

The 10,000 Londonderry Protestants Missing From the West Bank of the Foyle

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Introduction

There is general agreement that, from the late 1960s, thousands of Protestants left their homes on Londonderry's West Bank (or Cityside), and that intimidation was a major factor. The West Bank of the River Foyle came to be seen as a dangerous and unwelcoming place for Protestants.

This movement of population has been eloquently portrayed in Jonathan Burgess's play, *The Exodus*¹, and in a film of the same name made by Open Reel Productions for the BBC in 2008.

Popular accounts have estimated the number of Protestants who left the Cityside as anything from 12,000 to 15,000². Similar popular estimates of the number of Protestants who originally lived on the West Bank range from 16,000³ to 18,000⁴. By contrast, academic sources have found the greatest of difficulty in locating 10,000 Protestants who could have been intimidated out of their homes. There are a number of problems.

1. It is important to establish a baseline population, for instance in the mid-1960s, to show the position before serious intimidation took place. Starting with the 1971 Northern Ireland Census is too late.
2. Official statistics are quite useful in showing the Protestant population within the Londonderry Corporation (Londonderry County Borough Council) North and South Wards on the West Bank. They do not, however, show the population in the three Cityside wards of the 1960s Londonderry Rural District Council (the Lower, Middle and Upper Liberties). The Liberties took in districts such as Belmont, Culmore, and Crevagh. Omitting these areas means that the Protestant population has been underestimated.
3. Some analyses of Census data have only counted Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Methodist adherents as Protestants. Other Protestant denominations, which tend not to be shown separately in the official data, are sometimes omitted.
4. From 1971 onwards, growing numbers of people were classified as "Not Stated" in responding to the Census question on religion. This tended to conceal those people from a Protestant community background who no longer identified with a particular church or simply resented being asked to state their religion. It was subsequently shown that Protestants were disproportionately represented in the "Not Stated" category.

The Derry Catholic Registration Association Records

The Derry Catholic Registration Association (DCRA) existed to make sure that as many Catholics as possible were correctly recorded on the electoral register. In performing this task, it made surveys of the area and drew up religious analyses of the electoral registers. These records are now available in the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)⁵. The categories used by the DCRA vary over the years. They are, at different times, Catholics and Protestants, Catholics and Unionists, or Catholics and Others. Because the numbers of those who were neither Catholic nor Protestant in their community background were statistically

negligible in 1960s Londonderry, they can be reliably taken to be an estimate of the number of Catholics and Protestants on the register.

The DCRA records, which go up to 1969, were compiled by their registration agents. Their efforts were matched, on the other side of the political fence, by Unionist registration agents, although the latter’s records are not so readily to hand. The DCRA statistics were often published in the *Derry Journal* and were thus open to public scrutiny by Unionist registration agents. The evidence seems to suggest that the DCRA record keeping was scrupulous and its analyses were not the subject of a serious challenge.

There was an advantage that the DCRA registration agents possessed. Unlike the Census, their surveys did not just rely on citizens’ self-reports of their religion. Agents would also use their local knowledge to classify people, on the basis of their community identity, as Catholic or Protestant. In closely knit communities it was not impossible to work out which side of the fence someone belonged to.

The Baseline Population

How does the existence of the DCRA records help in the search for at least 10,000 West Bank Protestants? The DCRA analyses do concentrate on the Londonderry Corporation area, consisting of the North and South Wards on the West Bank and the Waterside Ward on the East Bank of the Foyle. However, on occasions they also provide analyses of the three Liberties wards from the Londonderry Rural District Council area. The most relevant records are those of the Westminster parliamentary election register, which contain details of people aged 21 or over. This is a good starting point.

Table 1: DCRA Figures for West Bank Protestants Aged 21 and Over January 1964 ⁶

| Local Authority | Ward | Protestants |
|----------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Londonderry County Borough | North | 4603 |
| Londonderry County Borough | South | 1555 |
| Londonderry Rural District | Lower Liberties | 500 |
| Londonderry Rural District | Middle Liberties | 1533 |
| Londonderry Rural District | Upper Liberties | 450 |
| Total | | 8641 |

Table 1 outlines figures from before the first “civil rights” march in 1968, and thus provides a reasonable baseline. It does include all the areas on the West Bank of the Foyle, and not just those in the Londonderry Corporation district (Londonderry County Borough). It also includes all Protestants, and not just the main denominations. This represents progress, but the statistics refer only to adults. What is required is a reasonable method of converting them into population figures, using the most conservative assumptions.

The method that has been chosen here is to examine figures from the 1961 Census, which provide an analysis of the age profile of different religious denominations in the Londonderry Corporation area.

Table 2: 1961 Census – Londonderry Population Under 21 by Religious Denomination ⁷

| | Catholic | Presbyterian | Church of Ire | Methodist | Other |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Total L Pop | 36073 | 7866 | 7116 | 1035 | 1672 |
| Under 21s | 17641 | 2764 | 2557 | 357 | 671 |
| Under 21s % | 48.9 | 35.1 | 35.9 | 34.5 | 40.1 |

Table 2 shows the percentage of each religious denomination which was under 21 years of age. The figures for the three main Protestant denominations are very similar. However, the most conservative assumption is to work with the percentage for Methodists who are under 21. Assuming that 34.5% of all Protestants were under 21 will bring about the smallest increase to the figure of 8641 adults in calculating the Protestant population size. A little maths can then be applied.

1. If 34.5% of Protestants were under 21, then 65.5% of Protestants were 21 or over.
2. If there were 8641 Protestant adults then 1% of all Protestants would have been $8641/65.5 = 131.9$
3. 100% of all Protestants would therefore have been $131.9 \times 100 = 13190$

There is therefore good statistical evidence to believe that there were at least 13,190 Protestants living on Londonderry’s West Bank in 1964.

To What Shall I Compare Thee?

The challenge is now to come up with a reliable figure with which to compare the figure of 13,190 Protestants to get a reasonable idea of how many Protestants left the Cityside. The author of this paper is indebted to the study by Shirlow et al (2005) ⁸ for suggesting a solution. Recall that the fourth problem faced by researchers working in this area is that, particularly from 1971 onwards, a growing number of people decided not to state their religion on their Census return. However, in 2001, an additional question was added to the Northern Ireland Census questionnaire, and that helped to solve the problem. ⁹

Respondents were asked if they belonged to any particular religion and if they said “Yes”, they were asked “What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?”. They then had a choice of Roman Catholic, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Church of Ireland, Methodist Church in Ireland or Other. For the last category, there was a space in which they could write something to clarify their affiliation. This is the question that some people did not answer.

The new question was “What religion, religious denomination or body were you brought up in?” with the same options as above. Subsequently, the answer to this question has usually been interpreted as a proxy for community background.

The other great thing about the 2001 Census is that results are widely available on an electoral ward basis. At this time there were 17 wards on the West Bank of the Foyle, an area which coincides precisely with the territory covered by the 5 wards listed in Table 1, so a direct comparison is possible.

Table 3: 2001 Census – Londonderry West Bank Wards ¹⁰

| Ward | Column A All Persons | Column B Catholic | Column C Protestant and Other Christian | Column D B + C as a Percentage of A |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| Ballynashog | 3720 | 3554 | 119 | 98.7 |
| Beechwood | 2507 | 2444 | 55 | 99.7 |
| Brandywell | 2602 | 2572 | 20 | 99.6 |
| Carn Hill | 3165 | 3110 | 36 | 99.4 |
| Creggan Central | 3054 | 3014 | 27 | 99.6 |
| Creggan South | 2453 | 2424 | 23 | 99.8 |
| Crevagh | 5223 | 4775 | 405 | 99.2 |
| Culmore | 7856 | 7394 | 390 | 99.1 |
| Foyle Springs | 3921 | 3710 | 192 | 99.5 |
| Pennyburn | 2902 | 2786 | 87 | 99.0 |
| Rosemount | 2651 | 2458 | 141 | 98.0 |
| Shantallow East | 2748 | 2700 | 38 | 99.6 |
| Shantallow West | 6406 | 6214 | 147 | 99.3 |
| Springtown | 3570 | 3458 | 67 | 98.7 |
| Strand | 3598 | 3270 | 261 | 98.1 |
| The Diamond | 2551 | 2067 | 452 | 98.7 |
| Westland | 2287 | 2238 | 34 | 99.3 |
| Totals | 61214 | 58188 | 2494 | 99.1 |

The first thing to note in Table 3 is the right hand column. When people were asked the new question, 99% of them were able to identify as either Roman Catholic or Protestant and Other Christian. This effectively solved the problem of respondents not answering the Census question on religion. They were happy to identify as being brought up in one or the other of the two main traditions if they were not comfortable answering the traditional question on religion.

By 2001 there were only small pockets of Protestants remaining on the West Bank. Crevagh (in the West of the district) and Culmore (in the North East) are home to more rural communities. The Diamond Ward contains the Fountain Estate, the only place on the West Bank which could be described as a Protestant area.

The main conclusion is that Table 3 provides a reliable estimate of the numbers to which the West Bank Protestant community was reduced by 2001. ***The 13,190 Protestants who lived in the area in 1964 had become 2494 by 2001. Even allowing for a small amount of statistical error, the number of Protestants who were present in 1964 had been reduced by at least 10,000.***

Earlier Historical Evidence

The 1937 Census provided population data about those living in the Londonderry Rural District as well as the Londonderry Corporation area. It shows that there were 11,791 Protestants living in the North, South, East and West Wards of the Londonderry Corporation on the Cityside of the river (the 1937 Census used the ward scheme in operation until 1936). The figure is 10,603 if the Other and Not Stated respondents are excluded. A further 8138 Protestants (7738 excluding the Other and Not Stated respondents) are shown as residing in the whole of the Londonderry Rural District.¹¹ That figure covers people living on both the East and West Banks outside the Londonderry Corporation area, so what is needed is some way of estimating how many of those lived on the Cityside.

In 1950 the DCRA produced a rare estimate of adults living in each of the Rural District wards.¹² A few calculations show that 35.4% of the Rural District Protestant adults lived in the Liberties, the three wards on the West Bank. If this is taken as a guide, it could be reasonably assumed that, very roughly, 35.4% of the 8138 Rural District Protestants of all ages lived in the Liberties. That yields a figure of 2881. Thus 11,791 Protestants from the Corporation area plus 2881 from the Rural District equals 14,672. If the Other and Not Stated respondents are excluded from the Corporation and Rural District statistics, the figure is 13,342. Because of the assumption that has been made about the proportion of Rural District Protestants living in the Liberties, this estimate is subject to a certain margin of error, but not to the extent of doubting that there were well over 10,000 Protestants on the West Bank in 1937.

Misleading Statistics

Earlier in this paper it was indicated that there have been a number of problems faced by researchers exploring this subject. Some examples are provided here. There is a series of papers produced by Templegrove Action Research, which sometimes say quite interesting things about the situation in Londonderry. They are available on the CAIN website. One of these papers provides, as Table 3,, a breakdown by religion of the population on the Cityside (West Bank) from 1971 to 1991¹³.

This is an example of the problem of starting the research period too late. By 1971 there would already have been movement of Protestants from the West Bank of the Foyle. The author's interpretation of the Census returns has the total number of remaining Protestants as 8459 in 1971 and the exodus over the period 1971 to 1991 is estimated at just over 7000. Only those who indicated that they were Presbyterian, Church of Ireland or Methodist are included in the Total Protestants figure. Some 5881 people on the Cityside are recorded in that paper as not stating their religion in the 1971 Census.

The study therefore runs into many of the problems outlined earlier in this paper. Researchers must work with the sources they have to hand. The DCRA archives were probably not available at the time of the Templegrove studies, and the 2001 Census results certainly were not. Now that we do have access to this additional information, the earlier studies should be treated with some caution.

When the Pat Finucane Centre became involved in a publication on Protestant migration in Londonderry, there were probably low Unionist expectations. The Centre has an Irish Republican ethos and the study it published was funded with a grant from the Irish Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade¹⁴. The major criticism was that it played down the role of intimidation in encouraging Protestants to leave.

The playwright, Jonathan Burgess, complained that "People were certainly not moving for houses. They weren't moving for jobs. They were moving because they were scared. The people who moved know why they moved...My father moved us when I was two weeks old. We lived at the top of the Abercorn Road (on the west bank) and my father moved us to Bonds Street (on the east bank), but when there was a bomb that went off outside our door in the Waterside my father decided to move us farther on out." ¹⁵

An examination of that aspect of the exodus is beyond the scope of this paper, but brief comment can be made about the report's statistics. In their Table 1, the authors present statistics from the 1961 and 1971 Census. Only figures for the North and South Wards of the Londonderry Corporation are included.¹⁶ The authors conclude that there was already a decline in the West Bank Protestant population between the two Census dates and this seems to be used to support a claim that migration factors other than intimidation were at play before trouble broke out.¹⁷ There are three significant problems with this argument.

1. By the time of the 1971 Census, the number of those in the "Other and Not Stated" category for the question on religion had, on the figures presented by the authors, risen from 1182 to 5145 in the North and South Wards. This was largely due to people not stating their religion. Juxtaposing the 1961 and 1971 results is therefore not comparing like with like.
2. From 1968 there was heightened community tension in Londonderry and, from 1969, serious public disorder. Intimidation would therefore already have been a factor before the 1971 Census was compiled.
3. Most seriously, by considering only the North and South Wards of the Londonderry Corporation, no account has been taken of the Protestant population in the Liberties Wards of the Londonderry Rural District, and any movement by Protestants from one part of the West Bank to another.

The DCRA records do not facilitate a comparison of the Corporation Wards and the Liberties throughout the 1960s, but there is good data covering the period 1960-1965. An examination of these statistics will prove instructive.

Table 4: DCRA Analysis of Protestant Adults in the West Bank Wards 1960-1965

| | 1960 ¹⁸ | Feb 1961 ¹⁹ | Feb 1962 ²⁰ | Jan 1963 ²¹ | Jan 1964 ²² | Jan 1965 ²³ |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| North Ward | 4903 | 4759 | 4629 | 4564 | 4603 | 4506 |
| South Ward | 1839 | 1754 | 1670 | 1569 | 1555 | 1561 |
| Total | 6742 | 6513 | 6299 | 6133 | 6158 | 6067 |
| | | | | | | |
| Lower Liberties | 491 | 496 | 478 | 489 | 500 | 506 |
| Middle Liberties | 1025 | 1256 | 1438 | 1455 | 1533 | 1573 |
| Upper Liberties | 432 | 435 | 433 | 427 | 450 | 461 |
| Total | 1948 | 2187 | 2349 | 2371 | 2483 | 2540 |
| | | | | | | |
| Corp + Liberties | 8690 | 8700 | 8648 | 8504 | 8641 | 8607 |

Table 4 is based on those who were on the Westminster electoral register, that is those adults who were 21 years of age or over. It can be seen that between 1960 and 1965 there was a slow decline in the number of Protestants in the North and South Wards of the Londonderry Corporation. However, most significantly, this is balanced by an increase in Protestants living in the Liberties Wards of the Londonderry Rural District on the West Bank. If the Corporation and Liberties totals are added, it is clear that the population remained remarkably stable throughout the first half of this decade. The conclusion is that 8690 Protestant adults lived on the West Bank in 1960, compared with 8607 in 1965.

The most logical interpretation of the DCRA statistics is that there was some modest movement of Protestants from one part of the West Bank to another during this period, but that there was no significant net loss to the Cityside Protestant population. Concentrating only on the North and South Wards presents a biased picture of the situation on the West Bank in the 1960s. There is no evidence here of any significant net migration away from the Cityside in the more peaceful years of the first half of the decade.

Those 10,000 Protestants

The popular accounts stating that 10,000 or more Londonderry Protestants moved from the West Bank of the Foyle have, to date, struggled to find academic support. It can now be seen, however, that some of the academic studies suffer from a number of problems. Starting the counting process in 1971 produces some interesting results, but it does not account for the Protestant exodus which had started before that year. Accounts which refer only to the North and South Wards of the Londonderry Corporation ignore the thousands of Protestants who lived in the Liberties wards of Londonderry Rural District Council on the West Bank.

Further, studies which count only Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Church of Ireland and Methodist respondents in Census returns as Protestants do ignore significant numbers of Baptists, Brethren, Reformed Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and a host of smaller Protestant denominations. For instance, the 1961 Census provides a breakdown of these smaller denominations for the whole of County Londonderry. It is clear that almost two-thirds of those in the “Other and Not Stated” category are members of identifiable smaller Protestant denominations.²⁴

It can be seen that a better baseline position can be established in the mid-1960s, revealing the situation before serious unrest broke out in Londonderry. It is also now possible to get around the problem of respondents not stating their religious affiliation in the Census by going to the 2001 results. The new question about community background encouraged 99% of respondents in Londonderry to identify with one main community or the other. This makes it easier to identify Protestants without a church connection who were still likely to identify with Protestant community values.

The conclusion is that there is now solid statistical evidence to suggest that at least 10,000 Protestants went missing from the West Bank of the Foyle. From the late 1960s they were encouraged to leave because the West Bank was perceived as a cold house for Protestants.

References

- ¹ Burgess, J. (2011) *The Exodus*, Nicholson and Bass
- ² *News Letter* 2 January 2008. Available online from <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/finally-the-truth-about-londonderry-s-exodus-to-be-told-on-television-1-1862606>
- ³ *Derry Journal* 23 November 2010. Available online from <https://www.derryjournal.com/lifestyle/the-forgotten-exodus-1-1673310>
- ⁴ *Londonderry Sentinel* 9 January 2008. Available online from: <https://www.londonderrysentinel.co.uk/news/people/the-west-bank-exodus-1-2091388>
- ⁵ PRONI Fond D2953. The Fond is the highest level in the PRONI classification system and a broad description of the DCRA records can be read online by typing in reference D2953. The DCRA files cited below are, together with all the other files, at the time of writing not yet indexed on the PRONI computer database, and the assistance of PRONI staff on site will be required if you want to view them
- ⁶ Derry Catholic Registration Association. *Relative numbers of Catholics and Others on Electoral Registers as revised January 1964*. PRONI D2953/5/1
- ⁷ Northern Ireland Census of Population 1961 – County and County Borough of Londonderry - Table 19 (Religions) and the author's calculations
- ⁸ Shirlow, P., Graham, B., McMullan, A., Murtagh, B., Robinson, G., and Southern, N. (2005). *Population Change and Social Inclusion Study – Derry/Londonderry* (OFMDFM). Available online from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/population/popchangederry05.pdf>
- ⁹ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2001) *Northern Ireland Census – Individual Questionnaire*. Available online from <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/2001-census-individual-questionnaire.pdf>
- ¹⁰ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2001). *Northern Ireland Census - Community Background*. The following link should bring up a search page. <https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/Theme.aspx> Look for the *Filters* section. In the *Subset* menu select *Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion*. In the *Geography* menu select *Ward*. In the *Year* menu select *2001*. Click *Apply*. Probably on page 2 of the search results, click on *Community Background: Religion or Religion Brought Up In UV019 (administrative geographies)*. It will be downloaded as a zip file. The file *uv019_ward.xls* will be the most helpful. Look for the Derry City Council wards.
- ¹¹ Northern Ireland Census of Population 1937 – County and County Borough of Londonderry - Table 20 (Religions) and the author's calculations
- ¹² Derry Catholic Registration Association. *Imperial Constituency of County Derry 1950*. PRONI D2953/3/1A
- ¹³ Smyth, M. (1995) *Borders within borders: material and ideological segregation as forms of resistance and strategies of control*. Presented at The Annual Conference of the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control; Crossmaglen, September 1995. Templegrove Action Research Limited. Available online from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ccru/research/temple/confer2.htm>

¹⁴ Hanssen, U. and McLaughlin, H. (2018) Protestant Migration from the West Bank of Derry/Londonderry 1969-1980. Pat Finucane Centre. Available online from <https://www.patfinucanecentre.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/Migration%20Report%202018.pdf>

¹⁵ *News Letter* 3 March 2018

¹⁶ Hanssen and McLaughlin (2018), Table 1 p.12

¹⁷ Hanssen and McLaughlin (2018), Table 1 p.12 and p.74

¹⁸ Derry Catholic Registration Association. *Imperial Register 1960 and Foyle Division – Imperial Vote 1960*. PRONI D2953/5/1

¹⁹ Derry Catholic Registration Association. *Relative position of Catholics and Non-Catholic electors on Parliamentary Registers 1961-1962 and 1962-1963*. PRONI D2953/5/1

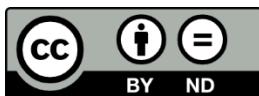
²⁰ Derry Catholic Registration Association. *Relative position of Catholics and Non-Catholic electors on Parliamentary Registers 1961-1962 and 1962-1963*. PRONI D2953/5/1

²¹ Derry Catholic Registration Association. *Relative numbers of Catholics and Others on Electoral Registers as revised January 1964*. Includes previous year's figures. PRONI D2953/5/1

²² Derry Catholic Registration Association. *Relative numbers of Catholics and Others on Electoral Registers as revised January 1964*. Includes previous year's figures. PRONI D2953/5/1

²³ Derry Catholic Registration Association. *Relative number of Catholic and other Electors on the annual Westminster and Stormont Parliamentary Registers for 1965-66*. PRONI D2953/5/1

²⁴ Northern Ireland Census of Population 1961 – County and County Borough of Londonderry - Table 18 (Religions)



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