

Sample study three

Title: A study of census material to examine the level of building and the impact of the railway's arrival on Dunlavin in Co. Wicklow.

Outline Plan:

This research study will examine late nineteenth century changes in the levels of building at local level. Local history is becoming ever more important and more popular, and is contributing significantly to our knowledge of national history. This study centres on Dunlavin, Co Wicklow, and the district electoral division (D.E.D.) is taken as a more manageable unit than the parish, which is very large. The study will use primary source material relating to buildings from three censuses – 1881, 1891 and 1901 – and will construct bar graphs from that data. Bar graphs for both the village and the D.E.D. will be drawn and compared. The data in the graphs will be analysed in relation to the economic situation in the area and the study will add to the body of historical knowledge about Dunlavin in the late nineteenth century. The study will also examine the impact of a known local event – the arrival of the railway in 1885 – on the pattern of building and so on the local economy.

Evaluation of sources:

The principal sources used for this study were the Censuses of 1881, 1891 and 1901. All 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 building. One of the skills that this study has taught me is how to decide what is relevant and discard what is not.

Extended Essay:

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

Figure 1.

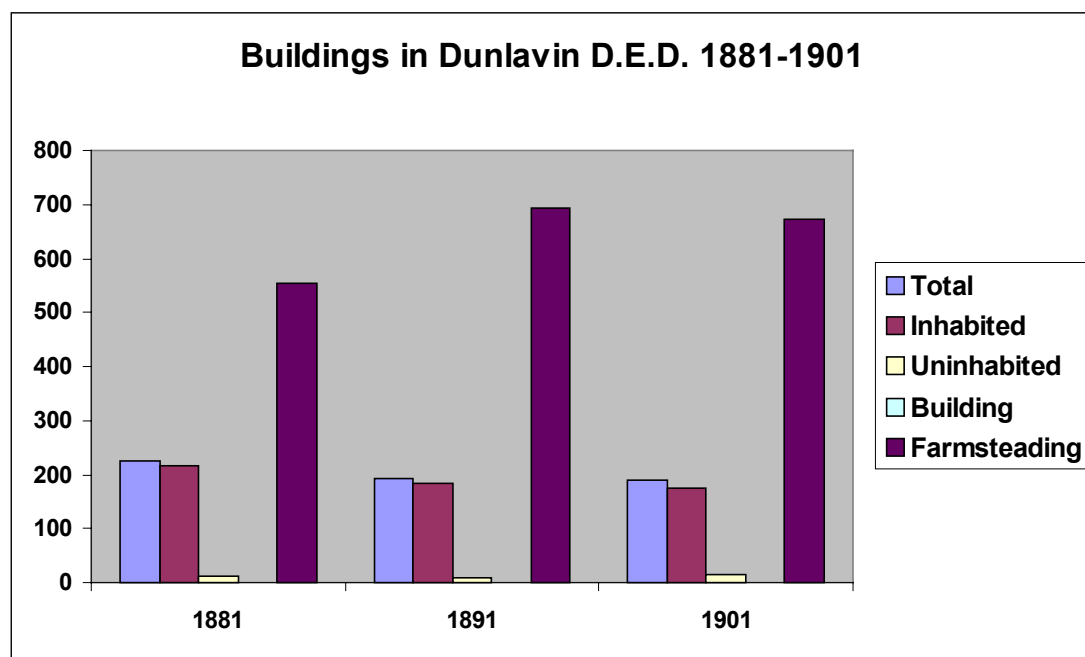


Figure 1 is a bar graph denoting the number of buildings in Dunlavin D.E.D. at three points in time – 1881, 1891 and 1901. The graph is divided into five sections for each year. The total number of houses declined from 226 in 1881 to 194 in 1891. This represents a 15% fall in the number of houses in the D.E.D. Perhaps more importantly the number of inhabited houses shows a very similar fall – from 215 in 1881 to 185 in

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

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

However, it is not quite accurate to refer to ‘the lack of any building in the area’. Obviously sheds (‘out offices and farmsteadings’ on the graph) were being built at quite a pace during the period 1881-1891. Numbers in this column increase sharply from 555 in 1881 to 694 in 1891. Given the overall ‘circle of decline’ in the area at this time, this is surprising. Why were more sheds being built? Two things spring to mind here. Firstly, because of the improving situation after Gladstone’s Land Act of 1881 (and it’s later amendments) and again after the Ashbourne Land Act of 1885

(and it's later amendments) tenant farmers were no longer afraid to build sheds or make other improvements on their farms. Indeed, as some families left the area, it is quite possible that their old cottages became sheds for the stronger tenant farmers that were emerging here at this time. This practice might also be a cause of the small number of uninhabited houses in 1891 as any such buildings would surely now be recorded as out offices and farmsteadings in the 1891 census.

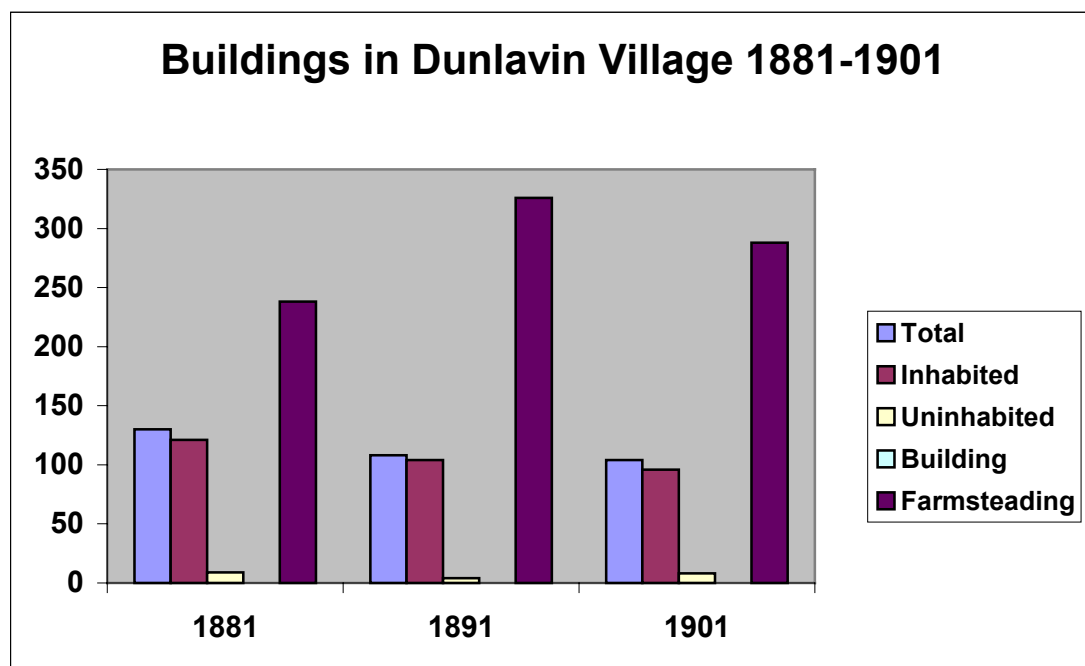
However, there could be another reason for the 20% increase in the number of sheds by 1891. This was the arrival of the railway in the village. The Tullow branch of the Great Southern and Western Railway reached Dunlavin in 1885. With goods trains now coming to the town, bulk buying by local people was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

Moving on to examine the census data for 1901, the trend of decline seems to be continuing. The total number of houses now stands at 191. However, though there has been a further fall here, this figure represents only a 1.5% fall between 1891 and 1901 compared to a 15% fall between 1881 and 1891. Thus, the rate of decline has actually decreased tenfold. The village may have been smaller than before, but the building and housing situation in Dunlavin D.E.D. was now stabilising. The number of inhabited houses has fallen from 185 to 175, a 5% fall (in comparison to a 14% fall for the previous decade). The rate of decline has slowed here too obviously. There

are 15 uninhabited houses in 1901 against 9 in 1891. This increase in uninhabited houses probably shows continuing emigration. The appearance of only one house in the 'building' column for 1901 is not enough to reverse the overall picture of out-migration either! People continued to leave the area and more houses were becoming derelict than were being built.

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

Figure 2.



Having examined at the numbers of buildings in Dunlavin D.E.D. in 1881, 1891 and 1901, this study will now look at the corresponding figures for Dunlavin village

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

This research study has used primary source data from three censuses – 1881, 1891 and 1901 – to construct a picture of the level of building in a local area in the late nineteenth century. The study has graphed the results on bar graphs. The graphs for Dunlavin village (urban) and Dunlavin D.E.D. (rural) are very similar. The overall trend is one of decline, but there was an obvious increase in the number of sheds in the area during the study period. This was probably due to better conditions for tenant

farmers and the coming of the railway to Dunlavin village, which also impacted on the number of sheds. This census data relating to buildings in Dunlavin D.E.D. also tells us something of the economic situation, and the study has shown that despite the continuing decline, there was some economic stabilisation in the area by 1901.

Sources:

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