

THE IRISH RELIGIOUS CENSUSES
OF THE 1760s
CATHOLICS AND PROTESTANTS IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY IRELAND

compiled and edited by

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IRISH MANUSCRIPTS COMMISSION

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*This volume is dedicated
to Mary, Patricia and Irene*

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OVERVIEW OF THE HEARTH-TAX CENSUS OF 1764–5

ORIGINS

This survey appears to have originated in the House of Commons in 1764, through an instruction from its Grand Committee for Religion.¹ As in 1732, parliament made use of the fiscal machinery of the state to conduct what was intended to be a countrywide census of religious affiliation.² To this end, the collectors of the annual hearth tax were pressed into service. In addition to their normal duties, they were required to determine the religion of each householder, and return an abstract of the area for which they were responsible (termed a walk), giving for each parish the number of Protestant and Catholic householders, and the condition of its various ‘places of worship’.³ It is not known if the collectors were expected to include details for exempt houses in their abstract, but it seems doubtful that they would have been; this would have imposed significant extra work on the collectors and, very likely, few would have complied.

FORMAT

We present the information generated by the hearth-tax collectors’ survey of 1764–5 in the following order:

- parish: the parish-name;⁴
- barony: the name of the barony or baronies in which the parish lies;
- diocese: the name of the diocese or dioceses in which the parish lies;
- walk: the name of the hearth-money walk in which the parish lies;
- [C.I. and Diss.: these two columns are only included if the collector distinguished between Church of Ireland (C.I.) and Dissenting Protestant (Diss.) households or people];
- Prot.: the number of Protestants (households or people) returned by the hearth-tax collector;

1 The House of Commons journals contain no reference to this survey, although a surviving abstract for the Kilmacrenan walk (Co. Donegal) was transmitted to ‘the Hon[ourable] the Grand Committee for Religion, Robt Fitzgerald in the chair’ (PRONI, T808/15261, f. 26). It is probable that the Grand Committee for Religion ordered the survey in March 1764. On Friday 2 March 1764, the House of Commons requested various details about the quality of the hearth-tax collection in recent years, including information on the collectors, and the arrears (*Commons jn., Ire.* (4th ed.), vii (1761–4), p. 315). This various information was promptly supplied on 6 March 1764 (*ibid.*, p. 319), after which, an instruction was issued for the Grand Committee for Religion to sit on the morning of 10 March 1764 (*ibid.*, p. 321). We suspect that the details on the hearth-tax collection process were sought in order to determine how feasible it might be to organize a census using its officers, and that the Grand Committee then issued the enumeration order following the receipt of satisfactory information.

2 The surviving data from the 1732–3 religious census is abstracted in Appendix A.

3 Throughout this volume and unless otherwise stated, the use of the word ‘church’ refers to Church of Ireland/Anglican places of worship, while ‘chapel’ or ‘Mass house’ pertains to Catholic places of worship. The small number of instances of Protestant chapels are identified as such to the reader.

4 Parish, barony and townland names for the 1764–5 and 1766 censuses have been standardised according to placenames given in *Census of Ireland. General alphabetic index to the townlands and towns, parishes, and baronies of Ireland* (Dublin, 1861).

- Cath.: the number of Catholics (households or people) returned by the hearth-tax collector;
- total: the total number of households or people returned by the hearth-tax collector.

The parish-level information is normally presented within this volume in alphabetical order. For Co. Clare, however, we have deviated from the norm. Aggregate data have survived for five ‘divisions’, albeit unnamed, within the county. Using internal evidence, we have managed to identify the unnamed divisions but have retained the order in which the material is presented exactly as it is found in the manuscript source.

Unless otherwise specified, the Protestant, Catholic and Total figures indicate the number of *households* reported for each religious grouping in the parish.⁵ In some instances the collectors undertook a full count of the population locally, and its denominational divisions, but more typically we are dealing with counts of households headed by a Catholic or a Protestant. An obvious but vitally important implication is that estimates of population at local, regional and national levels may be derived from the count of household heads, using an appropriate household multiplier. For a rough estimate, a round figure of 5 might serve well enough, though for more refined calculations of local and national populations a range of multipliers, nuanced by region and denomination, would be desirable.⁶

DENOMINATIONAL DETAIL

In the minority of cases where the original source distinguished between Church of Ireland and other Protestant denominations (Presbyterians, Quakers, Anabaptists and so on), this detail has been retained in the present volume, though a column is also maintained for the total number of Protestants in a parish (be it numbers of households or people). In the case of counties where only a small number of parishes have this level of detail, it has proved more convenient to relegate this information to the comments section accompanying each parish entry. Otherwise the reader would be presented with an excess of white space and largely redundant additional columns.

More disaggregated information on Protestants is in fact available for a fair number of areas, including some parishes in counties Donegal, Down, Fermanagh, Kildare, King’s County, Londonderry, Monaghan, Queen’s County and Tyrone. This is also the case for Carrickfergus parish (Co. Antrim), part of the parish of Loughgall (Co. Armagh), part of Drumgoon parish (Co. Cavan) and for what we believe to be the Co. Armagh part of Charlemont walk. Since many of these areas are contiguous, it is reasonable to suppose that the hearth-tax supervisors’ instructions to their collectors in these localities required denomination-specific information for the Protestant population, even though that was not a requirement from the Revenue Office, which coordinated the survey.

Not much is known about the procedures used in the 1764–5 survey. More to the point, it does not appear to have been successfully completed.⁷ It is not clear from the surviving records how complete was the coverage of this inquiry. But the surviving information from this census, while extensive, is far from being comprehensive. Ulster and bordering lands to the south are well covered, as are east Clare, west Limerick, north Cork and parts of some south-midlands counties. As the survey extended over two years rather than one, this may suggest that some hearth tax officers were less than highly motivated in the pursuit of religious head counting. After all, unlike clergymen, the affairs of religion were incidental to their calling, at least in this life.

RELIABILITY

To further complicate matters, the returns for the two different years are of a differing character, and origin. The returns that were compiled during the 1764 collection typically enumerate *households* (‘families’) and were returned to the House of Commons Committee for Religion, whilst most of the returns made in 1765 enumerate *people* — a bonus for the historian — and appear to have been

5 If the data are reporting population counts instead of household counts the parish name is followed by ‘people’.

6 For a discussion on eighteenth-century regional household size, see Dickson *et al.* (eds), ‘Hearth tax’, pp 150–56 (especially tables 5a, 5b).

7 Dickson *et al.* (eds), ‘Hearth tax’, p. 146.

instructed by the commissioners of the revenue, and returned to them.⁸ As indicated already, there are limits to our knowledge of the conduct of the 1764–5 survey, including the quality of the endeavours of the hearth-money collectors at a local level.

It is not difficult to cast doubts on the reliability of religious surveys conducted in this period, and this is an issue explored more fully in the next section. For many parishes it makes sense to consider the 1764–5 estimates as informed approximations rather than as precise counts, either of people or of denominational strength. They are probably closer to the mark in indicating the broad balance between Protestants and Catholics locally. As a general rule, our impression is that Catholics were more likely than Protestants to be under-enumerated. But it is also our view that the large bodies of information collected provide a valuable later eighteenth-century profile of the religious demography of major regions within Ireland, albeit with varying margins of error.

The 1764–5 survey also inquired into the condition of churches and chapels locally. This information is made available in the comment section, and helps enlarge our picture of religious conditions at local level. In addition, this survey generated data which can be profitably compared with the more remarkable and more comprehensive ecclesiastical survey of religious affiliations that was undertaken a year later, in 1766.

CASE STUDY

It may be helpful here to describe in a little more detail the information contained in the census, as well as mentioning the substrata of analysis and interpretation offered by us. This is best done perhaps through the medium of a case study. In Table 1 we present the information derived from the hearth-money surveys of 1764 for one parish, that of Annaduff in the diocese of Ardagh, Co. Leitrim. Since hearth-tax walks tended to be coterminous with barony boundaries, the southern part of the parish was in Mohill walk, and the northern part in Leitrim walk. Thus two collectors, Johnston Morton and John Finlay, surveyed different parts of the parish. In instances such as this, the information from each walk is presented separately. This is then followed by an entry which presents the information for the entire parish. Morton reported 10 Protestant and 105 Catholic households (8.7 per cent and 91.3 per cent of the total, respectively), and Finlay 65 Protestant and 143 Catholic households (31.3 per cent and 68.7 per cent, respectively). Thus, the reputed number of households in the entire parish was 75 Protestant and 248 Catholic households. The reported religious breakdown in the parish, therefore, was 23.2 per cent Protestant and 76.8 per cent Catholic, at least at the level of household heads.

Though the exercise is not performed here, it is an easy matter to use a household multiplier, that is, an estimate of *mean* household size, to derive an approximate idea of the size of the population in the parish of Annaduff. As indicated earlier, multiplying the number of households by five should give a rough idea. A similar exercise may be performed to arrive at the Catholic and Protestant populations of the parish but an important caveat has to be borne in mind. The religious affiliation of the household head was not always shared by all members of the household. Servants and lodgers might be of a different religion, or even a spouse in the case of a mixed marriage. By and large, Catholic households tended to be homogenous in terms of religion, whereas a minority of Protestant-headed households had one or more living-in Catholics. This difference suggests that servant-keeping — a measure of status — was more characteristic of Protestant households and thus that socio-economic differences ran along ethnic and religious lines.

8 Many of the surviving returns are undated or have ambiguous dates. However, the returns for the Belturbet, Enniskillen, Kilmacrenan, Monaghan, Castleblaney, Carrickmacross, Drumahaire, Mohill and Leitrim walks, which date from 1764, were returned to the Committee for Religion (PRONI, T808/15261, ff 2, 2v, 26, 28v, 29v, 30, 33v, 34, 34v), whilst the returns for the Newry, Killybegs, Drogheda and Londonderry walks (ibid., ff 23, 25, 30v, 32v), dating from 1765, were returned to the commissioners of the revenue. Also, the 1764 returns for Belturbet, Enniskillen, Kilmacrenan, Monaghan, Castleblaney, Carrickmacross, Drumahaire, Mohill and Leitrim enumerate households (ibid., ff 2, 2v, 26, 28v, 29v, 30, 33v, 34, 35v), whilst the 1765 returns for Newry, Loughbrickland, Markethill, Killybegs and Drogheda (ibid., ff 23, 23v, 24, 25, 30v) and those for Youghal (B. Troy (ed.), *Religious census of the diocese of Cloyne, 1766, and other contemporary documents. Transcribed by the Rev. Bartholomew O’Keeffe DD* (Midleton, n.d.), p. 245), Rosenallis, Monasteroris (Comerford, *Kildare and Leighlin*, i, 269–70) and Maryborough (ibid., iii, 407) enumerate people. In contradiction to these trends, the 1764 returns for Carrickfergus, Newtown Ards, Donaghadee, Killough and Dundalk record people (ibid., ff 2v, 24, 23, 24v, 31v), while those for Inishowen and Londonderry (1765) record ‘families’ (ff 25v, 32v).

In some cases the findings from the hearth-tax based census of 1764–5 can be compared with those from the ecclesiastical census of 1766, taken a year or so later. In such instances we have commented on the degree of conformity between the two. In the case of Annaduff we find that the figures for households in 1766, though estimates, are considerably higher than those reported for 1764. So, we draw readers' attention to this discrepancy in a comment (see below), thus allowing readers to draw their own conclusions. As noted in the Introduction, the ecclesiastical census may be regarded as the more reliable of the two.

Comparisons may also be made with other religious surveys. The most important of these is data for religious affiliations in 1831, in the *First report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction, Ireland*, published in 1835. On the basis of plausible estimates of population growth between the 1760s and 1831, we can sometimes comment further on the likely accuracy of household numbers (or population levels) reported for the 1760s.

Generally, our comments are presented underneath each parish entry, as is shown in this example (Table 1). We have attempted to present the comments in a standardised format, which includes the name of the enumerator, the date the return was compiled or posted (where known), and general notes about the geographic area covered by the return. If the information related to more than one parish, this is indicated in the comments section. Relevant observations by the enumerators are also noted. In addition, we have presented details, where known, on the complicated issue of boundary changes that occurred since the surveys were conducted and information on the formation or dissolution of parish-unions. In many instances, we have included our own observations on the likely accuracy of the data and compare the 1760s data with other, relevant religious counts. If additional detail is available for the dissenting Protestant population (figures for Presbyterians, Quakers, Methodists and Anabaptists, for instance), these figures are presented within the comments.

There is also information on the condition of churches and chapels locally. As can be seen in the sample below, Annaduff had a parish church and an infrequently attended meeting house, while there was a Catholic chapel in the part of the parish found in Mohill barony. Although the composition of the Protestant population is not provided, the presence of a meeting house suggests that some of the seventy-five Protestant households were Dissenters.

Table 1 — Return for the parish of Annaduff, Co. Leitrim, 1764.

Parish	Barony	Diocese	Walk	Prot.	Cath.	Total
Annaduff (pt of)	Mohill	Ardagh	Mohill	10 (8.7%)	105 (91.3%)	115
Return by Johnston Morton, hearth-money collector. Part of Annaduff is in Leitrim walk. No church or meeting house in this part of the parish; but one Catholic chapel — 'the bulk of the psh in another walk, in wch is the ch[urch]'. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 34.						
Annaduff (pt of)	Leitrim	Ardagh	Leitrim	65 (31.3%)	143 (68.7%)	208
Return by John Finlay, hearth-money collector; supervisor, Adam Tyrrell. Part of the parish is in Mohill walk. One church, one meeting house ('not frequented'), no chapel in this part of the parish. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 34v.						
Annaduff (entire parish)	Mohill, Leitrim	Ardagh	Mohill, Leitrim	75 (23.2%)	248 (76.8%)	323
The figures for both denominations are substantially below the 1766 numbers, though the 1766 figures appear to be estimates rather than counts.						

The Protestant and Catholic proportions in each part-parish, parish or union of parishes have been calculated by us, and are shown in parentheses immediately beneath the population figures reported for each spatial unit. If there is further detail — the numbers of Protestant households differentiated

according to Church of Ireland, Presbyterian or other Protestant denominations — the relative size of these denominations within the overall Protestant population locally is also shown but in this case placed in brace brackets.

The point has been made in the Introduction but it bears repetition: the absolute figures present in the Protestant, Catholic and Total columns refer to *households*, unless otherwise stated. In the minority of cases where we are fortunate enough to have population counts, this is signalled by adding the label 'people' after the parish name.

If information on both population and number of households is available for a parish, then mean household size (MHS = total population / number of households) can be readily calculated and is presented by us in the comments section for the particular parish. Sometimes it is also possible to calculate the denomination-specific mean household size. Strictly speaking, this is the mean household size of Protestant-headed or Catholic-headed households, because not all households were homogenous in terms of religious composition. This could be because some members of the family were of another religious persuasion, or more likely because of the presence of living-in servants or labourers.

Because of this complication it is often not clear whether the population figures reported for different denominations are 'pure' denominational totals or not. If there is any suggestion of ambiguity, we only calculate the mean household size for the overall population of the parish.

IRISH MANUSCRIPTS COMMISSION

ULSTER

CO. ANTRIM

A detailed return for Carrickfergus parish, the only Antrim parish for which 1764–5 returns have survived, can be constructed from two sources; both are given below. The figures must represent a count of people, not households, because the 1821 census reported a population of 8,023 people in 967 inhabited households.⁷⁴

Parish	Barony	Diocese	Walk	C.I.	Diss.	Prot.	Cath.	Total
Carrick-fergus, people	Carrick-fergus	Connor	Carrickfergus	809 (26.6%) {28.5%}	2,034 (66.6%) {71.5%}	2,843 (93.2%)	209 (6.8%)	3,052
One church; one meeting house; no chapel. The Dissenters figure includes 30 Seceders. ⁷⁵ The church in good order, and well supplied. Also, see below. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, ff 2v, 24.								

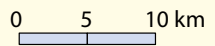
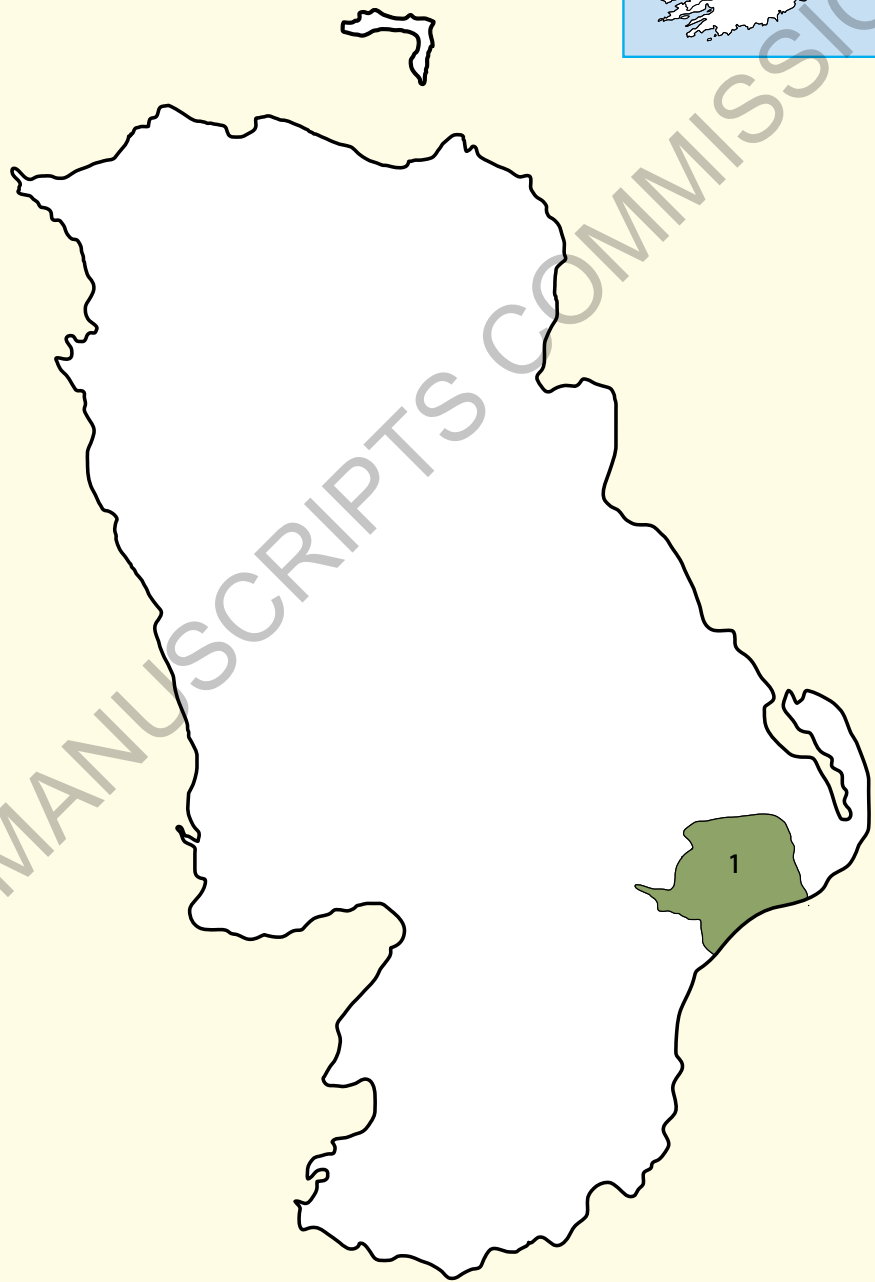
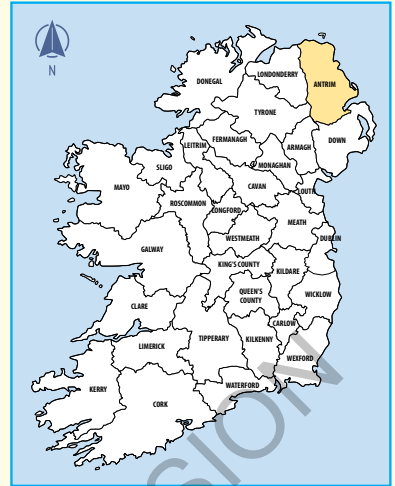
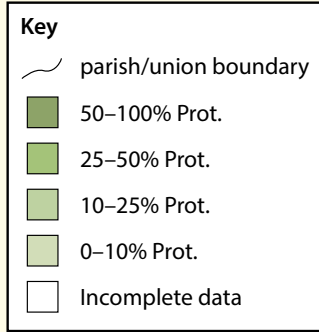
Carrickfergus, June 8th 1764

The church here is in good repair, and well supplied. No convents, Mass-houses, or other religious assemblies of the Popish religion in this parish, but there is one Phelix Scullion, a Parish Priest, who in summer time, frequently says Mass in the fields, and in the winter, in some of his parishioners' houses. – There are several [Dissenting Protestant] itinerant preachers who frequent this parish on stated days; by some they are called Seceders, and by others, Swadlers. Their followers here, in general, were the most reprobate of the other professions, but now boast of their enlightened understanding and superlative perfection and grace. They have no particular Meeting-house and assemble in our Market-House, Shire-Hall, or County-of-the-town-House, whose principles (if fixed) are only known to themselves, and entirely unintelligible to others.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Cen. Ire.*, 1821, p. 256.

⁷⁵ McSkimin's *History of Carrickfergus* states that the figure of 2,034 Dissenters included 30 Methodists: Samuel McSkimin, *The history and antiquities of the county of the town of Carrickfergus* ... (new ed., Belfast, 1909), p. 329.

⁷⁶ O'Laverty, *Down and Connor*, iii, 107. This return is by 'Henry Cocksedge, who seems to have been a Hearthmoney Collector' (O'Laverty). Cocksedge is described as a gauger in PRONI, T808/15261, f. 24.



1 Carrickfergus

Figure 11 — Religious distribution for Co. Antrim, 1764–5.

CO. DOWN

The Newtownards walk survey was conducted by Thom. Merry and is dated 7 September 1764. It reports the number of people, rather than households. The surveyor of the Loughbrickland walk was Richard ApRichard, hearth-money collector, and his report was made to the commissioners of the revenue. It dates from 1765, and reports on the number of people, not households. However, ApRichard clearly determined his estimate for people, in most cases, by multiplying his house-return by 5. He reported ‘one Popish fraternity in Killcoo, near Castle[wellan], as is said’.⁹⁶ Jeff Guml[e]y surveyed the Comber walk, dated 3 September 1764. No data are available for the individual parishes, however, so it is unclear how extensive this walk was. It may have covered all of Castlereagh Lower barony.⁹⁷ It reports on people, not households. James Hunter conducted the Donaghadee walk survey; the return is dated 4 September 1764. No Catholics are reported in the entire area, and ‘no chapels, convents and places of Popish worship’.⁹⁸ This is a return of people, not households. Dated 18 June 1764, the Killough walk data was returned by William Hillas, gauger of Killough, having been collected by Hugh Hill, hearth-money collector.⁹⁹ It is a return of households. The Newry walk data, dated 15 March 1765, were recorded by William Cross, hearth-money collector, and were returned to the commissioners of the revenue.¹⁰⁰ Cross reported numbers of people rather than households.

Parish	Barony	Diocese	Walk	C.I.	Diss.	Prot.	Cath.	Total
Aghaderg (pt of), people	Upper Iveagh, Upper	Dromore	Loughbrickland			2,815 (74.1%)	985 (25.9%)	3,800
				Return by Richard ApRichard, hearth-money collector. Listed as ‘Ahadarag’. One church, in ‘bad order’; one good meeting house; one good ‘Popish’ chapel. Part of Aghaderg is in the barony of Lower Iveagh, Lower. It is uncertain if these data are for the entire parish or for the Upper Iveagh, Upper barony part only but we suspect the latter. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 23v.				
Annaclone, people	Upper Iveagh, Upper	Dromore	Loughbrickland			655 (53.3%)	574 (46.7%)	1,229
				Return by Richard ApRichard, hearth-money collector. Listed as ‘Anaclone’. One good church; one ‘Popish’ chapel. ¹⁰¹ Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 23v.				
Ardglass	Lecale Lower	Down	Killough	60 (23.6%) {63.2%}	35 (13.7%) {36.8%}	95 (37.3%)	160 (62.7%)	255
				Surveyed by Hugh Hill. One old church; no ‘mass house’. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 24v.				
Ballee	Lecale Lower	Down	Killough	84 (13.7%) {24.7%}	256 (41.9%) {75.3%}	340 (55.6%)	272 (44.4%)	612
				Surveyed by Hugh Hill. One church; one meeting house; one ‘mass house’ – all in good order. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 24v.				
Ballywalter, people	Ards Upper	Down	Donaghadee	50 (3.3%) {3.3%}	1,475 (96.7%) {96.7%}	1,525 (100%)	0 (0%)	1,525
				Return by James Hunter. One church; one meeting house. We assume that this return covered the parishes of Ballyhalbert, Ballywalter and Inishargy, as the 1766 return did. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 24v.				

96 PRONI, T808/15261, f. 23v.

97 PRONI, T808/15261, f. 24v.

98 PRONI, T808/15261, f. 24v.

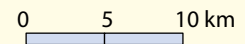
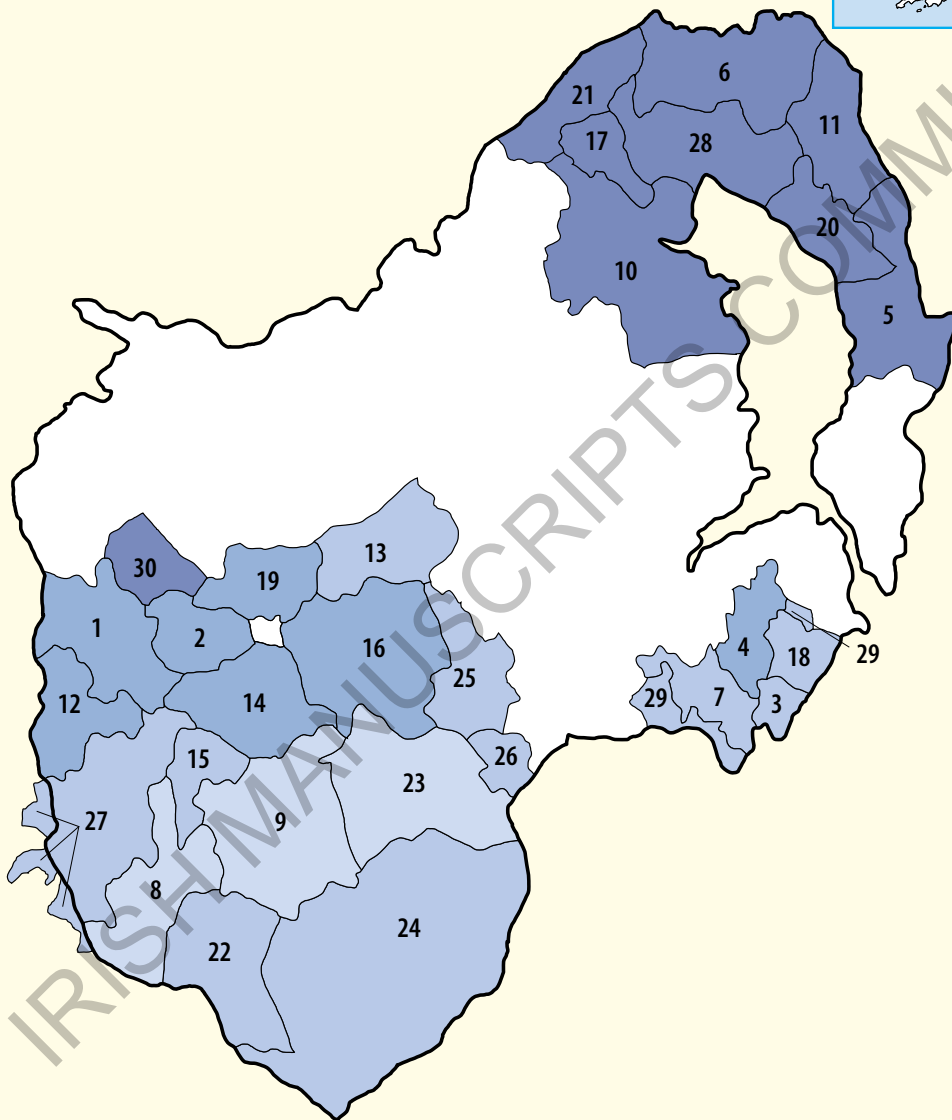
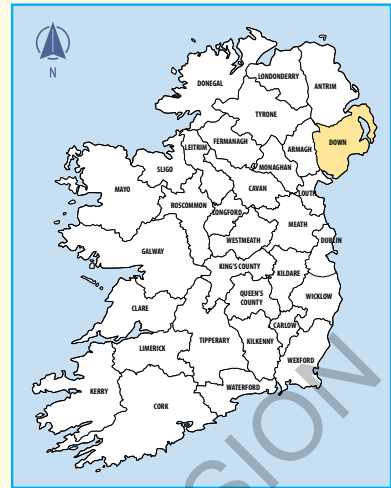
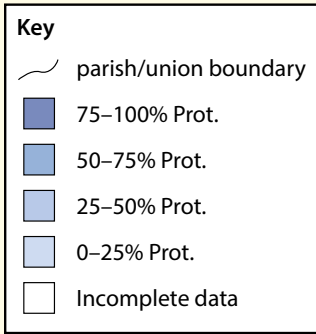
99 PRONI, T808/15261, f. 24v.

100 PRONI, T808/15261, f. 23.

101 The details for the Catholic chapel are almost illegible; we think the note specifies that the chapel was ‘thatched’.

Parish	Barony	Diocese	Walk	C.I.	Diss.	Prot.	Cath.	Total
Bangor, people	Ards Lower, Castlereagh Lower	Down	New-townards	400 (11.7%) {11.7%}	3,025 (88.0%) {88.3%}	3,425 (99.7%)	12 (0.3%)	3,437
	Return by Thom. Merry. One church; two Dissenting Protestant meeting houses; no convent or chapel. None of the Dissenting Protestants were Quakers. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 23; O'Laverty, <i>Down and Connor</i> , ii, 153.							
Bright	Lecale Upper	Down	Killough	188 (26.3%) {60.3%}	124 (17.3%) {39.7%}	312 (43.6%)	404 (56.4%)	716
	Surveyed by Hugh Hill. One church; one 'mass house' — all in good order. O'Laverty gives 100 Church of Ireland families but that is incorrect (see totals in PRONI, T808/15261, f. 24v). ¹⁰² Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 24v.							
Clonallan, people	Upper Iveagh, Upper	Dromore	Loughbrickland			745 (22.9%)	2,505 (77.1%)	3,250
	Return by Richard ApRichard, hearth-money collector. One good church; one good meeting house; one good 'Popish' chapel. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 23v.							
Clonduff, people	Upper Iveagh, Lower	Dromore	Loughbrickland			560 (22.8%)	1,895 (77.2%)	2,455
	Return by Richard ApRichard, hearth-money collector. Listed as Clanuff. No church or 'Popish' chapel; one good Quakers' meeting house. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 23v.							
Comber walk, people	Castlereagh Lower?	Down	Comber	315 (4.1%) {4.2%}	7,220 (93.8%) {95.8%}	7,535 (97.9%)	165 (2.1%)	7,700
	Return by Jeff Gumly. These data are for the entire walk. It is not known how extensive the walk was but it may have covered the part of Castlereagh Lower barony which was not included in Merry's Newtownards walk. If this is correct, these data cover Comber, Kilmood and Tullynakill parishes, and possibly the four townlands in Killinchy parish which are in Castlereagh Lower. Two churches, three meeting houses and no chapels in the walk. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 24v.							
Donaghadee, people	Ards Lower	Down	Donaghadee	100 (5.1%) {5.1%}	1,848 (94.9%) {94.9%}	1,948 (100%)	0 (0%)	1,948
	Return by James Hunter. One church; two meeting houses. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 24v.							
Donaghmore, people	Upper Iveagh, Upper	Dromore	Loughbrickland			1,295 (53.1%)	1,145 (46.9%)	2,440
	Return by Richard ApRichard, hearth-money collector. One good church; one good meeting house. Source: PRONI, T808/15261, f. 23v.							

102 O'Laverty, *Down and Connor*, i, 184.



1 Aghaderg, pt of	7 Bright	15 Drumgath	23 Kilcoo
2 Annaclone	8 Clonallan and Warrenpoint	16 Drumgooland	24 Killeel
3 Ardglass	9 Clonduff	17 Dundonald	25 Kilmegan, pt of
4 Ballee	10 Comber walk	18 Dunsfort	26 Maghera
5 Ballywalter (Whitechurch), Ballyhalbert (St Andrew's) and Inishargy	11 Donaghadee	19 Garvaghy, pt of	27 Newry, pt of
6 Bangor	12 Donaghmore	20 Greyabbey	28 Newtownards
	13 Dromara, pt of	21 Holywood	29 Rathmullan
	14 Drumballyroney	22 Kilbroney	30 Seapatrick, pt of

Figure 15 — Religious distribution for Co. Down, 1764–5.

OVERVIEW OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL CENSUS OF 1766

ORIGINS

There must have been disappointment with the conduct and findings of the religious survey of 1764–5. Otherwise there would have been no reason to institute a further, countrywide survey so soon afterwards.¹ A Committee for Religion within the Irish House of Lords was formed on 11 November 1765.² A few months later, on 5 March 1766, by order of the House of Lords, it was resolved that ‘the several archbishops and bishops of this kingdom shall be, and are hereby, desired to direct the parishministers in their respective dioceses, to return a list of the several families in their parishes to this House [of Lords], on the first Monday after the [Easter] Recess, distinguishing which are Protestants, and which are Papists, as also a List of the several reputed Popish priests and friars residing in their parishes’.³

The House resumed after the Easter recess on Tuesday 29 April 1766. The deadline for receipt of the returns by the Lords seems to have been 5 May 1766, which was a little over eight weeks from the date on which the order had been issued.⁴ Had the Lords’ instruction been clearly communicated and rigorously enforced, it should have succeeded in enumerating all householders and their religious affiliation on a parochial basis right across Ireland.

Hardly surprisingly, complete coverage was not achieved. But the good news is that large numbers of parish ministers did participate in the census, furnishing returns to parliament that covered most of the country. Thus the 1766 census is far more comprehensive in terms of geographical coverage, and more reliable in terms of its estimates of religious affiliation (we would argue) than the survey conducted by the hearth-tax collectors that immediately preceded it. Most of the 1766 returns came to be located in the Public Record Office in Dublin. The bad news is that the vast majority of these original documents went up in flames in the destruction of the Four Courts in the Irish civil war. However, prior to 1922 the census of 1766 had proved of such interest to genealogists and local historians that in the century and a half between its compilation and its destruction, many transcriptions of the original manuscripts, as well as parish-abstracts or summaries, were made, and many of these have survived. As a result, much of the information from the 1766 census comes down to us in the form of transcriptions, with the attendant complication of possible transcription errors. Nonetheless, we place a high degree of confidence in the work of noted genealogists such as Tenison Groves. Indeed Groves was responsible

1 Another national religious survey was conducted in 1768, this time with a focus on the Church of Ireland’s property and manpower; see Appendix C for the surviving return for Cloyne diocese.

2 *Lords’ jn., Ire., 1753–76*, iv, 347–8.

3 *Lords’ jn., Ire., 1753–76*, iv, 370.

4 *Lords’ jn., Ire., 1753–76*, iv, 374–5. There is an ambiguity with the deadline, as the instruction does not specify if the deadline was the ‘first Monday after the recess’ began, or the ‘first Monday after the recess’ ended. The House went into recess on 27 March 1766, and resumed again on 29 April 1766. Thus, the Monday after the commencement of the recess was 31 March 1766, and the Monday after the recess ended was 5 May 1766. Based on the dates of the returns, we presume that the Lords intended the latter date, although some dioceses may have worked towards the earlier deadline, even though that was Easter Monday.

single-handedly for transcribing large sections of the original materials, and the historical community is deeply in his debt, as it is to others who undertook similar work before the destruction of the Public Record Office in 1922. In addition to manuscript survivals and transcriptions of various kinds, there are also some printed works that embodied materials from the 1766 census. Thus, we have three potential versions, though all originate from the one ecclesiastical census.

FORMAT

We have adopted a broadly similar format in presenting the findings from the ecclesiastical survey of 1766 to that of the preceding survey of 1764–5. There are some additions, though: most notably there is the need to indicate the source of the information, in view of the three possible versions we can draw upon. The information is arranged by county and sorted alphabetically by parish, and typically takes the following form:

- **parish:** the parish-name;
- **category:** the ‘category’ of source from which the numerical data has been obtained. Three categories are used: ‘MS’ (manuscript) indicates that the data has been taken from an original surviving return; ‘Tr.’ indicates that the data has been sourced from a transcript, located in an archive; and ‘Pr.’ indicates that a printed source has been used. In cases where the information exists in more than one source only one source type is presented, with preference given to an original manuscript (‘MS’), followed by a transcript (‘Tr.’) source.
- **barony:** the name of the barony or baronies in which the parish lies;
- **diocese:** the name of the diocese or dioceses in which the parish lies;
- **[C.I. and Diss.]:** these two columns are only included if the clergyman distinguished between Church of Ireland (C.I.) and Dissenting Protestant (Diss.) households or people;
- **Prot.:** the number of Protestants (households or people) returned by the parish clergyman;
- **Cath.:** the number of Catholics (households or people) returned by the parish clergyman;
- **total:** the total number of households or people returned by the parish clergyman.

For some parishes we know the bundle number and record number that was allocated to the return in the ‘bundles’ of parliamentary returns in the Public Record Office (e.g. Annaghdown parish, Co. Galway: Bundle 79, no. 999). Although the numbering is now of no archival significance, we chose to include this information (where known) because it shows how the returns were ordered prior to the destruction of most of the originals in 1922 — generally, in alphabetical order, by diocese.

PROCESS

It is helpful to look at the process of census-taking in a little more detail, with a view to assessing its robustness. Although the instruction from the House of Lords appears quite explicit, requiring, among other information, a complete list of the names of the ‘several families’ (that is, householders) within each minister’s area of responsibility, the process by which the instruction was communicated to the clergy of the Established Church gave rise to some ambiguity. According to the instruction, the nature and scope of the census had to be communicated to the parish clergy through the medium of the diocesan administrative structures. This allowed a degree of individual interpretation on the part of the different bishops. Edward Wakefield noted, for example, that all the returns from the diocese of Cork and Ross gave details of the number of Protestant and Catholic households, as required by the Lords, but that the returns also recorded the number of Protestant and Catholic people. As he remarks, ‘no other diocese did the same’, implying that Bishop John Butler had specified that a *population* return was required.⁵

Other variations existed. Original returns have survived for a large number of parishes in the dioceses of Armagh, and Cashel and Emly. Most of the Cashel and Emly returns meet, or exceed,

⁵ Wakefield, *Account of Ireland*, ii, 587. Note that Wakefield is incorrect when he claims that this was ‘as directed by the order’.

the requirements in the Lords' instruction, whereas a large proportion of the Armagh returns simply report the overall number of Protestant and Catholic householders in the parish, but do not present a list of householders' names. The different character of the returns for these two dioceses suggests that Archbishop Michael Cox's instruction to his ministers in Cashel and Emly followed closely the Lords' instruction, whereas Archbishop Richard Robinson in Armagh seemingly took a more relaxed stance.⁶

Since most of the original returns have been lost, the details of how, and when, the Lords' order was communicated by each diocese to its clergymen are scant, and even the extent to which parish ministers responded is now unclear. Some vital information has survived, however, which sheds some light on the operation of eighteenth-century administrative processes. For instance, James Traill, bishop of Down and Connor, transmitted a copy of the Lords' instruction to each of his parish ministers, with a brief, uninformative note:

Reverend Sir,

I must entreat your utmost care and dispatch in returning to the Clerk of the House of Lords the information required by their order, a copy of which I send to you.

I am your affectionate brother,

James, Down and Connor.⁷

Traill transmitted the order to his parishes the day after the issuing of the resolution,⁸ but other diocesan officials responded with less alacrity, thereby reducing the time available to conduct the survey. Archbishop Robinson of Armagh appears to have been particularly tardy, as the minister for Mullaghbrack did not receive the instruction until 16 March, eleven days after the Lords' issued their order.⁹ While Traill's diocese was very clear in ordering the utmost care and speed 'in returning to the Clerk of the House of Lords the information required by their order, a copy of which I send to you',¹⁰ other bishops were less specific in that regard, and some ministers expressed confusion as to their requirements. Richard Lloyd, the rector and vicar of Rathcormack (Cloyne diocese), for example, complained that the bishop's order was 'general, and no particular method [for the returns was] prescribed';¹¹ furthermore, he failed to provide the list of names required, but simply listed the 'plowlands' within his parish, and numerically recorded the religious breakdown for each, although he claimed that that represented a 'list of the Protestant and Popish families'.¹²

There was a more serious flaw in the process, too, as evidenced both in the Lords' instruction and in Traill's circular. The returns were to be sent by the parish ministers directly to the clerk of the House of Lords, rather than to the diocesan office; thus, there was no ready means whereby the diocese might check that all of their ministers had complied with the requirements of the census.¹³ William Nethercoat, who consecutively held the deaneries of Gort and Kilmacduagh, while also serving as

6 Original returns are available in NAI, parliamentary returns 648–679 (Armagh diocese), 680–702 (Cashel and Emly diocese), 773–774 (Rathbarr and Ringrone, Cork diocese), 1431 (Killoteran, Waterford diocese). Many of the returns for Cashel and Emly, and Armagh contain postmarks.

7 O'Laverty, *Down and Connor*, v, 551.

8 See letter dated 6 March 1766 (O'Laverty, *Down and Connor*, v, 551).

9 Religious census, 1766, Mullaghbrack parish (NAI, parl. ret. 676).

10 O'Laverty, *Down and Connor*, v, 551.

11 Troy, *Cloyne*, p. 141.

12 Troy, *Cloyne*, p. 140. Lloyd did note, however, that what he was providing was a 'list of the Protestant and Popish families', so it would appear that the bishop of Cloyne had specified that that was required. Similarly, Richard Stewart of Louth parish (Armagh diocese) also claimed that his return of simply the number of Protestant and Catholic households by townland, represented a 'list of the several families in the parish of Louth' (Ó Fiaich, '1766 Co. Louth parishes', pp 112–13).

13 See returns for Kilmacduagh (Fahey, *Hist. Kilmacduagh*), p. 360), Tullylease, Brigown, Rathcormack, Magourney and Clonmel, in Cloyne (Troy, *Cloyne*, pp 34, 104, 140, 156, 184), Monkstown in Dublin (Guinness, *Register of Monkstown*, p. 93), Ballymore, Barronstown, Clogherny, Clonkeen, Desertlyn, Drumcree, Dundalk and Castletown, Derryloran, Loughgall and Mullaghbrack in Armagh diocese (NAI, parl. ret. 651, 652, 653, 654, 659, 662, 664, 665, 672, 676) and Kilcoo, Ardglass and Dunsfort, Saintfield, Kirkinriola and Finvoy in Down and Connor (O'Laverty, *Down and Connor*, i, 39, 183, 409; *ibid.*, iii, 409; *ibid.*, iv, 88), all of which were sent to the House of Lords. The return for Marshalstown was sent to the bishop of Cloyne at the House of Lords (Troy, *Cloyne*, p. 104).

minister of Beagh and Kilbeacanty parishes, in his submission to the Lords mentioned that he had informed his superior, the bishop of Clonfert, of the completion of the survey for his jurisdiction but that detail is unique in the surviving returns.¹⁴ Neither is there any evidence that a process existed within the Lords for checking the quality, accuracy or completeness of the returns, although a book of '150 pages of "pro patria" sized paper' was compiled from the returns, which gave 'the names of the Protestants, alphabetically arranged'.¹⁵ It is not inconceivable that some ministers falsified their information in order either to bolster the Protestant position within their parish, or to downgrade it. Many clergymen must have been unsure — perhaps even suspicious — about the motives behind the survey, and the receipt of the instruction stimulated some interest in west Donegal, where Rev. John Wilson, curate of Lettermacaward, noted that 'we in these remote parts form various conjectures about the end and design of this examination'.¹⁶

Some ministers used the (perhaps unique) opportunity to communicate directly with the House of Lords to let off steam or to complain about contemporary social conditions. The political and religious biases of some ministers are unmistakable in their returns, and while religious bigotry on the part of a clergyman would not have prevented him from completing an accurate enumeration, it could have had an adverse effect on the accuracy of the count. Rev. Thomas Hackett, curate of the union of Oregan in Queen's County (Kildare diocese), for example, decried the precarious position of Protestants in his area, in the following fashion:

yet there is not one Justice of Peace in the whole parish or barony [Tinnahinch barony], *Quere*, whether a militia quarterly array'd wou'd not be a natural security to the Protestant inhabitants, and be a check upon their Popish neighbours from entertaining any [Whiteboy] levelling schemes subversive to the peace of his majesty's faithful subjects.¹⁷

Hackett's disdain for his Catholic parishioners was shared by his neighbour, Rev. V. Deveux [des Voeux], curate of Lea parish (Kildare diocese), who referred to mixed-marriage families as 'mongrels'.¹⁸ In Cullen parish, Co. Tipperary (Cashel diocese), located at the centre of Whiteboy activity, Rev. Richard Lloyd, had cause for complaint, noting that the Catholic priest

Daniele Neal ... was rescued by ye mob from the sheriff & army at Loughstone in the County of Tipperary when transmitting from Clonmel to Limerick ... In this rescue many lives were lost, notwithstanding which, sd Neal continues to officiate as Popish priest in the same parish.¹⁹

This incident had occurred a dozen years earlier, in March 1754, so Neal's prosecution does not appear to have been particularly high on anyone's, but Lloyd's, agenda.²⁰ In Merville parish, Co. Donegal (Derry diocese), the return of 666 Catholic householders might have been coincidental, or a 'Revelation' of the minister's attitude towards his Catholic neighbours.²¹

In Ulster, home to three major religious groupings, local sectarian relations would, doubtless, have been influenced by the confessional makeup of the immediate region. Thus, Rev. Charles Humble, rector of Killeeshil parish, Co. Tyrone (Armagh diocese) — reporting that established church Protestants comprised just 24 of a total of 273 households — bitterly proffered the unsolicited information that

The rebellious insurrection called Hearths of Oak, took its rise in this parish; nor is it to be wondered at, when the Dissenters here shall be known to be what they really are, the spawn of Scottish Covenanters, avowed enemies of all civil and religious Establishment, and the most violent and furious persecutors of the established clergy during the late [Oakboy] troubles in the north of Ireland.²²

14 Fahey, *Hist. Kilmacduagh*, p. 360.

15 Wakefield, *Account of Ireland*, ii, 586.

16 T. O. D., 'Parliamentary returns, Raphoe', p. 76; Leslie, *Raphoe*, p. 105.

17 Comerford, *Kildare and Leighlin*, i, 270–71.

18 Comerford, *Kildare and Leighlin*, i, 271. Wallace, *Meath and Kildare*, p. 429, names him as Antoine Vinchon des Voeux.

19 Religious census, 1766, Cullen union (NAI, parl. ret. 688, p. 7 (no. 303)).

20 Burke, *Irish priests*, pp 360–62.

21 PRONI, T1069/8.

22 Religious census, 1766, Killeeshil parish (NAI, parl. ret. 668).

Further west, however, where ‘Scottish Covenanters’ were thinner on the ground, Rev. John Wilson, curate of Lettermacaward, Co. Donegal (Raphoe diocese), caustically observed:

I shall likewise beg leave to inform you of the apparent decay of the Protestant Religion in this whole country and of the prosperous growth of Popery, occasioned by the Papists supplanting Protestants in their land, whereby numbers of families were forced of late years to flee to other kingdoms for shelter. Thus this very year, out of the small number of Protestants above mentioned [17 Protestant families, and 72 Protestant individuals] no less than 18 will certainly go abroad ... so that it’s to be feared that in a few years there will be few or none here to cultivate that religion for which our ancestors gloriously and virtuously laid down their lives; and if there should it’s to be doubted whether there will be any to instruct them.²³

Wilson had every reason to be concerned. By 1831, although the Protestant population of the parish had increased marginally, it had declined in relative terms, to less than 6 per cent of the total, from the 13 per cent that he had reported for 1766.²⁴

TIME AND TROUBLE

Factors other than religious bias may also have impacted on the quality of the returns. Although a period of eight weeks — for the instruction to be communicated to the parish ministers, the census to be undertaken and the information returned to the House of Lords — hardly imposed an impossible strain on the clergymen,²⁵ some ministers, nonetheless, complained about the short time that was available to them to complete the survey.²⁶ It might even have been the case that some bishops specified that the returns were to be completed before the deadline, which would have caused further difficulties. Curate John Lawless’s return for Aghada, Co. Cork (Cloyne diocese), for example, was ‘as exact a list as could be made out before 25th March’, which suggests a tighter timeframe than that set by the Lords.²⁷ The significance of 25 March is unclear, as it predated parliament’s Easter recess, and was almost six weeks before the official deadline.²⁸ From the same diocese Rev. Richard Lloyd, rector and vicar of Rathcormack, apologised for his tardy response to the request ‘from the Bishop of Cloyne’ — ‘I was unwell when notice came to me’ — in a letter to the House of Lords, dated 8 April 1766, four weeks before the official closing date.²⁹ Similarly, Thomas Hackett (Oregon union) apologised that his ‘return could not be compleat sooner’, even though it had been posted before 28 April.³⁰

Of the ministers who considered the time available to complete the survey to have been insufficient, some surely succumbed to the temptation to provide an incomplete return. It has even been suggested that most of the returns were compiled using tithe lists,³¹ which would be a cause for serious concern. First, tithes were not levied uniformly across the island, so any list based on a tithe record would have been deficient to a degree, depending on local custom. Certainly, the returns for some parishes were compiled from tithe records, and in two instances (Termonfeckin, Co. Louth, and Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny) the ministers conveniently provided an indication of the extent of exemptions from their tithes-based returns. For Termonfeckin 170 householders’ names were returned but the minister

23 T. O. D., ‘Parliamentary returns, Raphoe’, p. 76.

24 *First report, Public Instruction*, p. 282a. The report gives 116 established church Protestants and 1,923 Catholics.

25 The only return for which the time taken to conduct the census is known is for Mullaghbrack parish (Armagh diocese). There, the instruction was received on 16 March, and the return to the Lords, which reported 207 Protestant and 585 Catholic households but did not list any householders’ names, was dated 23 March – seven days after the order was received (Religious census, 1766, Mullaghbrack parish (NAI, parl. ret. 676)).

26 Richard Stewart’s return (Louth parish, Armagh diocese) was ‘done with as much care and exactness as the time would allow’ and William Henderson’s (Termonfeckin parish, Armagh diocese) return ‘may not or cannot be perfect ... considering the short warning given’ (Ó Fiaich, ‘1766 Co. Louth parishes’, pp 113, 117).

27 Troy, *Cloyne*, p. 226.

28 *Lords’ jn., Ire., 1753–76*, iv, 374. Easter was on 30 March in 1766. The Lords sat until 27 March and reconvened on 29 April (ibid., pp 374–5). 25 March may, of course, have been Lawless’s personal deadline; alternatively, as one of the traditional quarter days 25 March (Lady’s Day) may have been used as a natural deadline.

29 Troy, *Cloyne*, p. 141.

30 Comerford, *Kildare and Leighlin*, i, 270–71.

31 Ó Fiaich, ‘1766 Co. Louth parishes’, p. 103. Bartholomew O’Keeffe (unjustly) presumed an unsigned and undated return was ‘the work of the parson’s proctor’ (Troy, *Cloyne*, p. 221).

suggested that there were as many as fifty additional families, 'poor cottiers and labourers, who are all Papists', who were exempted from the tithe, and were omitted from his return, as were 'seven or eight families' who occupied 'formerly mensal lands'.³² Similarly, in Castlecomer, the 896 'families' reported in the return were 'exclusive of 200 poor of the Popish profession'.³³ It is notable that 'Papists' comprised the bulk of those omitted in both parishes and that roughly comparable omission rates (25 per cent and 18 per cent, respectively) were reported for both areas. However, the principal complication with the tithe is that it was not payable on all produce, so it would be impossible to estimate representative deficiency rates. Most particularly, pastoral land was exempted from tithes from 1735, sending 'the parson from the demesne of the gentleman, into the garden of the cottager', so a tithe-based census for cattle-fattening regions could be expected to be considerably more deficient, and biased towards recording the lower social orders.³⁴

These examples of the use of tithe lists in the compilation of the 1766 returns may be the exception rather than the rule. It may be significant that only one other return among the surviving manuscript returns, that for Magourney, Co. Cork, was definitely compiled from a tithe list.³⁵ This does not of course rule out the possibility that other ministers concealed the fact but we have no evidence of that possibility. A further, more positive possibility is that tithe lists were used as a partial aid by ministers.

CLAIMS OF ACCURACY

The most reassuring point, however, is that a number of ministers claimed their returns were accurate, exact and complete. Thomas Hackett (Oregon union, Queen's County) claimed that his survey was 'difficult and expensive', which suggests a degree of diligence was exercised.³⁶ For Banagher parish, Co. Londonderry, Curate Henry Harrison submitted what he claimed was 'an exact return of the heads of the Protestant families', though he makes no comment on the return of the non-Protestant households.³⁷ Other ministers were more explicit in detailing the accuracy of their returns. The return for Monasterevin union (Kildare diocese), for example, provided 'the exact number of the Protestant and Popish families now residing in these parishes', while the returns for Killabban, Queen's County ('very carefully made and may be relied on'), Kilmichael, Co. Cork ('taken with all possible accuracy'), Newtown Ards, Co. Down ('after the greatest care to make out a list of the several Protestant and Popish families in this parish ... truly authoritative and correct') and Ballintoy, Co. Antrim ('an exact list of the families resident in the parish') represent only a sample of the claims for scrupulous care in the conduct of the local censuses.³⁸

Two issues that must have influenced the accuracy of many individual returns were the extent to which a minister was familiar with his benefice and the extent to which he was enthusiastic about the task. Clerical absenteeism must have militated against an accurate survey of all of Ireland and its constituent parishes. According to Brynn, drawing on a survey that inquired into the state of the established church in 1807, a half of the beneficed clergy (561 out of 1133) were habitually non-

32 Ó Fiaich, '1766 Co. Louth parishes', p. 117. The exemptions for Termonfeckin amount to 25 per cent of the suggested total number of households.

33 Carrigan, *Ossory*, iv, 404. Rev. Henry Stewart noted in 1814, that 'the number of cottiers [in Creggan parish, counties Armagh and Louth] who do not appear in my tithe book is greater than imagined', suggesting that the list was deficient by 15 per cent (Shaw Mason, *Parochial survey*, i, 208).

34 George O'Brien, *The economic history of Ireland in the eighteenth century* (Dublin, 1918), pp 110, 146–7.

35 Troy, *Cloyne*, p. 155. The list of names was 'as computed by Mr Philips [rector], and his tythe proctor'.

36 Comerford, *Kildare and Leighlin*, i, 270.

37 PRONI, MIC 15A/88.

38 Comerford, *Kildare and Leighlin*, i, 271; *ibid.*, iii, 405; J. J. Fitzgerald, 'Parish of Kilmichael', p. 73; O'Laverty, *Down and Connor*, iv, p. xxvi, appendix (Newtown Ards); PRONI, T3901/2 (Ballintoy, p. 6). Other ministers were equally definitive. For Inishcarra (Cloyne diocese) the return was 'ye exactest return yt could be possibly made' (Troy, *Cloyne*, p. 157), for Carrigrohanebeg (Cloyne diocese) the return represented the 'total population – no stayaways' (*ibid.*, p. 168). For Armagh, Benjamin Barrington's return represented 'the exactest list I could of the number of Protestant & Popish families' (NAI, parl. ret. 649), whilst the compilers were equally explicit for Killinchy parish (Down diocese) ('I had the number collected with the greatest care' (O'Laverty, *Down and Connor*, i, 409)), Inch (Down diocese) ('true return' (*ibid.*, iv, p. xxvi, appendix)) and Skerry and Racavan (Connor diocese) ('as exact as could be possibly obtained' (*ibid.*, p. xxix, appendix)).

resident, which suggests a shocking level of clerical neglect.³⁹ However, in part this was caused by pluralism, with a minority of clergymen holding more than one benefice, and it should be remembered that the holders of benefices often had curates serving under them; in many instances, curates signed the census returns. Moreover, the anti-tithe agitation of the Rightboys in the 1780s and the revolutionary upheavals of the 1790s may have increased the incidence of non-residence as compared to the 1760s. Still, there is no doubt that non-residence of benefice holders must have had an adverse effect on the efficiency of the census-taking of 1766.

The issue of how enthusiastic individual clergymen may have been about the census is difficult to determine. Some clergymen would have viewed it as an unwelcome imposition, whilst for others it was an opportunity to accurately survey their parish, or to comment on the condition — often parlous — of the established church in their locality. It may make sense to consider returns which exceeded the specifications for the survey in an especially favourable light.⁴⁰ Arthur Forde's return, for Shankill, Co. Armagh, for example, also included the details of a religious census that he had conducted on his appointment to the parish in 1748, which suggests a personal interest in religious demography (see Appendix F).⁴¹

In other cases the ministers distinguished the Protestants by denomination, although the Lords had not solicited denomination-specific information in relation to Protestants.⁴² Elsewhere, some ministers presented not just the name of each householder but also included details on spouses, children, lodgers and extended family.⁴³ The most impressive of the surviving returns is for Newchapel parish, Co. Tipperary, which lists the names of the 100 'parishioners', as was required by the House of Lords, but also includes details on spouses and children, grouped by age, servants, lodgers and live-in relations.⁴⁴ The unsigned and undated return for Ardagh and Clonpriest parishes, Co. Cork, is another example of a highly detailed survey; it includes details on the number of Protestant and Catholic individuals within each household, and appears to have resulted from a particularly scrupulous enumeration.⁴⁵

UNCERTAINTY

In many cases, however, it is impossible to determine whether a return was diligently compiled, because, for large areas of the country, only numeric data, in summary form, have survived, and for these parishes, any indications of the ministers' enthusiasm or complacency, which might have existed in the original returns, have been lost. We can, of course, say that one should be suspicious of any returns that give conveniently rounded figures. The returns for Tallaght union, Co. Dublin, for instance, report sixty Protestant households and 400 Catholic households, while the Corps of the Chancellorship of Cashel, apparently contained ten Protestant and '3 hundred' Catholic households.⁴⁶

There are even instances where the minister delegated the survey to a third party, whose commitment to the enumeration may have been more or less than that of the minister. Thomas Hackett (Oregon union) evidently paid for the 'difficult and expensive' census to be conducted, although the identity of the enumerator is not recorded.⁴⁷ The return for Louth parish, Co. Louth, 'was made by persons the

39 Edward Brynn, 'Some repercussions of the Act of Union on the Church of Ireland, 1801–1820' in *Church History*, xl, no. 3 (Sept. 1971), 292–3. See also *Papers relating to the Established Church in Ireland*, H.C. 1807 (78), v, 57.

40 Bearing in mind, of course, that the instructions received by the ministers were not necessarily the original instructions that emanated from the House of Lords.

41 NAI, M. 2476 (f).

42 See, for example, the returns for Donegore and Kilbride, Armoyle, Billy, Drummaul, Ahoghill, Skerry and Racavan, Loughguile and Ballymoney (Down and Connor diocese), Artrea, Clogherny, Donaghenny, Killeeshil, Loughgall and Magherafelt (Armagh diocese), Clondavaddog, Inver, Mevagh and Raymoghly (Raphoe diocese), Lurgan and Munterconnaught (Kilmore and Ardagh diocese) (O'Lavery, *Down and Connor*, iii, 293; *ibid.*, iv, 453, 587, xxviii, xxix (appendix); NAI, parl. ret. 650, 653, 658, 668, 672, 674; Leslie, *Raphoe*, pp 53, 77, 108, 117; Cunningham, '1766 Kilmore and Ardagh', pp 361–2).

43 Troy, *Cloyne*, pp 210–21. Comparable, although less specific, data were included for Litter, Magourney and Kilcolman, Inishcarra and Carrigrohanebeg (*ibid.*, pp 123–6, 152–6, 157–64, 165–8).

44 NAI, parl. ret. 696. This return was presented in a 'grid' format on a large sheet but the sheet has now been subdivided (although it could easily be pieced together again).

45 Troy, *Cloyne*, pp 210–21.

46 NAI, M. 2476 (i); *ibid.*, parl. ret. 687.

47 Hackett complained that the exercise was 'difficult and expensive' and in a subsequent letter to the Lords he noted 'the number of Priests not being return'd to me at the time I sent my List of Inhabitants...' (Comerford, *Kildare and Leighlin*, i, 270, 271).

best qualified to make it', whilst the Kilmuckridge (Co. Wexford) survey, now lost, was compiled by the parish clerk.⁴⁸

One other concern is the possibility that double-counting occasionally occurred, as a consequence of parishes having more than one resident active clergyman. We do not believe this to have been widespread but it is manifest, for example, in the two returns for Ardclinis, Co. Antrim; one by the rector, the other by his curate. In most cases, of course, it is likely that resident clergymen would have divided the task between them, to reduce their workload, as occurred in Down parish, Co. Down, where one curate enumerated the town and another dealt with the rural area. Complications arising from double returns are also evident in the data for Clonleigh, Co. Donegal, Clonmore, Co. Kilkenny, and Colman, Co. Tipperary.⁴⁹

GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

There is no doubt there was a wide variety in the detail, substance and accuracy of the returns submitted to the House of Lords in April and May 1766. Since most of the original returns were destroyed, it is impossible at this juncture to say how geographically comprehensive the survey was. But the evidence points to a high degree of compliance on the part of the clergy of the Church of Ireland. Wakefield, in his *Account of Ireland*, provides summary details for the entire 1766 returns which were in the Public Record Office in Dublin at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁵⁰ He notes that returns which detailed the number of households were received from 1,206 parishes and unions, accounting for 108,973 Protestant and 265,392 Catholic households.⁵¹ In addition, details of 21,263 Protestant and 40,288 Catholic households were available for 'sundry parishes ... the ministers of which did not mention in what diocese or county they were in'.⁵² Thus, the aggregate number of households recorded in the returns that were transmitted to the Lords in 1766 totalled 435,916 households, exceeding the 424,046 houses reported by the hearth-tax collectors in the same year.⁵³ However, Wakefield also noted that data for another 85 parishes were available, which provided details of the number of people rather than the number of households; based on the national figures, these 85 parishes probably contained 25,000 households, or more.⁵⁴

In all, therefore, it seems that returns recording in the region of 460,000 households were made by Church of Ireland clergymen during the course of the 1766 census. This was a truly remarkable achievement. A minor omission is that these returns appear not to have included the inhabitants of the various extraparochial and nonparochial territories, which would have accounted for some additional households. Underlining the scale of the achievement, we calculate that the number of households recorded by clergymen in 1766 considerably exceeded (by 8 per cent or slightly more) the number of households reported by the hearth-tax collectors, even though the hearth tax related to the whole country, whilst the ecclesiastical survey of 1766 had some parish omissions. This strongly supports the observation, made at the time of the Popery Inquiry of 1731, that ecclesiastics were more diligent surveyors of religious issues than secular officials.⁵⁵

48 NAI, parl. ret. 673; *ibid.*, M. 2471, p. 8.

49 For Ardclinis see O'Laverty, *Down and Connor*, iv, 556–7. For Down parish Daniel Matthews, curate, organized the returns for the town, while 'returns of the country parts of said parish have already been made by Rev. Charles Hamilton, curate assistant of said parish' (O'Laverty, *Down and Connor*, iv, p. xxv, appendix). Also, see the return for Clonleigh, Co. Donegal, where the enumeration may have been shared between the rector and his curate, and the two sets of figures for Clonmore, Co. Kilkenny, and Colman, Co. Tipperary, where separate clergymen may have been involved.

50 Note that Wakefield incorrectly claims that the Lords had instructed the parish ministers to return 'the number of Protestants and Papists' along with 'a list of the Protestant and Papist families'. The order did not require the former details (Wakefield, *Account of Ireland*, ii, 587, note).

51 Wakefield, *Account of Ireland*, ii, 587. See Appendix B for Wakefield's data. The individual diocesan figures for Protestant households, given by Wakefield, do not match his national figure. The diocesan figures sum to 130,236 Protestant households but the national total given is 130,263 households. We assume that Wakefield's national total is incorrect.

52 Wakefield, *Account of Ireland*, ii, 587.

53 Dickson *et al.* (eds), 'Hearth tax', p. 178.

54 See Appendix B, where 1,206 parishes returned 108,973 Protestant and 265,392 Catholic households (i.e. the sum of the diocesan households, minus the 61,551 households in the 'sundry parishes'), or a mean of 310 households per parish. If this national mean is representative of the 85 parishes returning details of populations only, then that equates to c.26,400 households.

55 'The returns [to the 1731 Popery Inquiry] made by the archbishops and bishops are much more full and particular than those which the Lords' Committees have received from the magistrates of the Kingdom ... the Lords' Committee have chosen to form their report chiefly from them' (House of Lords, 8 Mar. 1731/2 (*Lords' jn., Ire., 1727–52*, iii, 199)).

The diocesan data presented by Wakefield are replicated in Appendix B and mapped in Figure 20, whilst an abstract of the national picture is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 — Religious census for 1766, summary for Ireland. Source: Wakefield, *Account of Ireland*, ii, 587. Note the figures for the total number of people (columns 3 and 4) can be largely ignored because, as Wakefield notes, most ministers did not make a return of the number of people in their parishes

'Families' [households]		People (partial return)		Priests	Friars
Prot.	Cath.	Prot.	Cath.		
130,236 ⁵⁶	305,680	114,266 ⁵⁷	416,781	1,113 ⁵⁸	303

THE NATIONAL PICTURE

While the richness of the 1766 census lies in the detailed accounts of population and religious identity at a local level, it is important also to keep an eye on the national picture. Wakefield's diocesan data report the Protestant share of the population of Ireland at 29.9 per cent of all recorded households in 1766, exceeding the 27.3 per cent reported in the 1732 religious survey (see Appendix A). We are suspicious of this figure, given that various contemporaries were suggesting that the twin evils of emigration and conversion to 'Popery' were progressively eroding Protestant numbers during the eighteenth century. For Clogher diocese, for example, for which, conveniently, we have parish surveys for 1733 and 1766 (conducted by Church of Ireland clergymen), there is clear evidence of a decline in the Protestant (and especially the Presbyterian) share of population in many parishes.⁵⁹ Moreover, a proportion of 30 per cent would place the Protestant share of the island's population at the highest level ever recorded for any of the four centuries since 1600.

It is unlikely that the Protestant share of the Irish population had climbed so high and our conjecture is that it was closer to one in four than one in three by the 1760s.⁶⁰ Two factors served to inflate the Protestant proportion, as reported in 1766. One is that Protestant-headed households sometimes contained Catholic members, so the proportion of Protestant households was greater than the proportion of Protestants in the population.⁶¹ The other is that it is more likely that Catholics were omitted from the census than Protestants. Arguably, the typical Church of Ireland clergyman knew his own parishioners quite well, and his Catholic neighbours rather less well. How well he might know his Dissenter neighbours is a moot point.

It has been suggested above that in the region of 460,000 households were reported for 1766. Applying a household multiplier of 5.1 (and it can hardly have been much higher and may have been a little lower) to this number of households, would imply a national population of 2.35 million people (2,346,000) in 1766. A multiplier of 4.9 would still yield a total of 2.25 millions. These heuristic exercises in themselves suggest a very extensive national coverage on the part of the census takers of 1766. So, if one were to work with a mean household size of 5.1, and make the further assumption, a purely arbitrary one, that the deficiency in coverage was of the order of 15 per cent, then the population of Ireland in 1766, would have been approximately 2.7 million people. This may be a little lower than one might expect, in view of the findings of Dickson, Daultrey and Ó Gráda, which suggest a range of 2.2 to 2.6 millions for the earlier year of 1753, but is not greatly out of line with their estimates.⁶² This is but one of a number of topics that would repay further research, particularly at a regional level, with the 1766 census as one further pathway into the shadowlands of eighteenth-century Irish population history.

56 Wakefield gives 130,263 but the sum of the individual diocesan figures is 130,236.

57 Wakefield gives 114,166 but the sum of the individual diocesan figures is 114,266.

58 Wakefield gives 1,143 but the sum of the individual diocesan figures is 1,113.

59 Clogher diocese visitation book, 1733 (PRONI, DIO/4/24/2/1).

60 Liam Kennedy, Kerby Miller and Brian Gurrin, 'The Protestant population of Ireland since the seventeenth century: numbers, proportions and conjectures' in Joseph Ruane and Patrick Cabanel (eds), *Religion et violence: Protestants et Catholiques en France et en Irlande, 16th–21th siècle* (Université de Rennes, forthcoming).

61 As against this, Protestant households seem to have been slightly larger than Catholic households, so this takes some but hardly all of the force out of this qualification.

62 Dickson *et al.* (eds), 'Hearth tax', pp 152–3. Dickson, Ó Gráda and Daultrey present a range of estimates for mean household size at various times during the eighteenth century.

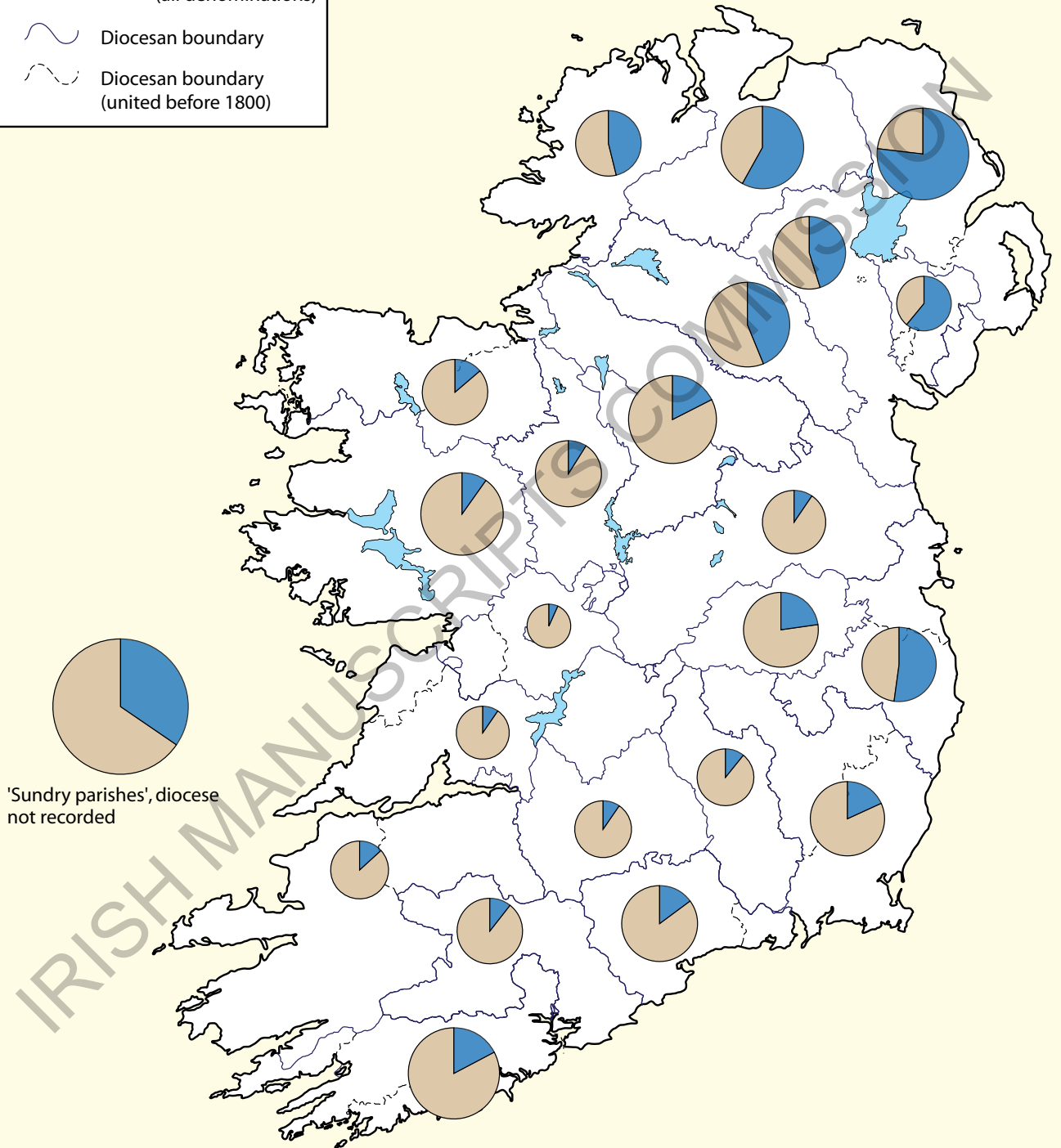
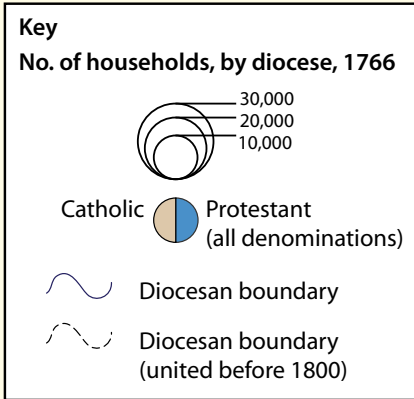


Figure 20 — Religious distribution in Ireland, 1766, by diocese. Source: Wakefield, *Account of Ireland*, ii, 587.

CHANGE OVER TIME

The fluctuating demographic fortunes of the various religious groupings through time has a contemporary, as well as a historical, resonance, most obviously in relation to Northern Ireland and its possible futures. The 1766 census of religion is of pivotal importance to any long-range attempts at tracking religious demographic change. We might use the parish of Donagh, in north Co. Monaghan, to illustrate the possibilities. Although Monaghan had not been included in the Ulster Plantation, private settlement had resulted in a substantial British presence in parts of the county from at least 1660.⁶³ Its location, bordering Co. Tyrone, which was a Plantation county, facilitated these inflows. Information about religious identity is available for the parish for 1733, 1764–5, 1766 and 1831, but, particularly importantly, in each case the Protestant figures are subdivided between Established Church and Dissenting Protestants.⁶⁴ The data from these censuses are shown in Table 5. As a rough and ready benchmark for Table 5, we might note that data from the Poll Tax for 1660 indicated that 70 per cent of the inhabitants were Irish and that 30 per cent were English.⁶⁵ Each of the four surveys suggests a small Catholic majority in the parish, and each show Dissenters outnumbering members of the Established Church. However, the table also shows the Established Church and Catholic proportions of the population advancing in the century after 1733, while the Dissenter population contracted in relative terms, from almost 40 per cent in 1733 to marginally above 20 per cent by 1831. Extending the story forward in time by means of the statutory census of 1861 — the first to deal explicitly with religious identity — and beyond is a relatively easy task.⁶⁶ Marked changes, such as those evident in Table 5, cry out for interpretation on the part of, among others, historians of religion, economy, demography and politics.

Table 5 — Religious population change in Donagh parish, 1733–1831. Note these data represent household counts for 1733, 1764 and 1766, and population counts for 1831.

Year	Household/population counts				Denominational proportions		
	Established Ch.	Dissenters	Total Prots	Catholics	Est. Ch.	Diss.	Cath.
1733	54	273	327	401	7.4%	37.5%	55.1%
1764	127	287	414	516	13.7%	30.9%	55.5%
1766	143	265	408	516	15.5%	28.7%	55.8%
1831	1,950	2,422	4,372	6,696	17.6%	21.9%	60.5%

CASE STUDY

Many of the conventions and calculations detailed earlier for the hearth-tax based survey of 1764–5 are also used in our presentation of the ecclesiastical census of 1766, so there is no need to repeat them here. Table 6 presents illustrative data from the 1766 census for Abington parish, in counties Limerick and Tipperary (Emly diocese; baronies of Oweybeg, Clanwilliam and Owey and Arra). The Abington return is the original, surviving return (NAI, parl. ret. 681) and this local census was conducted by Gilbert Rawson, curate. It is dated 9 April. Although Rawson's return covered the union of Abington, data for the constituent parishes in the union can be extracted; so, the figures presented below are for Abington parish only. Information on households and on population totals are provided in this particularly informative source, which also includes a full list of householders' names, as well as the number of Protestants and Catholics in each household. This means that a denomination-specific mean household size (MHS) can be calculated. This turns out to be 7.2 for Protestant households

63 Pender, *Census of Ireland, c.1659*, pp 152–3.

64 Ardagh, Kilmore and Clogher visitations, 1733 (PRONI, DIO/4/24/2/1); *First report, Public Instruction*, p. 12a.

65 Pender, *Census of Ireland, c.1659*, pp 152–3.

66 These trends continued; by 1861, for example, in spite of the Famine, and the emigration which followed, the Church of Ireland population had advanced to 18.9 per cent and the Catholic population to 61.5 per cent of the parish, while the non-Church of Ireland Protestant population had declined to just 19.5 per cent (*Census of Ireland, 1861*, part iv, *report and tables relating to religious professions, education and occupations*, vol. ii, p. 465, H.C. 1863 [3204–III], lviii, 173.