921 Census throughout Great Britain). Moreover, neither the question on Irish language nor the long-standing enquiry into agricultural holdings, so long a feature of Irish censuses and which had been the focus of a special study in 1911, were included north of the border. Instead the Northern Ireland form contained an additional question relating to health insurance and an enquiry on dependency in childhood and orphanhood, arising from the particular concerns resulting from the loss of fathers in the Great War.

2.2.8 Following the previous practice, the services of the local police force, the now Royal Ulster Constabulary, were again utilised in the delivery and collection of the Census returns.

2.2.9 Data processing was, for the first time in Ireland, carried out along the lines adopted in Great Britain and utilised the punched card and mechanical sorting machines first used in the 1911 Census there.

2.2.10 The Registrar General used the General Report to explain the need for, and the intricacies of, the Hollerith tabulating machinery that it had been necessary to introduce in order to remove the limitations (and reduce the costs) of the manual ‘ticking’ method of coding and tabulating the information from the census returns.

2.2.11 Bullwinkle accepted that the only satisfactory way of compiling the bulk of the Northern Ireland census statistics was by ‘machine tabulation’. Even though the amount of processing that was required was only a fraction of that in England and Wales or Scotland, Bullwinkle acknowledged in his Report that, from the experience of the 1921 Census in Great Britain, it was

“… abundantly clear that all the tabulation, excepting that of the housing and accommodation particulars and the populations of small areas, could be carried out more quickly, accurately and cheaply by using modern machine methods.”

2.2.12 Coding the responses into a series of numeric codes was done in groups of topics, with, for example, ‘usual residence’, ‘birthplace’ and ‘nationality’ coded together, but where the more complex topics of ‘occupation’ and ‘industry’ were coded separately by different coders. After this process the returns were passed to the card punchers who transferred the coded responses on to a unique card for each person, where the position of the each punched hole represented a specific question and code (Figure 3).

2.2.13 Two types of punching machines were used; the gang punch was able to punch mechanically batches of cards where there was a common code for each data item (such as area codes for the Enumeration Districts and place of usual residence; and hand operated key punches were used for the remaining data items. It was through such holes that electrical contacts were made when the cards went subsequently through the counting machines, which identified and recorded each item response at a rate of 24,000 cards per hour.
2.2.14 Bullwinkle recorded that all the card punching was carried out by just seven young women and a supervisor in the seven months between October 1926 and April 1927. The relatively small amount of data processing which was not carried in this way was done by the more traditional and laborious clerical ticking process.

1937

2.2.15 The next census in Northern Ireland was again out of phase with the rest of the United Kingdom. In an attempt to bridge the gap between the 1926 Census and the UK-wide census scheduled for 1941, W A Carson the second Registrar General for Northern Ireland at first planned to carry out a census in 1936 to coincide with the then proposed mid-term enumeration in Great Britain. But when the plans for the latter were abandoned because of the general economic crisis, Carson postponed the census in Northern Ireland until 28 February 1937, when he carried out a more limited enumeration by omitting not only the questions on key topics such as occupation and industry, but the long-running question on infirmities.

2.2.16 No detailed national report was published; the outbreak of the war in 1939 and the resulting paper shortages meant that, after the County Reports had been produced, the remaining reported, in a much shortened Summary Report

"After the close of hostilities the question of issuing a final volume – unless a new census is then in preparation – will be considered."

But neither a final report nor any such new census ever came to fruition.

The 1939 National Registration and identity cards

2.2.17 On 3 September 1939 World War II broke out, and less than a month later the civilian population was enumerated under the direction of the three UK Registrars General, but under separate legislation (the National Registration Act 1939), so that a National Register might be compiled as a war-time general security measure.

2.2.18 Preparations for such a National Register had already begun at the end of 1938 and were virtually complete by April 1939, and had the country still been at peace these preparations would have been used for a 1941 Census.

2.2.19 Originally the Registration Regulations prescribed that all persons present within the UK and the Isle of Man on National Registration Day, 29 September 1939, were to be enumerated, with the exception of those persons serving in the armed forces or who were registered merchant seaman, for whom a separate register was to be
kept. However, at the time of the Registration, no requirement for such a mercantile marine register had been identified, and merchant seamen were, in the event, included in the National Register. The information collected on each individual was kept to the bare minimum (as the exercise was not intended to serve any statistical function) and referred only to sex, age, marital status and occupation, together with some additional details, where appropriate, regarding membership of Naval, Military or Air Force Reserves, Auxiliary Forces, or Civil Defence Services.

2.2.20 Some of the statistics for Northern Ireland from the 1939 enumeration were published in 1944 in a volume covering the UK and the Isle of Man, but they were not comparable with previous censuses, since the enumeration itself was primarily an administrative exercise used for issuing National Identity Cards, and as the basis for a variety of other war-time measures such as rationing and the deployment of labour in the essential industries and services.

2.3 The post-war censuses: 1951-1971

1951

2.3.1 The first post-war census - the first in which the census in Northern Ireland took place at the same time as the rest of the United Kingdom - was no exception to the general rule that more suggestions for questions to be included are received by the Census Office than can possibly be contained on the questionnaire. Nevertheless, the new Registrar General for Northern Ireland, L C Mulligan, tried to accommodate as many demands for new information as possible, and consequently the topic content for the 1951 Census was far wider in scope than any of its predecessors. The fact that there had been an interval of 14 years since the previous Northern Ireland census (no mid-term census was even contemplated for 1946), during which time there had been significant legislative and social changes, no doubt justified a larger enquiry.

2.3.2 Mulligan agreed with his counterparts in England and Wales and Scotland (George North and Edmund Hogan respectively) that the content of the census in Northern Ireland should be broadly the same as in Great Britain. Thus, questions on age, marital status, relation to head of household, usual residence, birthplace, nationality, number of rooms, occupation and industry were similar throughout the UK. The main omissions in Northern Ireland were the fertility-related questions on date of marriage and number of children born in marriage for women aged under 50, and the questions on age at which full-time education ceased and employers’ address, and the enquiry into the exclusive or shared use household amenities such as piped water. On the other hand the Northern Ireland census form still kept the traditional voluntary question about religion and included also a new question on length of residence for persons born outside Northern Ireland.
2.3.3 Though representations were made to retain the 1926 question on infirmities, Mulligan decided to accept the view widely held by research bodies that it was no longer possible to use the census to collect accurate and consistent information about physical and mental conditions. The same conclusion had been reached in England and Wales some thirty years earlier, when the question was dropped after the 1911 Census. Indeed as early as the 1881 Census doubts were being expressed by William Ogle, the Superintendent of Statistics at the General Register Office in London about the reliability of the information recorded in the returns.

2.3.4 Today, however, there is an increasing demand for the sort of information that only questions on disability can provide, and the problem of dementia for example is certainly an issue of particular current national interest. But it remains as challenging as it was in Ogle’s day to include, on a self-completion form, questions on disability which yield relevant and accurate statistics.

2.3.5 In his General Report, Mulligan recorded no significant change in the field operation from the approach adopted in the previous census, and members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary acted once again as Enumerators. However, the publicity campaign for raising public awareness of the census was more extensive than any yet. It had, of course, been long realised that a successful enumeration is entirely dependent on the ready cooperation of the public. As Mulligan acknowledged

“The standard attained in the tabulations cannot rise above the standard set out in the returns, and this in turn depends on the extent to which people have been informed about the benefits accruing from a census.”

2.3.6 Consequently, not only was the census given wide publicity on the national and local press, but there was also a flow of articles in weekly and other periodicals. The BBC also made a substantial contribution in ensuring that the public was informed and receptive, and as many as twenty radio features, totalling over three and a half hours of air time, were broadcast covering all three stations - the Home Service, and the Light and Third Programmes - including the popular Woman’s Hour. A four and a half minute slot on Radio Newsreel was broadcast on Census night.

2.3.7 Neither were cinema audiences neglected. When not watching the latest blockbuster — Abbott and Costello meet the Invisible Man — they were shown special newsreel features interspaced with a cartoon produced by the Central Office for Information.

1961

2.3.8 For the 1961 Census there was much closer collaboration between the Northern Ireland, England and Wales, and Scotland Census Offices. Mulligan decided that, subject to the modifications necessary to meet local requirements and the needs of the Northern Ireland government departments and other users, the topic content should be harmonised with Great Britain so as to ensure a high degree of comparability across the UK as far as possible.

2.3.9 Consequently the list of questions included in the 1961 Census was considerably wider in scope than any of its predecessors. All those asked in 1951 were repeated, although in some cases there were slight changes in the wording and application. Thus the questions on sex, age, marital status, relationship to the head of the household, usual address, birthplace, nationality, occupation, industry and religion were similar to those in 1951, except that the age qualification for the marital status and occupation and industry enquiries reverted to 16 or over to be consistent with Great Britain and with the censuses in Northern Ireland prior to 1951 (when the questions were asked of those aged 14 or over and 15 or over respectively).

2.3.10 There were also new questions, in line with those being included in Great Britain, on

• scientific and technological qualifications,
included at the request of the Ministry for Science on the advice of the Advisory Council on Scientific Policy, in order to establish, amidst concerns about Britain’s brain drain, the extent and location of the country’s scientific manpower, and for whom special analyses were produced;

- **length of stay at a person’s usual address** if they had lived there more than one year, or **previous address** if less than one year, responses to which, when combined with other data, provided information about the extent of internal migration and the characteristics of such migrants;

- **the fertility of married women**, included at the recommendation of the Conference of European Statisticians and at the request of the Department of Health and Local Government as a key input into the study of genetics;

- **age at which full-time education ceased** in order to provide a general measure of level of educational attainment; and

- **tenure of accommodation** and the extent to which **piped water, cooking and toilet facilities** were available, in order to investigate the extent and characteristics of private renting and council housing for the purposes of informing housing and town planning policy particularly in Belfast.

2.3.11 Additional information, recorded on the form by the Enumerator, indicated the number of rooms occupied by the household and the type of accommodation, the total number of households occupying the premises, and whether the building was wholly or only partially residential.

2.3.12 In fact, the only information collected in England and Wales which was not asked in Northern Ireland was the person’s workplace address and a selection of key questions which were asked in respect of those persons usually resident at the address but who were temporarily absent on Census night.

2.3.13 The field operation was carried out, as was now customary, by members of the RUC, despite the concerns of a number of Northern Ireland MPs - expressed during the debates on the Census Bill – that it was no longer appropriate or practicable for them to do so. The Northern Ireland Minister of Finance, Terence O’Neill, emphasised the experience that the RUC had acquired in performing the Enumerator duties and the benefits that this would have to the overall quality of the census. However, in his *General Report* of the census in 1964, the new Registrar General Dr A T Park noted that insufficient numbers of the RUC could be released at the time of the Census in the border areas (in April) and that enumeration duties had to be undertaken by other appointed persons.\(^\text{15}\)

2.3.14 Nevertheless, with a common date fixed throughout the UK, the census in Northern Ireland benefited from the wider more general publicity in the UK national press and other media outlets. The importance of engaging the public and encouraging them to participate in the census was increasingly being recognised, and a variety of media channels (the daily press, journals and magazines, broadcasting, booklets and posters) was used to demonstrate the national importance of the event. Advantage was taken, in particular, of the increased access to television by referring to the census in both news items and in popular programmes on both the BBC and commercial TV channels, and by featuring short light-hearted fillers between programmes during the run up to the Census.

2.3.15 The local activities in Northern Ireland included the issue of some 4,000 census posters for display at schools, libraries, post offices, police stations, transport depots and other public buildings as well as at large industrial and commercial business establishments. Almost 8,000 copies of an explanatory leaflet, The Census of 1961, were distributed to a wide audience including clergymen and such organisations as chambers of commerce and young farmers’ clubs.

2.3.16 Data processing, in the main, developed the punched card technology used in 1951 but with a much larger 80-column card. But for the
preparation of the final reports, the Registrar General was able to use the services of an ICT 1500 electronic computer, operated under secure conditions, by International Computers and Tabulators Ltd at its London-based offices.

2.3.17 The use of a computer made it practicable for the first time to have machine-readable output consisting of the precise figures required for publication, tabulated in the way that was required by users. For example, the computer was programmed to derive automatically social class and socio-economic group (SEG), on the basis of a standard cross-classification of occupation and employment status; and for the purposes of the Fertility Report, where a husband and wife were enumerated on the same return, the computer automatically associated their records and recorded the husband’s SEG code on the wife’s record. In addition to this, the total volume of results could be both increased and reproduced for different output geographies, particularly for small areas if required.

2.3.18 Equally important was the fact that the quality of the results could now be better assured. The census input records inevitably contained errors originating both from respondents and as the result of the coding and keying of data. Previously, of course, some respondent errors could be removed by clerical processing, but often the tables produced by the punched card tabulation system contained inconsistencies which could not be detected by inspection alone. In 1951 and earlier censuses, the subsequent tabulations had then to be adjusted, in a somewhat time-consuming process, so that the marginal totals were consistent throughout.

2.3.19 But despite this technology the speed of producing the published reports was not greatly improved; the final county report (for Tyrone) appeared in July 1964, compared with the final county report from the 1951 Census (for Fermanagh) in September 1954.

Cost of the census

2.3.20 At a time, now, when the ever-increasing cost of the census is a matter of serious public and political concern, it is perhaps interesting to note that such increases seem almost always to have been the case. The total cost that Park estimated for the 1961 Census was £105,732, being 1s.6d per head of population, and therefore equivalent, in new money, to about 3p per head per year over the entire period of the census operation. But this was more than double the total cost for 1951 Census.

2.3.21 The longer than usual gap of 14 years since the previous census and the much reduced size of the whole operation in 1937 means that costs then (amounting to just £9,953) are not comparable. A more realistic comparison should, perhaps made with the cost of the 1926 Census, at £18,126.

2.3.22 Generally though, the costs of the field operation in these early Northern Ireland censuses were artificially low compared with the situation in Great Britain since, other than providing for travelling expenses for the Enumerators, the Registrar General was able to acquire the use of the RUC as part of their constabulary duties.

1966: the only mid-term census

2.3.23 The legislation providing for the census in Great Britain had, since its introduction in 1920, always allowed for a mid-term census, should the need arise. However, despite repeated calls from the Royal Statistical Society and others to do so, until 1966 no Registrar General had chosen to exercise the option to conduct a mid-term census relying instead on the decennial results to meet the needs of users for population data throughout each decade. But a rapidly changing socio-demographic profile in the 1960s - with increasing birth and...
migration rates, greater mobility and changing employment patterns - together with the need for information that would be more up-to-date than that being provided by the delayed results from the 1961 Census in Great Britain (the General Report for example, was not published until 1968), prompted the decision around the end of 1963, to undertake, for the first time, a mid-decade census.

2.3.24 Thus censuses were taken throughout Great Britain on 17 April 1966. To reduce costs, however, it was proposed that, for the first time, the census should be carried out on a 10 per cent sample basis.

2.3.25 The case for a census in Northern Ireland was equally as strong. However, the Northern Ireland Census was to be a full enumeration. The Bill for the Census was debated in Stormont and concerns were expressed that a 10 per cent sample would seriously limit the use of data since such samples, with their inherent errors, would prevent figures for areas of less than 50,000 population being published. The other big difference in Northern Ireland was that the date of the Census was deferred until 9 October.

2.3.26 The proximity of the 1966 General Election (called by Harold Wilson on the 31 March) was a matter of some concern to all three Registrars General. But because the additional cost of postponement in Great Britain (estimated to be as much as £350,000) was significant compared with the total estimated cost of the Census itself (£2 million), the decision was made to stick with the original date. In Northern Ireland, however, there were also concerns to avoid the risk of any disruption due to the parades and activities to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising on 24 April 1916. Both these factors together led to the postponement of the Census in Northern Ireland from 17 April to 9 October.

2.3.27 The 1966 Census questionnaire was much shorter than the 1961 form and omitted the individual person questions on birthplace, religion, fertility, education and occupation (though the question on industry was retained to reflect the changing pattern of employment in a number of new industries being established in Northern Ireland). Nor were the questions on housing tenure and amenities included as it was argued that these would have changed very little in the five years since the previous census. However, new questions on address one year and five years before the census and on workplace and transport to work were introduced to gain a better understanding of migration and travel to work flows.

2.3.28 The proposals were generally welcomed by the Northern Ireland parliament when the Census Bill was being debated, but concerns were expressed, particularly by David Bleakey, the Northern Ireland Labour Party MP for Belfast Victoria, that the Census would not address the issue of emigration, particularly of people qualified in the teaching and medical professions and in other skilled trades. In response, the Minister of Finance, Ivan Neill, noted regretfully that, though the government was looking for ways and means of getting a fuller and more up-to-date picture of the trend in migration:

“... the airport authorities will not cooperate with us in the matter of taking the census of persons leaving the country to remain overseas, and until we find some way of doing the job with the voluntary co-operation of those who are leaving ... the picture will remain incomplete”

2.3.29 In most other aspects the 1966 Census operation followed very much the pattern of its predecessors, and the new Registrar General, W G Nichol noted this in his General Report.

1971: new legislation – more questions

2.3.30 And nor did the 1971 Census throw up anything new or controversial for Northern Ireland’s first female Registrar General Miss S D J Henderson to report in depth. In fact for the first time since 1937 no general report was produced. And this was perhaps surprising, since a significant change in the legislative framework for the census had taken place in 1969 with the introduction of a permanent statute (the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969), along broadly similar
lines to the 1920 Census Act of Great Britain. This allowed, particularly in an age of rapid change and development, for a census to be carried out by the Registrar General every five years. Now all that would be required for a particular census to take place in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere in the UK, would be secondary legislation in the form of an Order and Regulations, prescribing the information to be collected and the arrangements for carrying out the enumeration respectively.

2.3.31 In taking the second reading of the Northern Ireland Census Bill on 14 May 1969, the Minister of Finance, Herbert Kirk, simply moved the proposal for the provisions of the legislation in much the same way that the Rt Hon Dr Christopher Addison, the Minister for Health had done at Westminster in 1920, seemingly wishing to play down the significant changes that the Bill was introducing. Only F V Simpson, Northern Ireland Labour Party MP for Belfast Oldpark, voiced a concern over the time it took for the reports to be published, and asked

“In this age of computerisation would it not be possible to produce a census report in a very short time so that it would not be out of date by the time it is made available to the public, which has been the case in the past? With a new Registrar General we expect great things.”

2.3.32 However, the complexity of the task was to mean that the Summary Tables for the 1971 Census were only published in 1975.

2.3.33 When the subsequent Northern Ireland Census Order was approved, a number of new questions found their way on the census form. With the aim of maintaining as much harmony as possible with rest of the UK, the new Registrar General, J Y Malley, included, as part of the fertility survey, a question on the dates of birth of all children born alive to women aged under 60 – a move aimed at providing data to examine trends in family size and spacing.

2.3.34 A new question was also included on occupation a year before the census, to provide data on occupational mobility. But no question was included on part-time or full-time work; instead a question on hours worked was asked of all persons in employment.

2.3.35 To extend the scope of the information collected on educational qualifications in order to inform planning in the field of higher education and the deployment of highly qualified manpower, a new question was asked on the possession of certain specified qualifications, broadly equivalent to A level or Higher grade of the Scottish Certificate of Education. But the 1961 question on age at which full-time education ceased was dropped.

2.3.36 Following difficulties experienced in 1966 in enumerating households in converted/shared accommodation, an attempt was made to identify structurally separate dwellings by asking if the household shared any room, hall, passage or staircase with another. And questions on car availability, garaging and means of transport to work (for the largest part, by distance, of the normal journey to the place of primary employment) were included because of the concerns about the need to monitor and control traffic in towns following the Buchanan Report - a major report on UK Transport Policy published in 196316.

2.3.37 A further change brought about by the regulations emanating from the 1969 Census Act was the role of the Census Enumerator. The tradition of utilising members of the local constabulary forces, stretching back to 1841, was broken, and a new temporary census field management structure was created, with Census Supervisors appointed and trained to recruit Census Officers and to take control of the field operations locally and to recruit, in turn, their own Enumerators. As a consequence the direct field costs of the census in Northern Ireland increased considerably.
2.4 The modern census: 1981-2001

2.4.1 As we progress to more recent censuses their historical interest naturally diminishes but not so the significance of the innovations they present. With the authority and basic format of the census now well-established, under the provisions of the 1969 Act, key developments in census taking in Northern Ireland focused on improving and assuring the coverage and quality of the statistical results. There was also a need, despite the growth in users’ requirements for information, to keep the demands made upon the public within bounds by making the form as easy as possible to complete. These increased demands, and the increasingly rapid changes in the social and technical environments meant that a number of new features have been introduced.

1981

2.4.2 After the 1979 General Election the UK Government under Margaret Thatcher sought to reduce the content of the 1981 Census by omitting the proposed questions on ethnic group, school qualifications, availability of car, and hours worked. In contrast the Registrar General for Northern Ireland E Boston made proposals for the Northern Ireland census which escaped relatively unscathed. However, the content of Northern Ireland’s second census conducted under the 1969 Act differed from the 1971 Census.

2.4.3 The question on tenure of accommodation was expanded to include response categories to distinguish between renting from a public authority and a housing association or charitable trust; the enquiry into household amenities now covered domestic sewage disposal, central heating, type of fuel used for heating, and type of heating insulation (none of which were included elsewhere in the UK) at the expense of the previous questions on kitchen cookers and sinks, and the supply of hot water; the 1971 question on the garaging of cars was also dropped.

2.4.4 As throughout the rest of the UK, a question on whereabouts on Census night was now included in Northern Ireland (in order to collect information on absent usual residents), and the question on journey to work again adopted the mode of transport categories asked in Great Britain, but added a space for the respondent to record the start time of the journey. But the enquiries into 5-year migration, school qualifications, apprenticeships, occupation one year before the census, and hours worked were omitted.

2.4.5 As in 1971, a large number of part-time field staff were recruited to undertake the enumeration activities which included the delivery and the collection of forms to households. At that time the census was conducted in particularly difficult circumstances amidst acute political tension during the second Maze Prison hunger strike. A campaign of non-cooperation, which included the public burning of census forms was conducted in some areas. Tragically, a female Enumerator, Mrs Joanne Mathers, was shot dead on the doorstep of a house while she was collecting returns. Arising from this, special arrangements were put in place, most notably the public were asked to co-operate by sending in their completed forms by post. The response from the public was excellent but the enumerated count still understated the actual population.

2.4.6 The Summary Report, published in 1983 under the pen of the new Registrar General R McMurray, reported an enumerated population of 1.49 million and an adjusted Census day population of 1.51 million, implying that 1.3 per cent of the population were not among those enumerated. However, a number of academics and official statisticians then examined the extent of estimated non-response, and compared the Census returns with other sources such as child benefit data, the Census of Employment, and derived variables such as implied fertility rates. This resulted in a range of estimates of the extent of the under-enumeration. The accepted mid-year estimate for 1981 (as currently adopted by NISRA)
is 1.54 million suggesting a level of non-response in the Census in Northern Ireland of the order of 3.6 per cent.

1991

2.4.7 The list of questions asked in the 1991 census was no shorter. Indeed all the topics included on the 1981 Census form were repeated - and some more.

2.4.8 A question on *limiting long-term illness* was included at the request of the Department of Health and local authorities to provide both a means of helping to measure, generally, the need for health and personal social services, and, more specifically, to help improve the formulae for allocating central government funds to the health service. After a gap of 80 years since the last health-related question had been included in the 1911 Census, it was important that, notwithstanding the strong demand for information, a viable and acceptable question should be devised. Consequently, thorough tests of two questions - one on long-term illness and the other on short-term illness were carried out by the Registrar General for England and Wales. The results from the long-term question correlated well with the use of health services, and data users were confident that the results could be put to practical use.

2.4.9 The *term-time address* of students was collected so that students could be allocated to area of usual residence as defined in the annual mid-year population estimates. The question on *hours worked*, dropped from the census in 1981, was reinstated. And for the first time, an attempt was made to collect information from wholly absent households, albeit on a voluntary basis, by asking householders who were away from home on Census night to complete a form on their return.

2.4.10 A question on *Irish language* was re-introduced for the first time since partition, so that similar questions on Celtic languages were now included in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the format of three of the GB Census questions were modified in Northern Ireland in order to meet specific user requirements for local information: an extra category of ‘*unpaid work in a family business including a shop or farm*’ was added to the *economic activity* question; and the *education* question ascertained levels of educational achievement in specific fields of study.

**Samples of anonymised records and the need for confidentiality**

2.4.11 A further innovation in the 1991 Census was the production of microdata that was made available to users in the form of two Samples of Anonymised Records (SARs) covering the whole of the UK. These were commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council.

2.4.12 The decision to issue these samples was only taken (a) after the three Registrars General had been assured that the measures taken to protect the data and to prevent identification of individual persons and households were sufficient, and (b) after legal advice had been given about the authority of the Registrars General to publish such samples as abstracts under the provisions of the Census Acts. The advent of computerised processing and tabulation production had demanded a whole new interpretation of the wording of the 1920 and 1969 Acts, and it was important to have this legally defined.

2.4.13 The SARs thus represented a major milestone in census processing on a par with the advances in outputs made possible by the introduction of Hollerith technology in 1926 and the computer in 1961.

2.4.14 Maintaining the confidentiality aspects of the SARs was always a key factor in their design and dissemination. Indeed, all three UK Census Offices have always regarded the confidentiality and security of the Census to be a matter of the gravest importance, and went to even greater lengths this time to assure Parliament and the public alike about the confidentiality of the information recorded and the security of the data processing systems. This assurance included, as was now the usual practice, commissioning an independent review of the computing arrangements. The Data
Protection Registrar had expressed support for such a review, and following a competitive tender, the British Computer Society (BCS) was awarded the contract to review the security arrangements to protect against unauthorised access to personal data for all activities from the receipt of the forms in the processing sites, through all the processing stages, to the subsequent removal and transfer of the forms to permanent storage.

2.4.15 In its main findings the BCS reported that the Census Offices’ arrangements were

“... fully in keeping with the very high standards of confidentiality required, and that the plans and intentions current at the time were consistent with that standard.”

2.4.16 But even before the 1991 Census was taken, the issue of confidentiality was brought to a head requiring new legislation to be hurriedly drafted. Two years before, parts of the 1911 Official Secrets Act were repealed, including, in particular, section 2 on which the Census Offices had relied until then to safeguard personal information after the census had been taken.

2.4.17 A new Act was therefore required to strengthen the confidentiality provision of the Northern Ireland and GB Census Acts. There was, fortunately, unanimous support for the measure – and the resulting Census (Confidentiality) Act 1991, together with an equivalent Order in Northern Ireland, was passed only days before the Census. It provided for an offence of unlawful disclosure of personal census information, and extended the previous confidentiality provisions to include post-enumeration census-related surveys and to encompass any person employed for the purpose of taking the census.

2.4.18 Under the supervision of the new and current Registrar General, Dr T N Caven, the broad strategy for the first census of the new century was to base it on those successful methods used for the 1991 Census, but to strengthen the operation by the introduction of some innovatory measures aimed at meeting the ever changing needs of users, the societal environment and the opportunities of utilising the rapidly developing technologies offered by outside service providers.

2.4.19 A question on relationship to each member of the household (rather than just to the head of household) was included to provide more detailed information on household structure to assist in planning housing needs for multiple families within households.

2.4.20 Recognising the increasing amount of informal (and often unrecognised) help given to people with ill health, the Census also included a new question on the provision of unpaid personal care aimed at improving the understanding of local variations in the need for care and the pressure on social services in an attempt to target resources more effectively. This was linked to another new question on general health, which, in addition to the question on long-term illness, aimed to allow people to assess their own health over the preceding 12 months as either ‘Good’, ‘Fairly good’, or ‘Not good’.

2.4.21 Questions on the lowest floor level of accommodation and on the number of floor levels in the accommodation were included to provide a measure of the numbers of people and households living in potentially unsuitable accommodation, such as households with young children, or elderly...
residents, or people with long-term illness living several floors above the ground.

2.4.22 While a specific question on religion was being included throughout the rest of the UK for the first time (following a necessary change to the 1920 Census Act), Northern Ireland’s long-standing enquiry was expanded to include a question on religion in which the person was brought up for those who indicated in the main question that they had no religion; this information would assist in the monitoring of policies on equality issues.

2.4.23 But the most significant change to the Northern Ireland census form was the inclusion of a question on ethnicity. Such a question had, after many years of research and testing, been included in the census in Great Britain for the first time in 1991. The GB question provided baseline figures against which the Government was able to monitor possible racial disadvantage and deprivation within minority groups.

2.4.24 The question was not at that time included in the census in Northern Ireland, where user consultation had not indicated a sufficiently strong enough case for such information. But its undoubted success meant that its extension to Northern Ireland in 2001 was broadly welcomed. The classification of ethnic groups used in the Census is now widely regarded as a standard for inter-censal surveys and ethnic monitoring.

2.4.25 A key development in the field operation was the use of postal services for the first time as the primary means of collecting the completed forms from households. This was a significant change in data collection methodology, and its implementation allowed a significant reduction to be made in the field force necessary to carry out the 2001 Census. The aim was to free up resources in order to focus on those areas known to be difficult to enumerate, with the aim of minimising the differential undercount experienced across the country ten years earlier. But it was also to play a key role in enabling the enumeration to be completed despite the catastrophic outbreak of foot and mouth disease affecting farms and the rural community not only in Northern Ireland but across the whole of the UK generally, and which threatened to disrupt the entire census operation.

2.4.26 The foot and mouth outbreak was sufficiently serious for the government to warn against travelling in rural areas, and for an early General Election, originally intended for 3 May (just five days after the scheduled date for the Census), to be postponed. Nevertheless, the Census went ahead as planned, though modified enumeration procedures had to be quickly developed to conduct the field work during the emergency. Close liaison was maintained with the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development and the several farming agencies to ensure that the census field work would not compromise the work being done to contain the outbreak.
one definitive set of estimates from the Census which were adjusted for the estimated under-enumeration, such that Census statistics were consistent with the mid-year estimate (MYE) series. The so called ‘One Number Census’ (ONC) was the innovative response to these problems, though in many ways it was a natural progression from the advances made in previous censuses: the introduction of automatic editing and imputation of missing variables in 1981; then the imputation of absent households in the 1991 Census.

2.4.31 The key to the ONC was comparing the Census with a second large independent survey, the Census Coverage Survey (CCS), that was carried out three and half weeks after Census Day, and then matching the records with those from the Census itself using a combination of automated and clerical processes to identify people and households missed by the Census but found by the CCS, and vice versa.

2.4.32 A new and ground-breaking methodology was successfully implemented and for the first time all the census results were successfully adjusted for measured under-enumeration. It was estimated that 95 per cent of the population were covered in the Northern Ireland 2001 completed census returns. A crude adjustment to the figures based on the information, collected separately by Enumerators, on occupied households that did not make a return might have increased coverage to around 98 per cent. It is clear that the ONC enabled a more accurate population count giving a more representative picture of the characteristics of the population.

**Electronic outputs**

2.4.33 The 2001 Census was also the first which based the planning of outputs on a strategy that was agreed at the outset and set out as government policy. It was based on the simple premise that

“They invest in the Census was only justified if the results are made available speedily and in a clear and useable form.”

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2.4.27 Special methods of delivery and collection were quickly arranged to ensure as complete a coverage as possible in the areas most affected. Additional instructions were issued to field staff on the revised arrangements for delivery and collection of census forms where access to premises was not possible or advisable.

2.4.28 These special arrangements worked well, and there was no evidence that response was seriously affected by the outbreak. Very few incidents of alleged breaches of the restrictions were reported, and even these turned out to be largely unfounded. Furthermore, since the Royal Mail had already established procedures for handling mail in such emergencies, the decision to adopt a post back methodology can be seen, in hindsight, to be serendipitous.

**The ‘one number’ census**

2.4.29 Every effort is made to ensure everyone is counted in a Census. However, no Census is perfect and inevitably some people are missed. As in previous censuses, the numbers from the 1991 Census were not adjusted for under-enumeration, but the mid-year population estimates series were. Differences in the published population statistics for 1991, some 1.578 million enumerated in the Census and 1.607 million in the mid-year estimate, were mainly due to the final estimate of the census under-enumeration.

2.4.30 But during the extensive consultation carried out prior to the 2001 Census, users of census data were adamant that they wanted...
2.4.34 The key UK criterion to meet user’s needs, was that outputs should be comprehensive and comparable between areas. At the same time NISRA’s own key criteria were that they should: be produced speedily and efficiently, be user-friendly, accessible and intuitive, and should minimise the risk of disclosing information about identifiable individuals.

2.4.35 As a result, and in accordance with government’s policy on e-government, the bulk of the outputs were disseminated by NISRA through on-line data systems such as the NISRA website and the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service or NINIS www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/ninis. Hardcopy reports were still produced for laying before the Assembly and ease of reference, however the dissemination of output at lower geographical levels was exclusively carried out through electronic media (CD products and via the Internet).

2.4.36 By 2001, and after almost two hundred years of census taking, the population of Northern Ireland had increased from 1.380 million to a record level of 1.685 million, though not before falling to a low of 1.236 million in 1891. This profile of change is in stark contrast with the pattern of continuous, though not always steady, growth in Great Britain, where population totals increased over 5½ times in the same period (Figure 7).

**Figure 7 Populations of Northern Ireland (1821-2001) and Great Britain (1801-2001)**

2.5 The 2011 Census

2.5.1 At the time of the publication of this article, the 2011 Census was little more than a year and half ago and the bulk of the outputs are yet to come, and so this account – as a history - effectively ends here. But perhaps we may conclude by commenting on how the lessons learned by the Census Offices from the several reviews and evaluations of the 2001 Census, together with changing social and legislative environments, helped drive the innovations and developments that were introduced into the 2011 Census carried out on 27 March last year.

2.5.2 The key issues raised in the reviews and evaluations of the 2001 Census covered the need to:

- develop a high quality and up-to-date address list to increase the efficiency of the delivery of census forms;
- develop field management and form-tracking systems to enable better central control of field processes and activities;
- undertake more detailed and earlier engagement with stakeholders to ensure, for example, that the needs of the disabled community are taken into account;
- review whether or not the coverage survey design is sufficient to identify under-enumeration in the hardest-to-count areas;
- review the cost-benefit trade-offs in aiming to produce more timely outputs that are consistent and harmonised across the UK; and
- review the mechanisms to protect statistical confidentiality without eroding the utility of the data.

2.5.3 The subsequent design of Northern Ireland’s 2011 Census introduced measures, methodologies and processes to respond to each of these as well as the need to reflect an ever more ageing, migrant and mobile population, and an increasingly less compliant society.
More questions

2.5.4 Not surprisingly, the 2011 Census introduced yet more new questions to reflect not only societal change generally and shifts in Government policy, but also the requirement to comply with new European legislation to provide the European Union with a set of census outputs that are harmonised not only within the UK but across all 27 Member States. But such questions were included only after extensive consultation, testing, assessment and a full justification for national purposes.

2.5.5 The previous long-standing census question on whether or not households have exclusive use of either a bath/shower and/or toilet amenities was no longer regarded as providing a sufficiently discriminative indicator in the allocation of resources for housing development and regeneration, and was now replaced with a question on the type of central heating available to provide a more useful indicator of basic housing standards. The information will be used to facilitate future research on fuel poverty and deprivation, and on renewable energy and energy efficiency.

2.5.6 In a similar manner, a question on adaptations to accommodation for health conditions was also asked to evaluate the issue of accessibility for many people, for example people with disabilities.

2.5.7 In addition to the enquiry into the knowledge of the Irish language, a similar question on Ulster Scots was introduced. And questions on main language and knowledge/use of English were included in order: to provide an indication of areas and communities where foreign language service provision is necessary; to better understand the diversity of the population; and, in particular, to assess the impact of English language ability on employment and other social inclusion indicators. The ability to include ‘British/Irish Sign Language’ as a main language was introduced to respond to the particular needs of the deaf.

2.5.8 In total, four specific individual questions on health and care were included in the 2011 Census; most notably a new individual question on specific long-term health conditions (e.g. deafness, blindness etc.) was included.

2.5.9 Following the Civil Partnership Act 2004, the traditional question on marital status was expanded to include response categories for those with a civil partnership status or former status.

2.5.10 A number of new questions were introduced to help measure and analyse the pattern of international migration flows – a subject that, with European Union expansion in the intervening decade since the 2001 Census, has aroused considerable interest. These included:

- country of previous usual residence and month and year of most recent entry into Northern Ireland for those people who had lived outside Northern Ireland for a period of one year or more;
- intended length of stay for those who had arrived in the UK within a year of the census; and
- citizenship (as determined by asking a question on the country of passport held)

2.5.11 But in order to reduce the burden on the public, people who were visiting at an address on Census night (including overseas visitors) were required only to provide information on the basic demographic questions; in previous censuses, and particularly those before 1991 that were carried out on a person present (de facto) basis, such visitors had been required to complete a full questionnaire at the address where they were present. Full information on such visitors was, however, still collected at their place of usual residence on their return.

Post-out and the Census Address Register

2.5.12 A logical extension of the post-back methodology adopted to collect the completed census returns in 2001 was the employment of a postal service provider for the delivery of questionnaires. And so, following the successful trialling of post-out as a delivery mechanism for census forms in the 2007 Test, a decision was
made by Dr T N Caven, the Registrar General for Northern Ireland, to use the postal service as the prime means of form delivery.

2.5.13 The rationale for this strategy was that even with hand delivery in the 2001 Census, Enumerators failed to make doorstep contact with households at more than a third of addresses and resorted to delivering the form through the letter box. The use of the Royal Mail to perform this activity was seen as an opportunity to direct further field resources to those areas where a more focused approach to follow-up activities was necessary in order to improve response rates.

2.5.14 Clearly the prerequisite for this was the availability of a comprehensive, high quality address register. In the absence of a single authoritative domestic address register, NISRA worked with the Land and Property Services Agency to develop an address register that met Census requirements. Drawn from the Land and Property Services Agency POINTER address database that had been developed for Northern Ireland jointly with the Royal Mail and local district councils, the resulting register contained a list of addresses linked to higher level geographic areas for management, reporting and output purposes. This associated every address with an accurate positional reference, which was used during the planning of field operations, the printing of questionnaires and the production of outputs.

More outsourcing – more confidentiality

2.5.15 The use of the Royal Mail, now for the delivery as well as the collection of the census forms, was not the only example of the benefits gained by using specialist agencies in the Census. NISRA, working with the Office for National Statistics, started a major data processing procurement in September 2005, and, following an extensive evaluation a single supplier - Lockheed Martin UK - was selected in August 2008, in time for them to work on the 2009 Rehearsal.

2.5.16 The confidentiality and security arrangements in place to manage not only the outsourced contracts, but the traditional field enumeration and all in-house activities at each site, were subject, as was now usual, to an Independent Information Assurance Review, which was reported to Parliament in February 2011 and which concluded that

“…. the public can be reassured that the information they provide to the 2011 Census will be well protected and securely managed.”

The online census

2.5.17 But not all forms were posted back. One final, but very significant development in 2011 was the facility for people to complete their census form online. It had been estimated from international experience that up to 25 per cent of households might be prepared to provide their census information online. Accordingly, the Northern Ireland Census Office offered the option of making a census return via the internet for the first time.

2.5.18 But in planning for this, the actual take up of this channel was uncertain. Such a facility afforded the possibility of both encouraging response among particular sub-groups of the population who may otherwise be hard to reach, and of achieving some data processing cost savings. Furthermore, such an option provided an opportunity to assess the efficacy of collecting information in such a way for any future censuses and surveys.

2.5.19 The online questionnaire had the same questions as the paper form. A unique reference number was placed on each paper questionnaire which formed the basic security code for accessing and completing an online return. The address was also checked at the start of the completion process to confirm identification. A little disappointingly, perhaps, less than one in five returns were submitted in this way, but the reaction from those respondents who did so was generally very favourable.

2.5.20 If only this technology had been available to the Reverend James Whitelaw!
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### Annex A - Dates of Census

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>1841, June 6-7</td>
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<td>1851, March 30-31</td>
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<td>1961, April 7-8</td>
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<td>1926, April 18-19</td>
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<td>1937, February 28 – March 1</td>
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<td>1951, April 8-9</td>
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<td>1966, October 9-10</td>
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<td>1981, April 5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991, April 21-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001, April 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011, March 27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Annex B – Registrar Generals

#### B1 - Registrar Generals of Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registrar</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W Donnelly</td>
<td>1844-1876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WM Burke</td>
<td>1876-1879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TW Grimshaw</td>
<td>1879-1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir R.E. Matheson</td>
<td>1900-1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir W. Thompson</td>
<td>1909-1926</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### B2 - Registrar Generals of Northern Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registrar</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA Bullwinkle</td>
<td>1922-1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA Carson</td>
<td>1938-1952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LC Mulligan</td>
<td>1952-1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF Darling</td>
<td>1962-1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr AT Park</td>
<td>1963-1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WG Nicholl</td>
<td>1965-1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JY Malley</td>
<td>1969-1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J Burns</td>
<td>1971-1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss SDJ Henderson</td>
<td>1974-1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JY Malley</td>
<td>1976-1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EJA Boston</td>
<td>1978-1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R McMurray</td>
<td>1981-1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr TN Caven</td>
<td>1994-Date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NOTES

¹ War-Time Population Enumeration and not full Census