

Counting shadows?

The 1831 census and its enumerators.

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'The enumerators [of the 1831 census] considered that they would be paid – and in many cases were paid – in proportion to the numbers they enumerated, the obvious tendency of which would be to augment the total numbers'¹

In her essential research guide to Irish statutory censuses, *Counting the people, 1813-1911*, Margaret Crawford rightly describes the census of 1841 as 'a milestone in census-taking'.² That census was ground-breaking, and innovative in the range and depth of its inquiries, transforming census-surveying from the simple population counts that had characterised the previous three efforts, into an ambitious and detailed social survey. Unlike the previous surveys, which took place over an extended period, the 1841 census aimed to count the entire population on a single day, 6 June 1841.

The administrators of this 'remarkable census of 1841' were three; Thomas Larcom, of the Ordnance Survey Office, William Tighe Hamilton, from the Chief Secretary's Office, and Henry Brownrigg, a former army officer. But this survey was Larcom's child, and its success, or otherwise, would play a key role in determining his legacy.³ The report produced by the census commissioners was impressive in the minutiae of the details provided, and for every county six tables of figures and statistics were given, which provided information on population, age-distributions, education, marriage, housing-quality and occupations. Never previously had the topography of Ireland's demographic structures been so clearly and so vividly exposed. The report opened with a useful 50-page introduction that explained the stages in the process of taking the census, explained key concepts, and described, often in considerable detail, how proposals were tested, and decisions were arrived at (figure 1). The impressive and important detail in the introduction to the 1841 report becomes even more impressive when it is contrasted with the report from 1831, which contained no introduction at all.

¹ *Report of the commissioners appointed to take the census of Ireland for the year 1841* [504], H.C. 1843, xxiv, p. viii (hereinafter *Cen. Ire., 1841*).

² Margaret Crawford, *Counting the people, a survey of the Irish censuses, 1813-1911* (Dublin, 2003), p. 16.

³ Crawford, *Counting the people*, pp 16-7.

Figure 1 – Extract from 1841 census report outlining decisions taken regarding the classification of accommodation.

We tested the rule practically on several houses in different localities, both town and country, and found the result sufficiently satisfactory. We, at first, intended to have thrown the third and fourth classes together; and it is to be hoped that hereafter they may be consolidated. But we thought it desirable to retain at present a separate column for the mere hut, still too common throughout the country. The floor of a cabin is a very essential criterion of its quality, which perhaps, we might, with advantage, have also inquired into, and used as an element of classification for houses of the third and fourth classes. The whole, however, is but an approximation, as the state of repair, a most important matter in estimating the comfort of a house, could not be brought into the calculation. It is, therefore, the more gratifying to find that the results of several other sections of the General Table, which will be noticed hereafter, tend to give considerable confidence in the results of this section.

Source: *Cen., Ire., 1841*, p. xiv.

Unsurprisingly, the 1841 report ventured to comment on the likely accuracy of the censuses which preceded it. A condescending tone is struck. Administered by the pluralist officeholder, William Shaw Mason, the 1821 census, the report informs

was the first successful occasion of enumerating the people in Ireland, and ... it was probably effected with a less perfect machinery. We may perhaps therefore assume that it was rather below than above the truth.⁴

More damning words were retained for the 1831 survey, however. Larcom’s great boast was that his census was Ireland’s first modern enumeration, conducted throughout the country on the same day, which situation he contrasted with the efforts of George Hatchell, ten years previously. How accurate could an enumeration have been which ‘was taken in different places at different times, extending over a considerable period’?⁵ The real problem with Hatchell’s census, though, concerned whispers of fraud on the part of its enumerators, which, it was alleged, corrupted its population numbers. The quotation which opened this essay shows the 1841 commissioners’ unflattering view of the 1831 enumerators, whom they accused of creating fictitious people in order to boost earnings.⁶ It stood to reason, in their eyes, that the ‘numbers returned in 1831 were greater than the real population, or at all events that any error was rather one of excess than of defect’.⁷

Figure 2 – Extract from 1841 census form.

1st TABLE.— RETURN of the MEMBERS, SERVANTS, or VISITORS of this FAMILY, who slept in this House on the night of Sunday, the 6th JUNE, 1841.							
NAMES EVENTS, and VISITORS of THIS FAMILY, in House on the above night.	AGE, Years, Months, Days, and Hours, of the Year.	SEX. Whether Male or Female.	RELATION To each to the Head of the Family, as whether Wife, Son, Daughter, Cousin, Servant, Visitor, &c.	MARRIAGE. Whether "Married," "Not Married," "A Widow," or "A Widower."	In what Year Married, or in what Year of more than once.	OCCUPATION, State the particular Profession, Trade, or other Employment of each person; or if a child, whether attending School.	EDUCATION. Whether he or she can "Read," "Read and Write," or "Cannot Read."
Ellis	46	Male	Head of Family	Widower	1821	Farmer	Can Read & Write
Ellis	19	Male	Son	Not Married	"	"	Can Read & Write
Ellis	14	Male	Son	"	"	Attending School	Can Read & Write

⁴ *Cen. Ire., 1841*, p. viii.

⁵ *Cen. Ire., 1841*, p. viii.

⁶ *Cen. Ire., 1841*, p. viii.

⁷ *Cen. Ire., 1841*, p. viii.

Those stinging criticisms contrast sharply with the honeyed words that the commissioners lavished on their own work. Their census (figure 2) might not have been entirely accurate, but they argued that

the strict mode of inquiry which we followed, carried out as it was by a highly disciplined body of men, and executed on the same day in every part of the country, together with the system of verification we adopted, affords ground to hope that it is not far from the truth.⁸

Because the findings of the 1841 census are so esteemed within the research community, and because the thoughts of the 1841 commissioners regarding the probable accuracy of the three censuses held between 1821 and 1841 are so clearly outlined, their arguments have retained considerable influence to the present day. It is, for example, regularly casually commented in academic works that the 1831 census overestimated the national population, while the 8.175 million reported by the 1841 survey was broadly accurate. It is important to consider if the evidence support these contentions, not least because they imply substantial fraud on the part of the 1831 enumerators, through the creation of fictitious inhabitants. By bad fortune, a parliamentary paper listed, by county, the names of all of the 1831 census enumerators (the only parliamentary paper to provide such a list) so the names of these 'scoundrels' are perpetually preserved (figure 3).⁹

Figure 3 – 1831 census enumerators (extract), showing sums received.

Account of the Expenses incurred under the Population Act in Ireland, in making the Census of 1831—continued.

COUNTY, CITY or TOWN.	NAME of ENUMERATOR.	AMOUNT PAID.	COUNTY, CITY or TOWN.	NAME of ENUMERATOR.	AMOUNT PAID.	
		£. s. d.			£. s. d.	
DUBLIN, City	Armstrong, Daniel -	45 13 7	FERMANAGH, County— <i>continued.</i>	Humphreys, Thomas -	50 - -	
	Armstrong, James -	11 8 9		Johnson, Francis -	30 - -	
	Bible, William -	39 4 9		Johnstone, Stephen -	30 - -	
	Bournes, William -	41 16 1		Kitson, John -	30 - -	
	Butler, John J. -	52 - 2		M'Donald, Samuel -	50 - -	
	Clarke, William -	55 18 3		Miller, George -	30 - -	
	Cooley, William -	74 1 -		Morrow, Henry -	20 - -	
	Cooper, William -	16 18 4		Murphy, Edward -	35 - -	
	Darley, Charles -	62 14 3		Woods, James -	50 - -	
	Falkiner, George -	52 7 6		GALWAY, Town.	Hughes, Thomas -	40 - -
	Fox, Francis -	45 13 6			King, Patrick -	60 - -
	Gregg, William -	9 4 5			Sweeny, John -	60 - -
	Kempstone, John, and Wilson, Philip -	126 11 -			Berningham, Cornelius -	40 - -
	Locke, Thomas -	54 18 9				

Source: *Expenses incurred under Population Act for Ireland, 1831*, p. 6.

The only historian to deal with this issue in the round is Joe Lee. He concluded that the 1821 census did, as the 1841 report alleged, underestimate the national population, but so, too, did the 1831 and 1841 surveys. Lee tentatively proposed upward adjustments to the population figures from the 1821-41 censuses; these are shown in table 1. The 1821 census, he argued, underestimated the national

⁸ *Cen. Ire., 1841*, p. viii. Census form accessed via National Archives of Ireland census portal (www.census.nationalarchives.ie).

⁹ *Detailed Account of Expenses incurred under Population Act for Ireland, 1831* [442], H.C. 1833, xxxix.45.

population by 400,000, implying a 5 per cent omission rate. Where Lee differed from Larcom *et al.*, though, was in his consideration of the accuracy of the two successive surveys – the 1831 census was within 2 per cent of the actual population, which he proposed at about 7.9 million, whilst the 1841 enumeration had failed to count about 225,000 people, almost 3 per cent.¹⁰ The analytical foundations for Lee’s re-imagining of pre-Famine populations were weak enough, it must be conceded, but that does not explain the relative lack of traction which his ideas have garnered. For various reasons – stubbornness, ignorance, perhaps an apathy to challenge widely held beliefs – the ideas from 1841 have cascaded through academic works, with each citation, each reference, each cutting quotation from the 1841 report, bolstering the idea that the 1831 census exaggerated Ireland’s population because of fraud on the part of its enumerators.

Table 1 – Lee’s adjusted national population figures, 1821-41.

Census	Official population	Adjusted population	Underestimate	Decennial increase
1821	6.802	7.2	5.5%	
1831	7.767	7.9	1.7%	9.7% (1821-31)
1841	8.175	8.4	2.7%	6.3% (1831-41)

Source: Lee, ‘Accuracy of pre-Famine Irish censuses’, p. 54.

Wagging a finger at the 1831 enumerators was hardly an innovative move. Edward Groves, Shaw Mason’s colleague in the Irish Record Commission, and grandfather of Tenison Groves, the famed genealogist, had taken that route when it came to finding scapegoats for the failure on the first Irish census, in 1813-4.

The appointment of the under agents [1813 enumerators] was in some cases, the result of ill-directed influence; even the mode of remunerating those agents was, in many instances, such as to afford a strong temptation to misrepresent. The payment was made according to the amount of the population returned; thus holding out a premium for enlarging the aggregate.¹¹

One enumerator, Groves informed, ‘went so far as to include in his return children in the womb’ in order to boost his earnings.¹²

It is important to note that Larcom’s attitude to the 1831 enumerators had not always gelled with the criticisms that emerged in his census’s report. Previous to its publication he had written that ‘it has been thought in Ireland that the census of 1831 gave too large a number, but we have no proof of this’ (figure 4), a comment which differs markedly from the position that was later adopted.¹³ The biggest obstacle confronting attempts to impugn the reputation of the 1831 enumerators, however, was that, not alone was there no proven evidence of widespread fraud having taken place, but that a unique circumstance had occurred in the aftermath of

¹⁰ Joseph Lee, ‘On the accuracy of the pre-Famine Irish censuses’ in J. M. Goldstrom and L. A. Clarkson (ed.), *Irish population, economy, and society, essays in honour of the late K. H. Connell* (Oxford, 1981), p. 54.

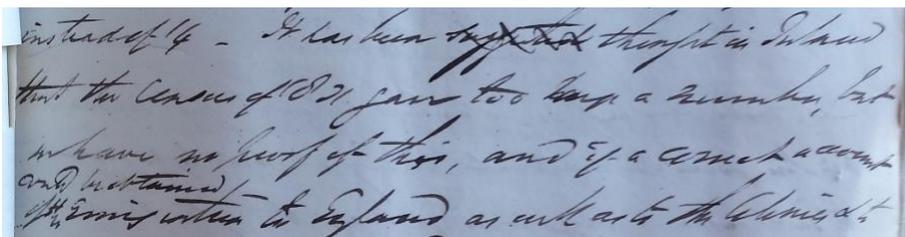
¹¹ Edward Groves, ‘Some account of the proceedings taken in 1813 and 1814 to ascertain the population of Ireland’, in William Shaw Mason, *Statistical account, or parochial survey of Ireland* (3 vols, Dublin, 1814-9), iii, p. xxiv.

¹² Groves, ‘Some account, population of Ireland’, p. xxiv.

¹³ Larcom Papers (N.L.I. ms 7527, unnumbered).

the census – unforeseen when the census was held – that would have publicly exposed any orchestrated fraudulent behaviour. In 1834 the House of Commons established a Committee of Public Instruction with the remit to make ‘a full and correct inquiry respecting the state of religious and other instruction, and the means of affording the same, now existing in ... Ireland’.¹⁴ The duties of the commissioners included a requirement to ‘visit every parish in ... Ireland, and to ascertain on the spot, by the best evidence which you can procure there or elsewhere, the number of members of, or persons in communion with the United Church of England and Ireland, in each benefice or parish’, and the numbers of ‘Roman Catholics or Presbyterians, and other Protestant Dissenters’.¹⁵ In essence, the Commissioners were authorised to conduct, if they deemed it necessary, the first national religious census of Ireland since the great religious census of 1766.

Figure 4 – Larcom’s early thoughts on the accuracy of the 1831 census.



Source: NLI ms 7527.

Because of ‘the great expense, the prospect of delay, and other inconveniences’ that would arise from a full enumeration,¹⁶ the Commissioners opted instead to employ the data from the 1831 census as the basis for their inquiries. They had no concerns about the accuracy of the numbers, pronouncing in their final report that ‘as a general rule ... the enumerator’s return for 1831 has been acted upon as conclusive evidence of the total number in that year of the inhabitants of each parish’, with which they had ‘every reason to be satisfied of its general correctness’.¹⁷ So accepting were the commissioners of the 1831 numbers that they used its data to ‘check any private census that might be presented’.¹⁸

The process operated as follows. The 1831 census data were copied into new books, with blank columns available where the religious numbers for each household were to be entered (Anglicans, Catholics, Presbyterians and other Protestant Dissenters). The scale of this task was immense. Although the 1831 census had only recorded the names of householders, unlike the preceding and succeeding enumerations which

¹⁴ ‘Commission for inquiring respecting the state of religious and other instruction now existing in Ireland’ in *First report of the commissioners of Public Instruction, Ireland*, H.C., 1835, [45], xxxiii (hereinafter *First report, Public Instruction*). The commission’s instructions are presented on unnumbered pages, at the beginning of the report.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* The commissioners were only required to inquire into the number of Anglican, Catholics, Presbyterians and ‘other Protestant dissenters’, although occasionally details were noted for other religions. In Dublin, twenty-one Jews were noted in St Andrew’s and four Jews in St Mary’s parishes, and one deist and one atheist were recorded in St Thomas’s (all in Dublin Diocese) (*First report, Public Instruction*, pp 116b, 120b, 124b).

¹⁶ *First report, Public Instruction*, pp 1-2.

¹⁷ *First report, Public Instruction*, pp 4, 6.

¹⁸ *First report, Public Instruction*, p. 2.

recorded all names, about 1.25 million names had, nevertheless, to be transcribed before the task of determining religious numbers could proceed.¹⁹

Figure 5 – Sample entries in a surviving original book from the Public Instruction Inquiry.

County of Londonderry		Grange Parish of Agivey				Half Barony of Coleraine						
Name of Owner or Occupier.	Name of Townland or Street.	No. of Houses.	No. of Families in each.	No. of Persons in Family.		Servants.		Total.	RELIGION.			
				Males.	Females.	Males.	Females.		Established Church.	Roman Catholic.	Presbyterian.	Other Protestant Dissenters.
J. John Moon	Coleraine	1	1	2	4			6	"	"	6	"
Jas. Moly		2	1	1	3			4	"	"	4	"
Hugh Mc Sparran		3	1	4	5			9	1	"	8	"
Robt Smyth		4	1	1	3			4	"	"	4	"
The M ^r Key		5	1	1	2			3	"	"	3	"
George Moore		6	1	7	2			9	"	"	9	"
Tho ^s Smyth		7	1	1	1			2	"	"	2	"
Jas ^s Smyth		8	1	4	3			7	"	"	7	"
Ric ^d Neil		9	1	5	4			9	"	"	9	"

When the data were transcribed, the copies were sent to the original (1831) enumerators, who were 'better qualified by their local knowledge and acquaintance with their own entries in the census books, to insert the religious denominations with accuracy and expedition, than persons less conversant with the subject'. In cases where the enumerator was unavailable 'others were of necessity substituted'.²⁰ Despite the faith that the Commissioners had in the enumerators' 'local knowledge', they recognised that they could not be expected to know the religious persuasion of everybody within their region, so they were encouraged to communicate 'with each minister of religion (of whatever persuasion) residing or officiating within the parish, and soliciting from him such information as he might be able to supply with regard to any cases upon which his assistance might be required'.²¹ Once the task was complete, the enumerator was to 'afford to such of the clergy of the parish as might at any time desire to inspect the return of 1831, every reasonable facility for doing so', by depositing the completed lists in 'some convenient place in or near to the parish ... to be there open, for at the least fourteen days, to the inspection of yourself and other persons residing in or connected with the parish'.²² Fortunately, the books for County Londonderry were in the Ordnance Survey Office instead of the Public Record Office in 1922, and have survived (figure 5).²³

¹⁹ *Abstract of the population returns, 1831*, H.C. 1833 (634), xxxix, p. 342.

²⁰ *First report, Public Instruction*, p. 2.

²¹ *First report, Public Instruction*, p. 2.

²² *First report, Public Instruction*, pp 2-3.

²³ *Fifty-fifth report, Deputy Keeper, Public Records, Ireland* (Dublin, 1928), p. 110. These books are probably not original Public Instruction Commission records. If they were the handwriting on the left-hand page should not match the handwriting recording the religious numbers. Running to 45 volumes, they were likely transcribed from the original books, possibly by the Ordnance Survey Office.

After the fourteen-day period had passed, one or more members of the Commission travelled to the benefice where a public inquiry was held, at which the local enumerator's religious distributions could be checked, challenged, and, if necessary, corrected. Meetings, 2,700 in all, were held throughout the country.²⁴ The enumerators, clergy, schoolmasters 'and others whose personal attendance was requisite' were notified of the timing of their parish's inquiry and these appear to have been well attended, especially by Church of Ireland ministers.²⁵ At each inquiry, the enumerator swore an oath to the veracity of his figures, the second time that he was required to stand over their integrity.²⁶

Figure 6 – Details from the Public Instruction Commissioners' public meeting in Carrick on Shannon, 1835.

The Commissioners of Public Instruction arrived in Carrick-on-Shannon, for the second time, on Wednesday last. We understand that the census, by computation, amounts to 14,999 Roman Catholics, and 2,091 Protestants.

Source: *Freeman's Journal*, 23 February 1835, p. 2, col. D.

It is difficult to argue that any fraud on the part of the enumerators during their 1831 census work would not have been quickly exposed by the opening of their lists to diligent public scrutiny. Certainly, fraud cannot have been widespread, as the 1841 census report purports. It is important to remember that the enumerators had no inkling in 1831 that their lists might later be publicly examined at any stage in the future. Although the 1841 report is not specific about how the 1831 figures were allegedly exaggerated – was it by creating fictitious houses, householders, families or simply adding extra numbers to households? – even a cursory examination of their returns during the Public Instruction Commission's inquiry by independent examiners, armed with intimate local knowledge, would have exposed the charade.

In fact, only three instances can be identified in the report's 800 pages where the enumerators' figures were rejected by the Commissioners. In St Anne's parish, Dublin City, the Commission concluded that 'very little reliance can be placed on the numbers of the several religious persuasions as stated by the enumerators', believing the Protestant population to be exaggerated and the Catholic numbers deficient. They did not, however, question the aggregate population total.²⁷ In St Nicholas' in Galway the 1831 population figure was rejected, but because it was deficient, not exaggerated. The 1831 figure was, the Commissioners believed, 'below the actual number of the population by about 3,000 persons, ... the enumerator having died

Census volume image accessed via National Archives of Ireland census portal (www.census.nationalarchives.ie).

²⁴ *Hansard*, xxviii, col. 135.

²⁵ *First report, Public Instruction*, p. 3. The 1831 census data should not have been alien to the various clergymen, because the enumerators, during the 1831 census, had been instructed to 'communicate with the Protestant and Roman Catholic Clergymen of their several Districts, and by exhibiting their *View Books* be enabled to obtain information as to their correctness' (Population, Mohill Estate, 1831 (N.L.I. MS 12,788, enumerator's instructions, p. 7)).

²⁶ *First report, Public Instruction*, pp 2, 3. Previously, the enumerators had sworn on the integrity of their enumeration when they presented the data during the 1831 census (55 George III, c. 120, s. 5; 1 William IV, c. 19). For the enumerator's oath in 1831, see Population, Mohill Estate, 1831 (N.L.I. MS 12,788, following p. 8).

²⁷ *First report, Public Instruction*, p. 116b.

before its completion in 1831'.²⁸ The situation is more ambiguous regarding St Paul's parish, Dublin City, where their observation that 'no reliance is to be placed on the enumerator's return for this parish' could be viewed as hinting at fraud, but the 10,570 inhabitants reported for the parish in 1831 is well below the 12,811 recorded ten years previously, suggesting that the Commissioners' ambiguous observation is not evidence of under-enumeration.²⁹

It is important to be sceptical about whether these public meetings offered a genuine opportunity to improve the accuracy of the reputed figures. Although evidence is thin, a few accounts of the process adopted during the public meetings favour a positive view of the operation. William Dool Killen, the Presbyterian minister of Raphoe parish, County Donegal, presents a vivid and informative account of the conduct of the meeting there, indicating some of the problems that may have been encountered elsewhere. According to Killen,

a gentleman [unnamed commissioner] had been sent down from Dublin to Raphoe to look after the population returns for the census of 1834; and the clergy of the various denominations were expected to meet with him in the market-house to give evidence as to their correctness. A considerable time beforehand the Episcopal clergy and the priest received notice of his coming, but I was not informed of it until a few hours before I was to appear. As soon as we assembled I complained that I had not been dealt with as the others; and urged that, as by far the larger section of the Protestants of the parish belonged to my denomination, the way in which I had been overlooked was the more remarkable. The commissioner informed me that the reason why I was not treated as the others was because I was a Dissenting minister, and consequently "unknown to the Government". This certainly was an odd excuse, and did not account for the care taken to notify the priest. I replied, however, that the gentleman was quite mistaken as to the matter of fact, inasmuch as being Presbyterian Minister of Raphoe, I was in receipt from Government of £100 per annum (late Irish currency) as *Regium Donum*. He could return no answer to this statement, but proceeded to make inquiry as to what was thought of the accuracy of the returns made by the enumerators. When it came to my turn to speak, I objected to the report given in as to the attendance on the Lord's Day in the Roman Catholic chapel. I deemed it exaggerated. The priest had received early notice as to when the return was to be made; on the preceding Sabbath he had announced this from the altar, and had taken steps, by pressing appeal to his co-religionists, to have as full attendance as possible. I had received no

²⁸ *First report, Public Instruction*, p. 46d.

²⁹ *First report, Public Instruction*, p. 122b; *Abstract of answers and returns, pursuant to act 55 Geo. 3, for taking an account of the population of Ireland in 1821*, H.C. 1824 (577), xxii, p. 24. In a handful of other instances the 1831 figures are recognized as not reflecting the true situation, but the discrepancies are accounted for by seasonal migration (See, for example, Inismacsaint (*First report, Public Instruction*, p. 18a), Warrenpoint (*ibid.*, p. 182a), Drumholm (*ibid.*, 284a), Bray (*ibid.*, 96b), Newcastle (*ibid.*, 112b), Drumcannon (*ibid.*, 6c), Monkstown (134c)).

such notice, and was not aware of what was to take place until the official (a Roman Catholic) appeared in my house of worship, and went about taking the number in each pew. Thus, I was placed at a disadvantage. The evidence taken by the commissioner was upon oath, and he asked the priest if he was prepared to swear that his return presented a fair average of his attendance. He demurred to make this deposition, and in the end the commissioner reduced his estimate considerably.³⁰

Killen's account of the meeting at Raphoe reflects the commissioners' framework. The enumerator presented his findings in public, and the numbers could then be challenged by any of the attendees. A distinction must be made, however, between complaints regarding religious populations and complaints regarding religious-service attendance numbers. Although Killen's account shows that the process by which religious service attendance-figures were determined may have been open to exploitation, that does not cast the population numbers for 1831 into disrepute. In Raphoe the Presbyterian clergyman had been alert to the priest's attempt to artificially exaggerate Catholic mass attendance, but that is a moot point when it comes to considering the parish's 1831 religious populations, which must have been viewed as being reasonably accurate by all interested parties. If they were not, a challenge would have emerged from at least one of the clergymen.

In Clonmore Union, County Kilkenny, it was the priest who was to the fore in challenging an attempt by Mr McCausland, the local rector, to exaggerate his denomination's population numbers. At the local meeting McCausland claimed that forty Protestants resided in his Union, but Revd Nicholas Carroll, parish priest, rejected this, so the attending Commissioner, George Cornwall Lewis, challenged McCausland to name them. He could only name thirty-nine, four of whom were resident in Fiddown, the neighbouring benefice. Carroll claimed there were only thirty-four Protestants in Clonmore, and 'this the commissioner coincided in, and put down the number at thirty-four, in place of forty'. The *Freeman's Journal* took 'great pleasure in saying that Mr Lewis acted in the most impartial manner during the investigation, and gave general satisfaction' (figure 7).³¹ One is left wondering, however, what both Carroll and the *Journal* thought when the Public Instruction Commission's report appeared, announcing the Union's Protestant population to be thirty-nine, 'by original census of the rector' (figure 8).³²

³⁰ William Killen, *Reminiscences of a long life* (London, 1901), pp 74-5.

³¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 19 February 1835, p. 3, col. a.

³² *First report, Public Instruction*, p. 148b.

Figure 7 – Report on the holding of a Public Instruction public meeting in Clonmore Union, Co. Kilkenny.

We have great pleasure in saying that Mr. Lewis acted in the most impartial manner during the investigation, and gave general satisfaction. In the Catholic union there are six additional Protestants, which altogether would make forty. In the same district the Catholic population is five thousand! "Look on this picture and on that." Hear this ye advocates for continuing a swollen, wealthy Protestant church establishment. Such facts as these will be irresistible in the parliamentary debates on the church this session.

Since the foregoing was written, we have learned that five individuals of one of the Protestant families, are now resident on a portion of Col. Keane's property, near Cuppoquin, in this county, thereby reducing the number to 29.

Source: *Freeman's journal*, 19 February 1835, p. 3, col. a.

This manipulation of the figures in Clonmore should not be viewed as typical, and other Commissioners went to extraordinary lengths to obtain an accurate return, as is evident, for example, in Burrishoole, County Mayo. That parish's public meeting, held in March 1835, at Newport, was a feisty affair, the details of which spilled onto the floor of the House of Lords.³³ Three Commissioners attended, who 'seemed exceedingly patient in their enquiries, and appeared most anxious in every way they could to elicit the truth'.³⁴ At the meeting the rector, Revd William Stoney, proffered a census of Burrishoole's Protestants to the Commissioners, which he requested not to be made public, 'lest they should suffer persecution'.³⁵ When the Commissioners rejected this, Stoney prepared a second census, containing the names of reputed Protestant householders.³⁶ The Commissioners gave the list to Revd Hughes, the priest, who copied it, and then proceeded to pick fault with some on the list. McNabb was struck off because he had moved to Achill. William Morris was also removed – he was road-building in Belmullet. The objection to Atkinson and his children was rejected, when Stoney produced the baptismal register, 'and it was proved the father declared they should be Protestants'.³⁷ It was the appearance of 'a woman called Gordon' on Stoney's list, though, which proved the final straw. Hughes claimed that 'he had received her into the Catholic Church, and had also administered the sacrament to her', but Stoney was adamant. To resolve the dispute – involved only a single individual – the census enumerator, 'a highly respectable man, and a Protestant' – was dispatched, to make contact with Gordon, 'to inquire of herself how she chose to be classed in the census'. Stoney withdrew from the meeting, after which, Hughes withdrew his objection to Gordon's classification as Protestant.³⁸

³³ *Hansard*, xxviii, cols 133-5.

³⁴ *Mayo Constitution*, 16 March 1835, p. 3, col. C.

³⁵ *Dublin Evening Packet and Correspondent*, 24 March 1835, p. 4, col. f.

³⁶ *Dublin Evening Packet and Correspondent*, 24 March 1835, p. 4, col. f.

³⁷ *Dublin Evening Packet and Correspondent*, 24 March 1835, p. 4, col. f.

³⁸ *Hansard*, xxviii, cols 133-5; *Mayo Constitution*, 16 March 1835, p. 3, col. c; *Dublin Evening Packet and Correspondent*, 24 March 1835, p. 4, cols d-e.

Figure 8 – Clonmore Union religious numbers reported by Public Instruction Commissioners.

Names of Parochial Benefices, and of the Parishes comprised in each.	POPULATION.										County in which each Parish is situate.	Distances of the Parishes in Union from each other.
	1831.					1834.						
	According to the Enumerator's Return.					As determined by the Commissioner.						
	Members of Established Church.	Roman Catholics.	Presbyterians.	Other Protestant Dissenters.	Total in Parish.	Members of Established Church.	Roman Catholics.	Presbyterians.	Other Protestant Dissenters.	Total in Parish.		
15. CLONMORE.												
Clonmore . . .	40	662	..	..	702	37	563	..	..	600	Kilkenny.	They are contiguous.
Ballyarsney . .	1	244	..	..	245	2	218	..	..	220		
Total . . .	41	906	..	..	947	39 ^a	781 ^b	..	..	820		

^a By original census of the rector.

^b By original census of the parish priest.

Source: *First report, Public Instruction*, p. 148b.

It seems clear enough that evidence for the claim of the 1841 census commissioners regarding the falsification of the 1831 population count by the enumerators is lacking. In fact, there is a wealth of circumstantial evidence pointing to the accuracy of the returns. The nit-picking and squabbles that have been shown for Raphoe and Newport, where the classification of small numbers of individuals provoked in-depth scrutiny, suggest that it would have been near impossible for incorrect figures to have survived the Public Instruction Commission's process. Lee's re-worked population estimates given in table 1 show the 1831 census as the most accurate of the three national enumerations conducted between 1821 and 1841. There was no need for the 1831 enumerators to count 'shadows'; there were enough 'real' people for them to count after all. It should be no surprise to see a decline in the accuracy of the census between 1831 and 1841, of course, as Lee's figures indicate. The 1841 census noted that a deficiency in the 1821 count could be expected because it was 'the first successful occasion of enumerating the people in Ireland ... it was probably effected with a less perfect machinery', but their own census was also innovative, in that it was the first attempt to enumerate the entire country on a single day. Doubtless, therefore, some of the *machinery* their enumerators were working with was 'less perfect' than Larcom, Hamilton or Brownrigg might have been prepared to admit – even to themselves.