

Population change in Cornwall since 1801

Cornwall's demographic history since the first census in 1801 divides into four phases. During the first, from 1801 to 1841, there was a strong population growth, equalling the rate in England and Wales. This implies that the growth of mining in this period was not accompanied by any major in-migration with the excess of births over deaths supplying the required extra labour force.

From 1841 to 1871 population grew by only a few percentage points a decade, implying a flow of net outward migration as a craze for overseas emigration swept through communities across Cornwall. A turning point actually occurred in 1866/67 when population growth turned into absolute population decline. This was caused by a financial crisis that led to a fall in commodity prices and triggered a twenty year collapse of copper production in Cornwall.

From 1871 to 1961 the population declined. The 1870s saw a population fall of almost nine per cent, the largest decline in modern Cornish history. Falls were also seen in the 1880s, 1910s, 1920s, 1930s and 1950s. Some decades were, however, exceptions to this long drawn out decline in numbers. A small rise from 1901 to 1911 reflected a mini-boom in the Edwardian period. A larger rise from 1939 to 1951 was the result of wartime movement to Cornwall, most of this taking place in the early years of the war. With the exception of the early 1940s this century of population decline was caused by a large net out-migration, a considerable component of this before 1914 being overseas.

This all changed in the 1960s. That decade saw the onset of the fourth phase of Cornwall's modern demographic history and one through which we are still living. Population began to increase rapidly in the 1960s, as Cornwall experienced the first wave of counterurbanisation. Since 1961 the number of people living in Cornwall has risen at a rate that is much faster than that of the UK, and faster than most equivalent areas outside parts of south east England and Cambridgeshire. All of this rise is explained by movement to Cornwall from other regions of the UK and two thirds of migrants come to Cornwall from south east England. Underlying this population movement in turn is the role of mass tourism, which has produced an apparently insatiable desire to live in Cornwall.

It is surprisingly difficult to find the statistics for all the censuses in one place on the web. So in the following table I've collected together some census totals. These are from the published census for the ancient or administrative county. The house totals are for 'inhabited houses' to 1931 and for 'households with residents' for 1991 and 2001. (For more information see <http://www.histpop.org/ohpr/servlet> for the census reports before 1951 and <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census> for the most recent census data.)

Cornwall, houses and population: 1801-2001

	Inhabited houses	Population
1801	32204	192281
1811	37971	220525
1821	43873	261045
1831	53521	301306
1841	65749	342159
1851	67987	355558
1861	72954	369390
1871	73950	362343
1881	69790	330686
1891	70558	322571
1901	72601	322957
1911	79365	328098
1921	77647	320705
1931	83961	317968
1951		345442
1961		342301
1971		381672
1981		418631
1991	186340	468425
2001	204410	501267

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