

Sample study one

Title: A study of census material to investigate the effects of the Great Famine on the Dunlavin region in Co. Wicklow.

Outline Plan:

This research study will examine the effects of the great famine at local level. The famine was a very important event in Irish history and this study aims to investigate its impact in a local area. Local history is becoming ever more important and more popular, and is contributing significantly to our knowledge of national history. This study will use primary source material from two censuses and will examine data regarding population and housing in six townlands around Dunlavin, Co Wicklow. Changes in population and housing levels in the Dunlavin area will be investigated. The research study includes tables to show the census information and will add to the body of historical knowledge about Dunlavin and about the famine in Co. Wicklow.

Evaluation of sources:

The principal sources used for this study were the Census of 1841 and the Census of 1851. Both of these censuses are available on microfiche in the National Archive of Ireland in Bishop St., Dublin. They have the advantage of dating from the time in question and are primary sources. They are very accurate. The main disadvantage of the censuses as a source is that they contain nearly too much information, and the research study will only concentrate on the information regarding population and housing. The third source used was Lewis's Topographical Dictionary of Ireland, which was published in 1837 and provides good background information about the Dunlavin area. Lewis was a good source, but not all the information was relevant.

Extended Essay:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The above table shows the figures for 1851, in the aftermath of the famine (the first figure in each column) juxtaposed with the figures for 1841, before the famine (the second figure in brackets in each column). Every townland in the study recorded a decrease in population. This decrease was due to starvation and emigration. The townland of Milltown was particularly badly hit. The townland lost just over 80% of its population, which declined from 159 to 30. Even the least affected townland, Tornant Upper lost approximately 20% of its population as the figures declined from 52 to 42. The average population decline in the six sample townlands was just over

60%, with overall totals falling from 522 in 1841 to 201 in 1851. This represents a huge proportion of the population who simply disappeared from the area, due to death and out migration between 1841 and 1851. The rural hinterland of Dunlavin was obviously devastated by the Great Famine.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Merginstown is in three divisions.

Sources:

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