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Title	The border, the Laggan and the professor
Authors	Macourt, Malcolm P. A.
Publication date	2019
Original Citation	Macourt, M. P. A. (2019) 'The border, the Laggan and the professor', Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions, 21, pp. 35-51.
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	https://jisasr.org/about/current-issue-volume-7-2019/
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Download date	2026-11-07 06:21:45
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/12139



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Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions

JBASR 21 (2019), 35-51 **ISSN: 2516-6379**

The Border, the Laggan and the Professor

Malcolm P.A. MACOURT

ABSTRACT

The physical boundary ('the border') between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland has featured as a crucial part in relationships across the island, not least in the negotiations between the UK and the EU over Brexit.

Under the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921, a Boundary Commission was established with Professor Eoin MacNeill as the representative of the Irish Free State. It started its work after the civil war in the Irish Free State (1922-23) had ceased. It almost achieved its objective of a revised border.

With the agreement of all sides, the major source of data was religion in the 1911 Census, but individual returns were not made available to the Commission. The areas agreed for transfer involved large majorities of Catholics to the Free State and large majorities of Protestants to the North. The only exception was the Laggan in northeast Donegal, an area with a small Protestant majority.

At the last moment MacNeill withdrew, the Commission could not produce a unanimous report, therefore its report was unenforceable and it remained secret for over 40 years. The 1911 Census forms became available in the new millennium permitting detailed examination of the Laggan.

This paper addresses the outcomes of the Commission's work and questions whether there was a particular problem which caused MacNeill to withdraw. Speculation on MacNeill's activity in this exercise is offered and related to his official reasons for sinking the Commission.

KEYWORDS

Census, Religion, Boundary, Irish Free State, Northern Ireland, Professor Eoin MacNeill

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* * *

Introduction

The responses individuals and families have given to questions in Censuses have been used for a variety of purposes. Questions on 'race', and 'ethnic origin' have been used in a range of locations in Europe and Asia in the 20th century to assist in determining where boundaries between different provinces or different countries should be located. In many instances 'religion' has been used as a surrogate for 'race' or 'ethnic origin'.

This paper adduces evidence on 'religion' in the establishment of the border between the Irish Free State and the six counties comprising Northern Ireland which remained under British jurisdiction.

In certain circumstances responses have been used as a preliminary to some expressions of public will – a plebiscite for example. On other occasions – perhaps where unrest is anticipated – census responses have been used to avoid seeking a public expression of opinion while nonetheless taking some account of individual views or preferences.

The island of Ireland was governed as a single entity throughout the 19th century as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. After considerable unrest a mechanism for 'home rule' was agreed by the Westminster Parliament in 1912. After further unrest the decision to permit six north-eastern counties of Ireland to withdraw from (any) independent state in Ireland and permit the inhabitants of those counties to have a separate parliament was taken by the British Government during the Great War of 1914-18. It was not accepted by the vast majority of the people in the other twenty-six counties (Macardle 1937; Ferriter 2019).[1]

It was only when an Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed that it appeared that the matter was likely, at least in the short-term, to be settled. The passage of that Treaty in the Irish Parliament, *Dáil Éireann,* by only a small majority led to a 'civil war' in the Free State between pro- and anti-treaty factions which lasted for a year (1922-23).

Only after the end of the unrest could one instance of the use of 'religion' in the Census of Ireland become important, namely in the work of the much-heralded Irish Boundary Commission.

Two other instances of the use of responses to questions are particularly relevant to this paper: Upper Silesia in 1921-22 where an uprising followed a plebiscite after an investigation of census data and: Punjab and Bengal in British India in 1947 where, without a plebiscite, new borders apparently based on census data led to serious uprisings – particularly in the Punjab.

[1] Eamonn de Valera, the surviving leader of Sinn Fein and later Premier and President for 30 years, declared in a foreword 'Miss Macardle's book supplies the complete and authoritative record…' it '…is an exhaustive chronicle of fact and provides the basis for an independent study of the period and a considered judgment upon it.'

Upper Silesia

After the end of The Great War the Versailles Treaty required the determination of a section of the border between Germany and the newly (re-) created Poland. As demonstrated by the Census of 1910, the region concerned was ethnically mixed with both Germans and Poles. The most significant of three ethnically mixed areas on the new German-Polish border was East Upper Silesia, not least because it was one of the richest mineral and industrial areas of Europe.

British, French and Italian troops were overseeing the policing of the region and the Allies were governing it through an inter-allied Commission. It appeared, from the last pre-Great War general census, held in 1910, that ethnic Poles – Polish speaking inhabitants – formed almost 60% and ethnic Germans – German speaking inhabitants – almost 40% of the population.

The Upper Silesian Plebiscite Commission reached the conclusion that it was not appropriate to simply divide the region using the 1910 Census data. Not least had a decade passed, but in that period a significant number of persons formerly resident in the region had (been) moved (further) into Germany to obtain employment. Using powers contained in Article 88 of the Versailles Treaty, which entitled those who had 'been expelled by the German authorities' to return to vote, the members concluded that a plebiscite, a referendum for self-determination, should be held and that vote took place on 20th March 1921.

Those who supported being (remaining) part of Germany 'won' the vote by 60% to 40%, suggesting that a significant proportion of ethnic Poles – Polish speakers – voted to be part of Germany. Tooley (1997, p.135), in his comprehensive study of the region, noted that

> people had diverse, often very pragmatic, reasons for voting for Germany, which usually had little to do with a person regarding him or herself as having a German ethnonational identity.

There was disagreement between British and French members of the Upper Silesian Plebiscite Commission on how to interpret the result of the plebiscite. Only after a Polish popular uprising was detailed resolution of a boundary reached at an ambassadors' conference in Paris: and a 'German-Polish Accord on East Silesia' concluded on 15th May 1922 dealing with the constitutional and legal future of Upper Silesia.

It is worth noting that a senior member of the Plebiscite Commission was a British civil servant and academic then in his late 30s, Francis Bernard Bourdillon (1883-1970); he was awarded the CBE in the 1923 Birthday Honours list 'for his contribution to the work of the Plebiscite Commission'[2]. After his work at the Commission Bourdillon became secretary of the Irish Boundary Commission. Later he was Secretary of the Royal Institute of Institutional Affairs, better known as Chatham House.

[2] See the entry on Francis Bernard Bourdillon in Wikipedia

Punjab, Indian Empire

Immediately after the Second World War it became clear that the (British) Indian Empire was to be abolished. With the passage in the British Parliament of the Indian Independence Act, in the early summer of 1947 it had been agreed that two independent states be created.

The boundaries between the two states were then open for debate. The British and South Asian leaders began serious discussions about the format and procedure of boundary commissions. The central parties agreed on all aspects of the Commission arrangements with surprisingly little wrangling. There would be two commissions, one for Punjab and one for Bengal. Each commission would consist of four South Asian judges, two selected by the Congress Party and two by the Muslim League, and each commission would be chaired by one appointee made by the Mountbatten British India government.

The Chairman appointed was an eminent lawyer, Cyril John Radcliffe KC (1899-1977), knighted in 1944 following three years as Director General of the Ministry of Information[3]. Radcliffe had only five weeks after arriving in India on 8 July 1947 to complete the tasks set for the Commissions.

Each Boundary Commission was given the task of creating a boundary between areas to be controlled by Muslims and the remainder of India expected to be controlled by the Congress party. All lawyers by trade, Radcliffe and the other commissioners had, perhaps, all of the polish but none of the specialized knowledge needed for the task. In the event of disagreement between commissioners it was the chairman's daunting task of drawing boundaries in such a way that would leave as many Muslims in Pakistan and as many Hindus and Sikhs in India as possible.

In his review of the period Nicholas Mansergh (1983, No. 488, Appendix 1) notes that

> Radcliffe was widely respected for his intellectual abilities, but he had never been to India. Paradoxically, this fact made him a more attractive candidate, on the theory that ignorance of India would equal impartiality. In the end, this two-versus-two format and the judges' strong political biases produced deadlock, leaving Radcliffe the responsibility to make all the most difficult decisions himself.

The Punjab Commission's terms of reference directed it to 'demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of the Punjab on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims. In doing so, it will also take into account other factors.' So ethno-religious data from the 1941 Census of India formed the basis of the work of the commissions. The Congress representatives argued that the unreliability of the 1941 census figures meant that 'other factors' must be given greater weight in the Punjab;

[3] After his work in India Radcliffe was appointed a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary, becoming Baron Radcliffe.

the Muslim League commissioners maintained that the census figures were valid and thus 'other factors' could be all but ignored.

The Commissions apparently had no advisors to inform them of well-established procedures and information needed to draw a boundary; nor was there time to gather any survey and regional information. The British India government (under Earl Mountbatten) gave Radcliffe the mandate to focus on the religious demographics. In his Report Radcliffe did discuss (for example) roads, railways and canals but the basis of evidence in the Report was data from the 1941 Census.

The Radcliffe Report sought to minimize the numbers of Hindus and Muslims on the 'wrong' side of the dividing line. To make it more complicated the Punjab Commission found themselves required to draw a border which divided the area, which was home to the Sikh community, most Sikh leaders were militant in their opposition to the Muslim League. In the few weeks he had, Radcliffe seems to have tried to minimize infrastructure disruptions, but he was well aware that his proposal was flawed.

In her study of the work of the Commission, Lucy Chester (2009, 93) opined

> The Radcliffe Commission failed to draw a geopolitically sound line delineated and demarcated in accordance with accepted international procedure. The Punjab's population distribution was such that there was no line that could neatly divide Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. Radcliffe's line was far from perfect, but it is important to note that alternative borders would not necessarily have provided a significant improvement.

Radcliffe's efforts apparently saw some 14 million people – roughly seven million from each side – flee across the border when they discovered the new boundaries left them in the "wrong" country. In the violence that ensued after independence, several hundred thousand lost their lives and millions more were injured. After seeing the mayhem occurring on both sides of the boundary, Radcliffe apparently refused to accept his salary.

Ultimately, there was no easy way to partition India. Akhilesh Pillalamarri (2017), writing seventy years after partition, noted that

> any line would have been somewhat arbitrary and caused difficulties for the people living in Bengal and Punjab. The haste of the partition.. ..has often been criticized, but the boundary did a fairly good job of demarcating frontiers on the basis of religious demography.

The Irish Boundary Commission

Almost one hundred years ago, immediately after the end of the Civil War between the pro-Treaty and the anti-Treaty factions, the Irish Boundary Commission was established. The Boundary Commission was the

mechanism to give detailed formal consideration to the nature of the border between the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland.[4]

What would have been the course of history if the outcome of the work of the Boundary Commission had been implemented?

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921 enshrined the existence – for a time at least – of the separate jurisdiction of the six north-eastern counties of Ireland (under the title 'Northern Ireland') (Macardle 1937).[5] The 1911 Census established that combined the population of these six counties was one-third Roman Catholic, and combined the population of the remaining twenty-six counties was nine-tenth Roman Catholic.

Not only was the existence of the separation jurisdiction the matter of much disagreement but also the detail of how many counties and parts of counties would be included in (any) separate jurisdiction. By agreeing to the Anglo-Irish Treaty – which was passed by the legislature (*Dáil Éireann)* in the South by only 64 votes to 57 – the Boundary Commission was established. Article 12 of that Treaty states: *'….a Commission… shall determine… the boundaries between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland….'*

The armed struggle between pro-treaty and anti-treaty factions was one of many reasons which delayed the establishment of the Boundary Commission. However, by the middle of 1924 the Commission had been established with the active or passive participation of all the governments: 'The Imperial Government' at Westminster, the 'Northern Government' (with responsibility for the six north-eastern counties) and the 'Free State Government'. Although it did not make it a condition of participation, it became clear later that the Free State Government were expecting that all transfers of territory would be from 'the six counties' to the Free State.

Personnel of the Commission

Under the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the Irish Boundary Commission was to be established consisting *'...of three persons, one to be appointed by [each of the governments in Ireland] and one who shall be Chairman to be appointed by the British Government…'*

After a wide-ranging search the British Government persuaded a South African Supreme Court judge, Richard Feetham, to chair the Commission. He worked with the other two commissioners, an Ulster Unionist and former newspaper editor Joseph R. Fisher and – arguably the most eminent of the three – Professor Eoin (John) MacNeill (1867-1945).[6]

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[4]The report of the Commission was not released (by the British government) until 1st January 1968. Much of the material contained herein is taken from that published report and from the introduction to it by Geoffrey J. Hand (1969). A more recent publication by Murray (2011) largely confirms Hand's work.

[5] Much of the material is contained in Dorothy Macardle's excellent book.

[6]Much of this material is taken from **THE SCHOLAR REVOLUTIONARY: Eoin MacNeill, 1867-1945, and the making of the new Ireland** ed. F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne, Irish University Press, Shannon 1973, and in particular the chapter 'MacNeill and the Boundary Commission' (pp 199-275) by Geoffrey J. Hand, which is a much expanded version of Hand's introduction to the Report (1969).

MacNeill described later as 'the scholar revolutionary', was a co-founder of the Gaelic League in 1893 and was appointed Professor of Early Irish History at University College, Dublin in 1908. Before and during the Great War he was involved in establishing the Irish Volunteers. Perhaps surprisingly Professor MacNeill served as a commissioner while continuing to be Minister for Education in the Free State Government, a post to which he was appointed in August 1922.

The Commission's Secretary was Francis Bernard Bourdillon CBE, then recently honoured for his work with the Upper Silesia Boundary Commission. Although not a commissioner himself, Bourdillon had rather more experience of Boundary Commissions that any of the three commissioners. Effectively he was the spokesperson for the Commission and its (major) documents were written over his signature.

Context in which the Commission operated

Under the guidance of Bourdillon, Judge Feetham and his fellow commissioners had to struggle with the question of scope, agreeing whether large and important areas could be transferred or acknowledging merely that minor modifications in either direction were permitted. As part of this deliberation Judge Feetham had to convince himself and his two fellow commissioners that they could

> …determine **in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants,** so far as may be compatible with economic and geographic conditions, the boundaries between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland…. [my emphasis added]

From the perspective of a study of religion in the Census perhaps the two most important questions the Chairman posed were

> What qualifications entitle persons to rank as "inhabitants" whose wishes are to be considered, and by what procedure are the wishes of inhabitants to be ascertained?

As an answer to the second of these questions the commissioners confirmed that no plebiscite would be held. The wishes of inhabitants would be established by consideration of representations made to the Commission.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Commission was invited by **both sides** to rely on the 1911 Census returns on religion 'the members of Protestant denominations being reckoned as wishing to be in Northern Ireland and Roman Catholics as wishing to be in the Irish Free State.'

Data on religion in the 1911 Census very nearly – how nearly is a matter for speculation – became the determining factor in the detail of the border between the two jurisdictions.

Implicit in these representations and in the Commission's response was an answer to the first of the two important questions: the inhabitants were considered to be those who resided at the time of the 1911 Census, except

where special circumstances adduced by witnesses were accepted by the Commission.

The Chairman agreed that 'apart from special circumstances affecting limited areas' those returns 'may still be relied upon as showing with approximate accuracy the proportionate numbers of Catholics and Protestants in the different districts.' Implicitly, if not explicitly, Catholic equated to Free State and Protestant to Northern Ireland.

The Decisions of the Boundary Commission

The **first** set of decisions concerned the transfer of large and important areas. The two most important areas to be considered were **Londonderry** City (County Borough) and **Newry** Urban District. It was apparent that the Free State wished these areas to be transferred. After much deliberation, and receipt of advice from both sides, the Commission appears to have agreed that no major important area could be transferred and that such a transfer was only possible only where it involved less significant areas.

The situation of **Londonderry City** was a complicated one. The City straddles the River Foyle just before that River reaches Lough Foyle. On the western side, beyond the City, Co. Londonderry only comprises a strip of about four miles, known as 'The Liberties', before the Co. Donegal boundary.

The population of the County Borough according to the 1911 Census was 40,780 of whom 22,923 (56.2%) recorded themselves as Roman Catholic. Of the 17,857 'other religions'[7] in the City 5,552 lived on the eastern side of the River Foyle, constituting 60.5% of those living on that side. On the western side of the river Roman Catholics constituted 61.1%. Including within the Free State the entire City and the rural parts of the (Civil) Parishes of Templemore and Clondermot which constitute it would have involved a population shift (in 1911) of 48,066 people, 53.9% of them (25,888) recording themselves as Roman Catholic.

Including in the Free State only the County Borough and the rural area in Co. Londonderry on the western side of the Foyle, would have involved a population of (in 1911) 43,927 of whom 24,139 (55%) Roman Catholic.

Arguably the border could have been drawn down the River Foyle dividing the City in two, thereby transferring the west side and 'The Liberties' to the Free State involving (in 1911) 34,757 people of whom 20,521 Roman Catholic (59%). Transferring the City and its immediate region would involve an area where 54% of the population was Roman Catholic: dividing the city in two by the River Foyle – explicitly ruled out by the Commission – would involve an area with 59% Roman Catholic. Neither of these was deemed to be acceptable to the Commission.

[7] The Boundary Commission referred to all persons not being (Roman) Catholics as 'other religions' or 'non-Catholics'. Of the 17,857 'non-Catholics' in the City five people refused to provide their religion, 34 were Jewish and 17,818 were Protestants of various denominations.

The situation of **Newry Urban District** was less complicated. Newry Urban District straddled the Newry River which demarcated County Down and County Armagh just before that River reaches Carlingford Lough.

The population of the Urban District in 1911 was 11,963 of whom a significant majority 8,924 (74.6%) recorded themselves as Roman Catholic, 3,679 of 5,178 on the Armagh side, 3,845 of 4,148 in the south ward and 1,400 of 2,637 in the north ward both on the Down side of the Newry River. Adding the remainder of the contiguous (Civil) Parish of Newry (on both sides of the river, the Co. Armagh side and the Co. Down side) and the Civil Parishes of Jonesborough and Killevy which link Newry with the Co. Louth border, produces a population (in 1911) to be transferred of 22,715 of whom 16,863 Roman Catholic (74.2%).[8]

Transferring the Urban District and its immediate surroundings would involve an area where three-quarters of the population was Roman Catholic: a significantly large majority. Despite this large majority the Commission, perhaps surprisingly, decided not to transfer Newry and its immediate hinterland to the Free State.

The **second** set of decisions which the Commissioners faced were those concerned with largely rural areas. They appeared to agree readily that (largely rural) areas with a substantial majority of Roman Catholics would be transferred to the Free State and that three (smaller) enclaves each with a substantial majority of Protestants would be transferred to Northern Ireland.

The three areas proposed for transfer from the Free State were: two in Co. Donegal: one around the village of **Pettigoe** in the far south of the county, and the other in the north, around the village of **Muff**; and one in east Co. Monaghan: the area around **Mullyash** mountain.

Pettigoe

In **south Donegal** the Commission proposed to re-unite the divided village of **Pettigoe** and its immediate hinterland all within Northern Ireland. To affect this change, they proposed to transfer all of one District Electoral Division and parts of two others.[9] The total area to be transferred was 11,510 acres with a population (in 1911) of 1,339 of whom 497 were Roman Catholic (37.1%) and 842 other religions. Detailed analysis demonstrates that the Church of Ireland predominated among the other religions to be transferred – about 70%, with about 15% each Presbyterian and Methodist.

By the 1926 Census Returns 593 Roman Catholics and 594 Protestants lived in the enclave; by 1936 and 566 Roman Catholics and 465 other religions. By 1961 Census the population of this area had decreased to only 710, the number of Protestants had dropped even more dramatically to 147, with a

[8] The most distant part of (contiguous) Newry Civil Parish on the Co. Down side, Ouley District Electoral Division with a population of 1,019 was, at 42.8%, the only part of the wider Newry region to record less than half Roman Catholic.

[9] All of Grousehall DED and parts of Pettigoe and Templecarn DEDs, all in Templecarn Civil Parish and Donegal Poor Law Union.

static 563 Roman Catholics. By 1991 there were only 45 Protestants and 456 Roman Catholics and by 2002 only 26 Protestants and 376 Roman Catholics.

Muff

In **north Donegal** the proposal was to incorporate a strip of land of 9,253 acres, from the three District Electoral Divisions of Kilderry, Birdstown and Burt, just north and north-west of Londonderry City and involving the village of Muff. Muff (in Kilderry DED) had a population in 1911 of 157 of whom 58 were Roman Catholic (36.9%) and 99 other religions. The remainder of the strip had a population of 1,233 of whom 423 were Roman Catholics (34.3%) and 810 other religions.

By 1926 the 'other religions' in strip had reduced to just over 50%, and by 1936 reduced still further to below 45%.

Mullyash

The Mullyash area of **east Monaghan** had a large protestant presence, its natural hinterland was the market town of Newtownhamilton in south Armagh. The Boundary Commission proposed to transfer the **Mullyash** area[10], noted as a prominent flax-growing area, with five flax mills (Dooley, 2000)[11]. The total area to be transferred was 6,279 acres with a population (in 1911) of 995 of whom 335 (33.7%) were Roman Catholics. The vast majority of the 'other religions' were Presbyterians either 'General Assembly' or 'Secession Synod' supporters[12].

By the 1926 Census Returns 608 Protestants and 315 Roman Catholics lived in Mullyash – almost the same as in 1911. By 1936 there were 524 Protestants and 334 Roman Catholics. The next 25 years saw a reduction in the total population: by the 1961 returns the population of the area had declined from 858 to 622, but with hardly any change in the religious balance. The decline in population continued so that by 1991 there were only 441 people, with Protestants – Presbyterians in the main – still in the majority. Mullyash was the only one of the three enclaves still to have a majority of Protestants 80 years after the data made available to the Commission.

The Last Decision: The Laggan

The final part of the Commission's proposals appears to have been related to that part of Co. Donegal which lay between the River Foyle and the River Swilly – the area known locally as The Laggan. It separated Inishowen Peninsula from the rest of Co. Donegal.

[10] Most of Mullyash DED and parts of Carrickaslane and Church Hill DEDs, all in Muckno Civil Parish and Castleblayney Poor Law Union.
[11] Dooley (2000) p.52.
[12] In Mullyash DED were 526 Presbyterians including Secession (or Reformed) Presbyterian, 35 Church of Ireland and 272 Roman Catholics.

The Laggan was the only significant area on the Free State side of the border with a Protestant majority. The ten District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) which, perhaps, best defined the core of 'The Laggan', have an area of 54,758 acres – more than twice the combined areas of the three enclaves, already identified, of Pettigoe, Muff and Mullyash.

It may have been that finding a solution to the Laggan 'problem' was 'the straw which broke the camel's back'. Notwithstanding other difficulties, transferring the whole of the Laggan would have been **geographically** problematic since the Inishowen peninsula would have had no land link with the Free State and a justification for its removal to Northern Ireland would have to have been found. The peninsula had a population of over 27,500, of whom 86.6% declared themselves Roman Catholic in 1911. At the very least a land link would have been necessary for the peninsula to remain in the Free State otherwise the situation would have become politically impossible.

Advisors to the Commission suggested that a line be drawn 'down the middle' of the Laggan. This would divide District Electoral Divisions with protestant majorities from other District Electoral Divisions also with protestant majorities. It would divide DEDs with a substantial proportion of large protestant farmers from other DEDs also with a substantial proportion of large protestant farmers. The Commissioners concurred that a middle line be accepted and one was drawn – if rather arbitrarily – apparently using a group of hills which rise to between 800 & 900 feet.

Figure 1: The Laggan

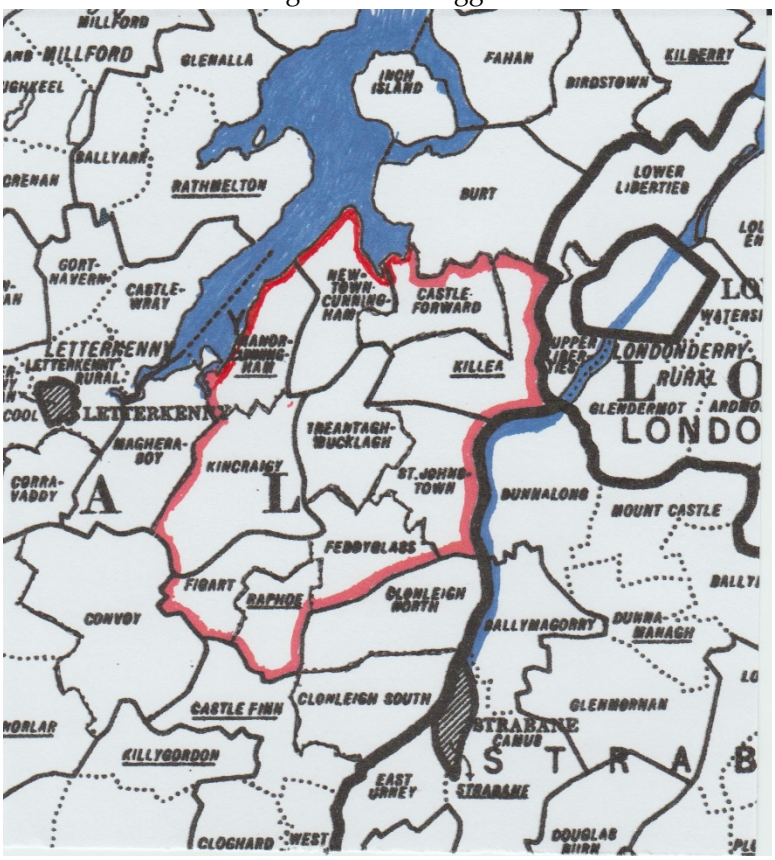


Figure 2: Census Data for the 10 DEDs forming the core of The Laggan[13]

District Electoral Division	1911	RC	CofI	Pres	etc
Figart	680	237	93	338	12
Trentamucklagh	818	307	78	422	11
Killea	1,408	552	380	457	9
Feddyglass	737	299	70	359	9
Kincraigy	994	432	53	509	0
Castleforward	847	378	136	325	8
St. Johnstown	1,276	587	155	510	24
Raphoe	1,187	562	275	343	7
Newtown Cunningham	790	385	132	272	1
Manorcunningham	847	435	107	301	5
TOTAL	**9,584**	**4,174**	**1,479**	**3,836**	**86**

Households in the Laggan

The published data from the 1911 Census provided a breakdown by religion for each District Electoral Division. The Census Office provided the Commission with totals of Roman Catholics and of 'other religions' for each townland (detail which was not made available to the public). Of course, some townlands had Catholic majorities, but these were interspersed with other townlands with Protestant majorities. As is the case with all census data for 1911, detail of individuals and households only became available in the new millennium.

Each DED comprised an average of twenty-four 'townlands', for each of which only total populations were published. The ten DEDs in the core of The Laggan are Castleforward (with 22 townlands), Feddyglass (19), Figart (21), Killea (36), Kincraigy (25), Manorcunningham (23), Newtown Cunningham (28), Raphoe (25), St. Johnston (27) and Trentaghmucklagh (16). They had a combined population of 9,584 in the 1911 Census, of these 4,174 (43.6%) recorded themselves as Roman Catholic. The five villages in those DEDs accounted for 1,592 people of whom 679 (42.7%) identified as Roman Catholic.[14],[15]

[13] Pres = Presbyterian, CofI = Church of Ireland, RC = (Roman) Catholic, etc = all others.

[14] The five villages were, in Raphoe DED, Raphoe (705 people in 1911, of whom 351 recorded as Roman Catholic), in St. Johnston DED, St. Johnston (357, 84), partly in Newtowncunningham DED and partly in Castleforward DED, Newtowncunningham (215, 134), in Killea DED, Carrigans (200,49) and in Manorcunningham DED, Manorcunningham (115, 61).

[15] The seven DEDs outside the core of the Laggan are: Burt (1,142 people in 1911, of whom 646 recorded as Roman Catholic 56.6%), Magheraboy (892, 507, 56.8%), Convoy (1,879, 1,083 57.6%), Killygordon (1,015, 607, 59.8%), Castlefinn 1,323, 707, 53.4%), Clonleigh South (1,481, 876, 59.1%) and Clonleigh North (1,289. 834, 64.7%). Their combined population was 9,021 of whom 5,260 (58.3%) were Roman Catholic.

Examining the material released in the new millennium, both in its original form and on-line,[16] 1,987 households were recorded in the ten District Electoral Divisions in the 1911 Census, 792 (39.9%) Roman Catholic, 847 (42.7%) Presbyterian, 330 (16.6%) Church of Ireland. Of these the lead occupation of 674 was described as farmers, the lead occupation of 698 as (farm) labourers and in 615 households there was another lead occupation or (in a small number of cases) no occupation. So, there were 1,372 households where farming was the main occupation, 621 Presbyterian, 542 Roman Catholic and 198 Church of Ireland.[17]

Records of farm size, collected as part of the census exercise, appear to have been lost in the conflagration at the end of June 1922 in Dublin's Four Courts building which was being used as the Public Record Office. So, without information on farm size, those investigating what remains of 1911 Census data have had to rely on surrogates: the most obvious being farmhouse size, number of 'outhouses' and the presence or absence of live-in servants.

Perhaps the most surprising conclusion of all this detailed investigation was that the pattern ***by religion*** was remarkably consistent across all ten District Electoral Divisions – whether farmhouse size, outhouses or presence of live-in servants.

The headlines are that almost 70% of the farmers were Presbyterian: they employed on average rather more than one live-in servant per farm, and two-thirds of these servants were Roman Catholic. The headlines for those living in labourer households are that only one-quarter were Presbyterian, and over one-half were Roman Catholic.

Figure 3: Example of households: farmers and farm labourers[18]

surname	**relig**	**out**	**rm**	**no**	**townland**	**DED**
Farmers						
McKinley	Pres	**2**	**2**	9	Moneyhaughley	M'cunningham
Ewing *	Pres	14	5	4	Drumbarnet Up	Nt'cunningham
Carson	CofI	9	4	9	Burnthaw	St. Johnston
O'Donnell *	Cath	15	11	5	Castruse	Killea
Brogan	Cath	**0**	**2**	5	Tullybogly	Kincraigy
Labourers						
McGowan	Pres	**0**	**2**	6	Cloon	Castleforward
Magee	Pres	4	4	6	Treantagh	Trenta.muckla.
Dodwell	CofI	**0**	**1**	4	Townparks	Raphoe

[16] The original Census returns are available in the Irish National Archive, Bishop Street, Dublin, and on line at www.census.nationalarchives.ie.

[17] The eight farmers of 'Other Religions': two Reformed Presbyterians, 4 Congregationalists, one Brethren and one 'Christian'. The one 'Other Religion' labourer: Reformed Presbyterian

[18] out = outhouses, rm = number rooms occupied, no = number of people in household, ser = (live-in) male servant/female servant, M' = Manor, Nt' = Newtown. * Household includes 2 live-in servants, one male and one female.

Quinn	Cath	**0**	**2**	6	Drumbeg	Feddyglass
Monaghan	Cath	1	4	12	Tullyvinny	Figart

Farmer households

In detail: investigating the 674 households whose lead occupation was **'farmer'**, 444 were Presbyterian (65.9%) – some 23% more than the percentage of households in the Laggan – and 148 were Roman Catholics, almost 18% less than the percentage of households. Some 62 of these 674 lived in one or two rooms – 60% of them (37) Roman Catholic. At the other end of the size spectrum 222 farmers lived in 6 or more rooms – of these 181 – more than four-fifths – were Presbyterian with only 9 Roman Catholic farmers.

Farmer households (612 not including those with one or two rooms) included 587 live-in servants. Living in 426 Presbyterian farmer households, were 483 servants (1.13 servants per farmer); in 67 Church of Ireland farmer households were 60 servants (0.90 servants per farmer); and living in 111 Roman Catholic farmer households were 39 servants (0.35 servants per farmer). Roman Catholics dominated these 587 live-in servants (70.7%), 199 of the 260 females and 216 of the 327 males; there were also 113 Presbyterian live-in servants, 41 female and 72 male.

Farm Labourer households

In detail: of the 698 households whose lead occupation was (farm) **labourer**, 394 were Roman Catholic and 124 were Church of Ireland – only 179 were Presbyterian. Some 314 of these 698 households lived in one or two rooms (45%), of whom 191 were Roman Catholic (48.5% of 394).

Of the 615 households whose occupations were **other than** farming, 250 were Roman Catholic (40.7%), 226 Presbyterian (36.7%) and 132 Church of Ireland (21.5%).[19]

The Commission, the Professor and the Boundary in the Laggan

Economically those who controlled the land of the Laggan were largely Presbyterian: with those who were Church of Ireland, they controlled three-quarters of the land. This appears to have been the case throughout the ten District Electoral Divisions. Was control of the land sufficient? How to deal with the whole area constituted a serious problem for the Commission.

[19] 250 of the 615 households (40.7%) lived in one two rooms – 117 Roman Catholics, 77 Presbyterians and 55 Church of Ireland. At the other extreme, almost one-in-six of these 615 households had 6 or more rooms: of the 100 households 23 were Roman Catholic (with 19 servants living-in, all of them Roman Catholic), 47 were Presbyterian (with 37 servants living-in, 21 of them Roman Catholic and 12 Presbyterian) and 27 were Church of Ireland (with 31 servants living-in, 14 of them Roman Catholic and 15 Church of Ireland). In these 615 households lived 90 servants, 13 male and 77 female, of whom 57 were Roman Catholic, 14 Presbyterian and 19 Church of Ireland.

Was the decision that a line be drawn 'down the middle' of the Laggan too much for Professor MacNeill? It appears not – in the first instance at least – because by the beginning of November 1925 a coherent boundary between Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State had been identified and agreed.

That agreed boundary involved the Boundary Commission proposing the transfer of a strip of land of between two and four miles wide and eight miles long, 21,042 acres, from the Irish Free State to Northern Ireland.[20] In 1911 2,321 Protestants and 1,438 Roman Catholics (38.3%) lived in this strip.

By the 1926 Census Returns the number of Roman Catholics equalled the number of Protestants, by 1961 the Protestants constituted less than 40% of the population and by 1991 less than 30%.

Figure 4: The Irish Boundary Report Recommendation (for the Laggan)[21]

To NI: DED	1911	Caths	Non-Caths	Acres
Castleforward (pt)	498	163	335	3,388
Killea [ALL]	1,408	555	853	7,569
Trentaghmucklagh (pt)	578	176	402	4,409
St. Johnston (pt)	1,150	509	641	4,434
Feddyglass (pt)	125	35	90	1,242
TOTAL	3,759	1,438	2,321	21,042

therefore:

In Free State: DED	1911	Caths	Non-Caths	Acres
Castleforward	349	215	134	2,128
Killea	none	none	none	none
St. Johnstown	126	78	48	913
Trentaghmucklagh	240	131	109	2,140
Feddyglass	612	264	348	3,463
TOTAL	1,327	688	639	8,644

because:

Total of these DEDs	1911	Caths	Non-Caths	Acres
Castleforward	847	378	469	5,516
Killea	1,408	555	853	7,569
St. Johnstown	1,276	587	689	5,322
Trentaghmucklagh	818	307	511	6,549
Feddyglass	737	299	438	4,705
TOTAL	5,086	2,126	2,960	29,661

Professor MacNeill appears to have concurred with his fellow Commissioners on key issues – and it seems that the Laggan was the final issue. MacNeill may have known from the beginning that becoming a Commissioner was a poisoned chalice. He saw himself as having a judicial rather than an advocacy role and apparently did not keep his (political) colleagues informed of developments.

[20] It included all of Killea District Electoral Division and parts of Castleforward, Feddyglass, St. Johnstown, and Trentaghmucklagh DEDs.

[21] 1911 Census. Caths, Non-Caths; (Roman) Catholics and those of other persuasions and none.

On realising that MacNeill had concurred with his fellow Commissioners on this issue, intense political pressure from within the Free State Government was placed on him to withdraw from the Commission. That pressure succeeded and he resigned two weeks after the boundary had been agreed and just before it was to be published – on 20th November 1925.

Thereby went the chances of the Commission's decisions on the boundary – which required unanimity - being implemented. MacNeill refused to remain part of the Free State Government and resigned as Minister for Education four days later, withdrawing from active involvement in political matters.

Discussion and conclusion

The new boundary involved the transfer of just over 286 square miles (over 183,000 acres) from Northern Ireland to the Irish Free State, and almost 77 square miles (49,000 acres) in the other direction. The 'border' would have been rather more regular, avoiding the unusual nature of townland boundaries which dictate county boundaries in Ireland.

If the Commission's findings had been implemented there would have been a small but significant alteration to the population of Northern Ireland: on the basis of the 1911 Census returns, the number of Roman Catholics would have decreased by 25,079 and the number of Protestants increased by 1,354.

Whether all three Irish Boundary Commissioners concurred with the 'final' proposed boundary is open to some doubt, but the records do **not** show dissent by the most likely dissident, Professor MacNeill.

MacNeill appears to have (initially) accepted the recommendations of Secretary Bourdillon who in turn carried Judge Feetham with him. Bourdillon's work in Upper Silesia as a senior civil servant will have commended itself to Professor MacNeill whose own academic and public service record was very impressive.

The final piece in the jigsaw appears to have been the solution to the Laggan. It was always going to be 'touch and go' on whether any solution would satisfy all three Commissioners and Bourdillon's compromise – a line down the middle – was likely to exacerbate problems.

Each side, the North and the Free State, wanted all of the Laggan, but neither side was able to provide Census data – or other information – which would provide the 'killing' blow. Professor MacNeill's political colleagues – perhaps his political masters – eventually persuaded him to withdraw from the Commission and the whole edifice collapsed.

Would any similar arrangement over India twenty years later have caused a result with less bloodshed? Would Bourdillon have been able to carry off the Punjab Commission or would his attempts to compromise have failed just as spectacularly as did those of Radcliffe? We will never know.

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