

Population of the Liverpool City Region : long-term stability exemplified

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Introduction

This note summarises the outcome of an examination of long-term population change. Population counts from censuses between 1901 and 2001 are tabulated for the districts comprising Merseyside and the surrounding areas that constitute a series of progressively wider definitions of the 'Liverpool City Region'. A simple method is used to highlight patterns of variation in the population figures, using 1931 as the base, the census year in which Liverpool's population was at its peak. Brief comments are offered on the tabulations and some of the consequences that should follow from this analysis.

Geography of the Liverpool City Region

A starting point for the analysis is the 1974 Merseyside county area, comprising the metropolitan districts of Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral. More recently, notably in relation to transport, the neighbouring district of Halton has been included in a wider definition of the area that is covered by the Liverpool City Region. Other districts taken into account here in the specification of progressively wider definitions of the city region include Ellesmere Port & Neston and West Lancashire [but *not* reported here: Warrington, Chester, Vale Royal & Flintshire (see Figure 1)].



Figure 1 : Local authority district boundaries in widening definitions of the Liverpool City Region

The assembly of data for these areas, derived from the more recent census counts (1971 – 2001), was relatively straightforward. A greater challenge was posed by the task of aggregating, to the current more familiar local authority district geography, the counts recorded in earlier censuses for the former County Boroughs, Municipal Boroughs, Urban Districts and Rural Districts for which accurate boundary maps were frequently difficult to locate. Population counts for these areas were obtained for the census year between 1901 and 1961 from 'A Vision of Britain Through Time 1801-2001' website. A further set of more up-to-date population counts was obtained, in the form of the mid-year estimates (MYE) of district populations, published by the Office for National Statistics for 2008.

Initial Spreadsheet Population Tabulations : Merseyside Districts

The initial task was to present the district counts for the census years 1901 to 2001, and 2008 MYE figures, for the five districts that comprise Merseyside, as seen in Table 1. The table reveals that the former county area had a population of just under 1.2 million in 1901 and that this grew to just over 1.5 million by 1931, the year in which Liverpool recorded its highest census head count, at 855,688.

Table 1 : Merseyside District Populations : 1901 - 2001

Year	Merseyside Districts					M'side Districts Total
	Knowsley	Liverpool	St Helens	Sefton	Wirral	
1901	25862	706545	143546	148494	151735	1176182
1911	27501	749178	163095	171988	190275	1302037
1921	27868	805046	170689	198935	215526	1418064
1931	30531	855688	175590	207927	238989	1508725
1941						
1951	96628	790838	189713	265916	271296	1614391
1961	160104	745750	191622	279153	293475	1670104
1971	197819	610114	221233	277883	320232	1627281
1981	172991	503722	189251	298204	338952	1503120
1991	152091	452450	178764	289542	330795	1403642
2001	150459	439473	176843	282958	312293	1362026
2008 (MYE)	150800	434900	177500	275100	309500	1347800

Source: A Vision of Britain Through Time 1801-2001 [based on census data]

While Liverpool's population declined in successive censuses to its 2001 level of almost 440,000, the county total grew to peak at 1.67 million in 1961 before consistently declining, in each later census year, to reach 1.36 million in 2001.

Examination of district figures reveals interesting contrasts. For example, Knowsley grew, from a very low initial total of almost 26,000 in 1901, by a factor of almost five, to reach just over 150,000 in 2001. Meanwhile, St Helens only increased by about 20% over this period and Wirral only roughly doubled its population.

While interesting, and eventually distinguishable by close scrutiny of the table, patterns of change are not clear and are at least partially obscured by the relatively large numbers.

In order to highlight patterns of change more clearly, the figures in the table have been transformed and presented in index form, i.e. taking a base year and comparing all subsequent counts with the base count set to 100. Logic points to 1931 as the base year as our aim is to highlight the changing distribution of population in the Liverpool City Region and its comparison with Liverpool's population over time, as seen in Table 2. This enables a much clearer impression to be gained of the relative scale of change that has occurred in each of the districts and across Merseyside as a whole since 1931.

Table 2 : Merseyside District Populations : 1901 - 2001

Table with population figures expressed in index form with respect to 1931 figures, the peak census population for Liverpool

Year	Merseyside Districts					M'side Districts Total
	Knowsley	Liverpool	St Helens	Sefton	Wirral	
1901	85	83	82	71	63	78
1911	90	88	93	83	80	86
1921	91	94	97	96	90	94
1931	100	100	100	100	100	100
1941						
1951	316	92	108	128	114	107
1961	524	87	109	134	123	111
1971	648	71	126	134	134	108
1981	567	59	108	143	142	100
1991	498	53	102	139	138	93
2001	493	51	101	136	131	90
2008 (MYE)	494	51	101	132	130	89

The first figure to note is the index value of 51 for Liverpool in 2001, indicating that the city's population all but halved over this time period. In stark contrast, the corresponding 2001 index value for Knowsley is as high as 493, reflecting an almost five fold increase in the district's population between 1931 and 2001.

During this period, both Sefton's and Wirral's populations increased by almost one third while, by 2001, St Helens had returned to almost its 1931 level after an intervening rise. Finally, we note that the overall Merseyside total fell by 10% over the 1931 to 2001 period, indicated by the 2001 index value of 90.

LCR Extension : Halton, Ellesmere Port & Neston and West Lancashire

As noted above, Halton (including Runcorn) has been added to the conventional definition of Merseyside for transport planning purposes. Ellesmere Port and Neston is another logical candidate for addition to a wider definition, as a southerly extension of the Wirral. West Lancashire, including Skelmersdale, Ormskirk and Maghull, also interacts strongly with Liverpool and is included in this wider definition.

Table 3 records the index values resulting from the addition of these three districts.

Table 3 : District Populations 1901 - 2001 : extended City Region including Halton, Ellesmere Port & Neston and West Lancashire

Table with population figures expressed in index form with respect to 1931 figures, the peak census population for Liverpool

Year	Merseyside Districts					M'side districts total	Districts etc beyond Merseyside ...				
	Knowsley	Liverpool	St Helens	Sefton	Wirral		[H] Halton	[E] E Port+ Neston	M'side+ H+ EP&N	[WL] West Lancs	M'side+ H+E+ WL
1901	85	83	82	71	63	78	98	34	78	59	78
1911	90	88	93	83	80	86	97	61	86	65	86
1921	91	94	97	96	90	94	98	74	94	96	94
1931	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
1941											
1951	316	92	108	128	114	107	124	172	109	138	109
1961	524	87	109	134	123	111	133	230	113	168	115
1971	648	71	126	134	134	108	158	319	113	244	117
1981	567	59	108	143	142	100	207	334	107	240	111
1991	498	53	102	139	138	93	211	329	101	243	105
2001	493	51	101	136	131	90	201	332	98	244	102
2008 (MYE)	494	51	101	132	130	89	204	333	97	247	101

This shows that West Lancashire's population grew by a factor of 2.5 between 1931 and 2001, mid-way between the rates in Halton (x2) and Ellesmere Port & Neston (x3). However, more striking is the fact that, this wider definition of the Liverpool City Region, had a population figure in 2001 that is two percent greater than the corresponding figure in 1931 (index value 102). Thus, while Liverpool's population halved during this period, that of the wider definition of the Liverpool City Region has remained virtually the same.

Some Observations

- Elected representatives, officials and the press must stop talking about the halving of Liverpool's population as this gives a negative impression of the area's fortunes.
- In reality half of Liverpool's population has simply moved further from the city centre.
- For many, this meant crossing the municipal boundary (sometimes reluctantly) – a line on a map that takes no account of economic & cultural patterns of behaviour.
- When considering the area's economic, cultural, health or educational attainment, it makes no sense to compare the city of Liverpool with, say, Birmingham or Leeds, as Liverpool does not include much of its outer residential areas, whereas others do.
- Misrepresentation of such comparative data often casts Liverpool (and Manchester) in an undeserved bad light.
- We note that preparations for the London Olympics are being handled on the basis of London as a whole, not just the borough in which the games will be taking place.
- Why is the city of Liverpool so often considered in isolation from its neighbours?
- City councillors and officials (including those of Liverpool Vision) need to enter more fully into the spirit of the Multi Area Agreement in tackling cross-boundary issues, including transport, housing, economic development and employment generation, in a more effectively co-ordinated manner.
- The analysis presented here reinforces the case for the acceptance of a more widely drawn definition of the Liverpool City Region for these purposes.