

# Digest of 1951 Census

**AYRSHIRE : 1931-1951.**

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For anyone studying local history there are three essential sources—the first and second *Statistical Accounts* and the series of *Census Reports*. The former provide colourful pictures of the old days before they changed into the times that we know ; the latter offer a set of statistics from which can be derived a view of the community's economic change and social progress over the last hundred and fifty years.

These *Census Reports*, which appeared decennially from 1801 to 1931, are currently being supplemented by a new batch, recording the figures which were computed in the 1951 Census. The separately-published section on Ayrshire contains 58 closely-packed pages of statistical material.<sup>1</sup> This can hardly be recommended as a work of absorbing interest, and there are not many who will choose it as a bedside book. The present article is less in the nature of a review directed at prospective readers than the ruminations of an historical food-taster, appointed to digest this rather heavy diet of statistics—for properly absorbed they do provide a valuable commentary on social developments in Ayrshire between 1931 and 1941.

Let us start with the straightforward business of counting heads. With 321,237 inhabitants in 1951 (153,114 males and 168,123 females), as compared with 285,217 at the previous census in 1931, Ayrshire is experiencing a continued growth of population, increases having been noted between each census since the first in 1801, save in the period 1921-1931, and that was probably due to a bounty of holidaymakers among us in June, 1921.

How and why has there been an increase of 36,020 over the twenty years 1931-1951 ? There has been a natural increase of 39,857 in the period thanks to the fact that births (114,432) outnumbered deaths (74,575), which seems healthy enough. But there is an ominous 3,837 of a discrepancy between the natural increase and the actual increase, which can only be accounted for by people leaving the county. And this is a net loss, the actual loss (which cannot be computed) being presumably much greater. The deduction is that even a prosperous county like Ayrshire cannot absorb all its additional members, and the only consolation is that Ayrshire is holding its numbers much better than other parts of Scotland whose general net loss through migration between 1931 and 1951 was in the region of 40% of the natural increase as compared with Ayrshire's 9.6%.

(1) *Census of 1951 : Report on the Fifteenth Census of Scotland, Volume 1, Part 8 : County of Ayr.* H.M.S.O., 1953, 15/-.



Of course, not all of Ayrshire's exiles have gone abroad. The figure of net loss includes not only the emigrant for Canada but also the family that has just flitted to Glasgow. And as against the exodus there is the partial compensation of an influx from outside. Of our inhabitants in 1951 there were 234,597 natives of Ayrshire (93·4%); 65,280 incomers from other parts of Scotland; and a heterogeneous collection of "furriners," including (the largest groups) 11,850 English, 4,596 Irish, and 1,632 aliens. Among these last were 439 Poles, 231 Germans, 221 Russians, 303 Italians, and only 91 Americans—and the total number of aliens had increased from the 793 of 1931. Most of the incomers seem to have settled in the biggest towns, for Kilmarnock has only 80% of its population Ayrshire-born and Ayr a mere 72·5%.

Totals for the county give only a generalised and superficial picture. To discover what has been going on in the various corners of Ayrshire a closer analysis is recommended. Talk of the continued growth of population then becomes a little less confident when we discover that between 1931 and 1951, while 32 parishes acquired an augmented population, they did so at varying rates, and in the remaining 12 parishes an actual decline was recorded. This dozen deserve examination under the microscope. Half of them are in the remoter rural areas—Ballantrae, Colmonell, Barr, Kirkmichael, Stair and Loudoun (landward area); most of the others are districts where there had been a decline in mining or heavy industry—Dalry, Kilbirnie, Dreghorn, Galston, Muirkirk; and the final and most curious one—Kilmarnock—is due, we hasten to point out, to the transfer of population from the burgh centre to the new housing schemes south of the river in the parish of Riccarton.

It is disturbing to note not only that so many rural parishes are declining in population but that others make so little increase. Indeed, if we examine long-term trends, over the century 1851-1951, 15 of the 44 Ayrshire parishes have declined in population—largely due to the drift from the land. Carrick, which had 32,000 a century ago, now has only 23,000, and how great the drain has been can be seen in the parish of Barr, with 907 in 1851 and a mere 376 a century later.

Not only has there been a decline in the rural areas whence in the past Ayrshire has drawn some of its best human stock, but the smaller towns have, if not declined, virtually stopped growing. It may be argued that these excellent smaller communities have thus been better able to retain their finer characteristics as places for living in; but unfortunately they have been able to stay small only as a result of the steady exodus of some of their best young folk. The places which have grown most are those towns which

were already the largest. The coast towns have been flooded with incomers and the two large burghs of Ayr and Kilmarnock are being steadily swollen in numbers, until in 1951, with 42,377 and 42,123 inhabitants respectively, they hold between them 26·3% of all the folk in the county. These two burghs have filled up all their most convenient housing sites; water, drainage and other service facilities have become inadequate; internal transport is chaotic; the schools are grossly overloaded; and one is tempted to suggest that walls should be built around both burghs and no one allowed to enter in future except with a visitors' passport.

One other gloomy aspect—we are an ageing population. This is true of the country as a whole, but the realities of the problem may be made more clear by local references. The average Ayrshire man in 1951 was 33 years of age (as compared with 30 in 1931), and the average Ayrshire woman 35 (compared with 32). Whereas in 1931 7% of the population was 65 years of age or more, by 1951 the percentage had risen to 9·6%. The numbers and proportion of old folk has been and is continuing to increase, which means that the proportion of non-producers in our economy is increasing, and the standard of living can only be maintained by increased productivity of those in the working-age groups. Unfortunately, statistics are not yet available of the numbers engaged in the various industries and occupations—they will appear in a later national volume—and we cannot meantime analyse the structure of the working-age groups in Ayrshire. In fact, we know (from other sources) that the numbers employed in Ayrshire have noticeably increased over the twenty years from 1931 to 1951, and those within the working-age groups (15-65 years) have maintained almost exactly the same proportion of the population (65%) as in 1931. But that is because while the proportion of old folk has increased, the proportion of children has decreased—a very serious matter which we shall revert to in due course. And the average age of the working population has risen. In 1951 there were fewer young folk in each of the age groups 15 to 25 than in 1931. The general picture is of an ageing population with a growing number of old folk to be maintained by a working population which contains fewer young people.

This ageing population is the product of a declining death rate, which is in itself an excellent thing. On the other side of the balance there is a birth rate which has been declining, except for the (probably temporary) respite of the war and post-war years. The result has been that though the number of children in Ayrshire under the age of 15 has increased, it is a meagre increase from 79,071 to 80,280, and the proportion of children in the total population has declined from 27·7% to 25·0%. In a number of age-groups the numbers of children were actually less in 1951 than



in 1931, and had it not been for the raising of the school-leaving age the number of school children would have been less in 1951 than in 1931. Immediately after 1951, however, into the schools began to pour the multitude of infants who had been procreated so prolifically in the immediate post-war years, constituting that "bulge" which is producing havoc as it passes through the schools. Behind this abnormal invasion the age-groups are smaller in size, and in due course, if long-term trends continue, obstetricians will find less work to do, teachers will get classes of manageable size, and ultimately employers will find fewer and fewer young folk available to fill their vacancies.

The effects of the decline in the birth rate are being partially offset by the reduction in mortality among babies and young children. This is having a significant effect on the sex ratio. Formerly, though there were more boy than girl babies, many more of the former died at birth or soon after, and in most age-groups there was a preponderance of females. In 1931 it was obvious from the statistics that in the healthier communities more of these "excess" boy babies were being kept alive, and so the sex ratio was becoming more balanced. By 1951 the effects of improved child care on the sex ratio is becoming even more marked and more widely so. If such trends continue, ultimately there will be no "surplus" women, and even as it is, girls will be happy to hear their prospects of spinsterhood are becoming steadily less.

Over the county as a whole, and including all age-groups, there is a sex ratio of 1,098 women for every 1,000 men. There are variations from area to area. As in 1931 there is a far higher ratio of women to men in the textile towns and the coast residential towns; while in the mining areas there is, on the other hand, actually an excess of men as compared with women. In the period 1931 to 1951, in most of these places, the unequal ratio has become less acute. In the coastal towns this may be due to the decline in numbers of domestic servant girls. In the other places it seems to be due to improved transport facilities. The mining areas, happily, are now able to retain more of their girls; they can stay at home and travel to work daily, even if no local jobs are available.

In more obvious ways the *Census Report* reveals continued social progress. Besides counting heads and enumerating sex, age, place of birth, conjugal condition and ability to speak Gaelic, the inquiry extends into the field of living conditions. For nearly a century the takers of the census have made inquiries about housing conditions. In 1861, for example, the average number of persons per room was 2.08 for the whole of Ayrshire. By 1931 that had been improved to 1.33 and by 1951 to 1.07. In our

twenty-year period the number of houses increased by 18,901 from 66,010 to 84,911 and there was a noticeable improvement not only in quantity but also in the quality of houses available. There was, for example, a reduction in numbers of old one-roomed dwellings, from 7,140 to 3,313, and a similar effort was obviously being made to reduce the numbers of small two-roomed dwellings, which decreased from 25,481 to 20,202. In passing, too, it is worth noting the reduction in numbers of very large houses with more than six rooms.

The figures given illustrate the differences in housing conditions from place to place. As against the county average of 1.07 persons per room, in the better-off residential-cum-resort burghs like Largs, Girvan and Troon, the figures are as low as 0.77, 0.88, 0.90 respectively; in the mining district of Dalmellington the high figure of 1.28 reflects the heritage of poverty and bad conditions that has not yet been overcome.

A new inquiry was made in the 1951 Census regarding "Household Conveniences." The information discovered is of particular interest. The other tables in the *Report* may record progress; the new statistics indicate improvements which still remain to be accomplished in the various communities throughout the county. It might therefore be appropriate to conclude this article by selecting some of the figures. At some future date (sooner rather than later, we trust) they will become matter for comment by the social historian.

#### County of Ayr, 1951.

<i>Number of Households.</i>	<i>With</i>	<i>Sharing</i>	<i>Without</i>
Indoor Piped Water Supply ...	75,779	10,420	3,117
Kitchen Sink ...	76,388	9,567	3,361
Cooking Facilities with Oven ...	75,878	8,462	4,976
Water Closet ...	58,204	28,693	2,419
Fixed Bath ...	49,690	7,892	31,734
Total Number of Households ...	...	...	89,316
Number with all these Conveniences ...	...	...	48,915
Number with None of these Conveniences ...	...	...	578



## INDEX TO AYRSHIRE PARISHES

IN THE *Statistical Accounts*.

- (1) *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, 21 volumes, 1791-1799.  
 (2) *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, Volume 5, Ayrshire, 1845.  
 (3) *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland: Ayrshire*, 1951.

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