

POPULATION CHANGES IN NORTH-EAST SCOTLAND 1696-1951

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Introduction

North of the Highland Line there are to be found not only mountains and glens, swift rivers and placid lakes, but also extensive lowlands penetrating within the last outposts of the Highlands. Sometimes narrow, sometimes broad, they possess distinctive characteristics occasioned by an admixture of Highland and Lowland landscapes, coupled with a rather different historical development to the lands farther south. Of these Lowlands, the North-East region extending, for the purposes of this study, from the Dee to the Spey is both large and economically important. Fringed on the north and east by a fruitful sea and bounded on the west and south by sparsely populated districts, the area comprises the whole of Aberdeenshire and those parts of Banffshire and Kincardineshire which have an orientation towards the North East corner.

The Highland and Upland Rim gives an assymetric scheme of relief, emphasised by the fact that the two main entrances to the region lie in the extreme south-east and north-east corners, the former guarded by the regional focus, Aberdeen. Because of the regional variation in structure and erosional history, a fundamental pattern of Highlands, Upland basins and Lowlands has emerged; a framework which is made up of such geographical factors as slope, altitude, drainage, climate and soils, which always influence, in greater or lesser degree, the population.

Within this basic framework, however, there is another pattern which is just as important, though in many places not so obvious. This pattern consists of valley and divide, or interfluve, with varying degrees of amplitude of relief according to the regional situation. Other patterns are contained within this sub-framework—floodable plains in the valleys and variations in soils on the valley slopes arranged primarily in linear belts but with, of course, many local variations. This detailed pattern is the work of the rivers, the Dee, Don, Ythan, Ugie, Deveron and Isla which, together with their tributaries,

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traverse the region before emptying into the sea. Here another linear pattern occurs, the junction of land and sea, the convergence and superimposition of two contrasting environments. Nevertheless, the contrast visible here is simply an over-emphasis of the contrasts which are to be found between each of the landward patterns.

In relation to these environmental features the population of the North East has always been distributed, but at each period the inhabitants have tended to look upon the environment with different ways of life in view. The viewpoint taken at each period has been bound up with the contemporary traditions and stage of technological development. Consequently, in the early period, certain portions of the environment were more attractive than others. Agriculture, once based fundamentally on soil exhausting processes, needed the most fertile soils if it was to succeed at all, and the population was distributed primarily in relation to good soil areas, which are usually found as part of the valley pattern or in basin situations. At the same time knowledge of river and water control was scanty, so little permanent use could be made of the "haughlands" or flood plains. The fundamental geographical factors of slope and altitude were also important and led to the greatest development of the population on the lowlands, where there was the added attraction of a coastal strip bordering a sea well stocked with fish, a sea which also permitted easy, if somewhat dangerous, communication in contrast to the difficulties of movement inland.

With progress in agriculture, in industrial and fishing techniques, there has been a progressive redistribution of the population, which utilised environmental features formerly neglected or deserted. Thus more components of the fundamental geographical pattern came into use. There was, for instance, a movement to use the patterns higher up and lower down the valley sides, leading to the colonisation of the wastelands on the interfluves, and a more harmonious adaptation to the "bottomlands", permitted by increasing knowledge of drainage and flood protection. Nevertheless, limits were set to this outward spread of the population by slopes which were too steep to plough; by ground which was too high to permit the successful ripening of crops or too wet to cultivate even with the new drainage techniques; and more recently by distance from shopping centres, higher education and entertainment facilities; by remoteness from happenings in the region in

general or by the low standard of living which could be obtained in the marginal lands. This indicates that although some of the geographical factors have only a relative value—factors such as soil acidity, wetness and dryness, which can be changed with new techniques—other factors such as slope, altitude, climate and position have a permanent value and determine to a very great extent the population distribution. Within the North East region, it is on the Lowlands that the geographical factors have had primarily relative values. In the Highlands and Uplands the permanent geographical factors have been most important and influenced most considerably the demographic change.

This demographic change taking place in relation to the physical environment has been caused by a great many factors. Some of these were physical factors, such as the climatic vagaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which led to famine, deaths and migrations. Other changes were the result of advances in technology and communications, as when water power became extensively used for manufacture by localised rather than cottage industries, or when advances in the knowledge of working stone permitted the exploitation of the granite resources of the North East, at first near the sea and later, with improved transport and communications, farther inland. New methods of travel led to the wider dissemination of the products needed for agricultural improvement, permitted the development of cattle rearing which has given the region a reputation and farming prosperity, and also brought a realisation of different standards of living to people living on marginal and ultra-marginal land. Each of these changes has led to redistribution, growth and decay of the population.

While these changes were, in many cases, “impersonal”, other changes also occurred which were the work of the lairds and landowners which had profound effects on population movements in the earlier periods. The improving landlords and village erectors of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were just as much factors in population change as births and deaths and since many of these landowners had strong political connections, as at the time of the Jacobite Rebellions, changes in politics, in the ebb and flow of the affairs of Scotland in particular, and the British Isles and the world in general, have helped to cause changes in North-East Scotland and the distribution of its folk.

No investigation of this kind can be completely

comprehensive. Selection of fact and data is essential if the main issues are not to be obscured. Similarly, no one cause may be held responsible for population change and, though this work concentrates on cause and effect within the framework of geographical discipline, the complete picture can only be acquired through study in all the social sciences.

Source Material

The absence of reliable population data makes it impossible to begin a connected survey of change before the end of the seventeenth century, when the Poll Tax Returns for 1696 afford a datum point. An earlier Poll Tax had been unsuccessfully imposed in 1693, and the Scots Parliament imposed a new Tax in 1695 to augment existing sources of revenue. The Returns, which apart from Aberdeenshire and Renfrewshire are available for only a few parishes of Scotland, give a detailed account of the name, status, place of residence and occupation of every person who was above the age of sixteen and not a burden on the parish. The absence of these Returns for Banffshire and Kincardineshire means that there are no figures available for parts of these counties included within the region until 1755, when Webster's population estimates may be used. From these beginnings the changes in the population of the North East will be examined at intervals of roughly fifty years. It will be seen that certain districts tended to show the same features of population change, and these areas will be examined to see whether "population" regions may be discovered, and the physical, economic and other factors which may have helped in their unity.

The first population figures which are sufficiently detailed and complete to permit their use as a starting point for a population survey are those contained within the 1696 Poll Tax Returns. Since the population enumerated in the Poll Book only includes persons above the age of sixteen not dependent on charity, the figures have to be adjusted to obtain an estimate of the total population. The method of obtaining this estimate is linked with that employed by Webster in his census of 1743-1755. Since the clergy engaged in the Webster census only counted examinable persons over the age of six—the age varied between six and nine in some parishes—Webster added two-ninths part of the examinable persons to represent the number of children.¹ The Poll Tax Returns, however, only include the adult population above the

age of sixteen, so the factor was increased to one third to account for the increased number of children and paupers. The figures are also probably low since the Returns were made in a period of great famines at the end of the seventeenth century when there was undoubtedly a high mortality rate of old and young. The age groups in between would also have been adversely affected by the food shortages. No claim can therefore be made for great accuracy in the population figures for either 1696 or 1755.

After Webster's census, population statistics are generally scarce. Some returns were, however, collected by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge between 1755 and 1791, but these are not complete for the whole region. Similarly some of the Ministers in the Old Statistical Account (O.S.A.) include figures for 1775, and for the parish of Kinellar in Aberdeenshire the number of "souls" in the parish is given for each year from 1758 to 1791, except for the years 1788-9 when the minister was indisposed and unable to go through the parish.

At the end of the eighteenth century population statistics become more frequent. The Old Statistical Account, for instance, gives the population of the parishes together with suggestions as to the factors of population change between 1755 and the closing years of the century. Shortly afterwards, in 1801, largely as a result of the writings of Malthus in 1798, the first official census was taken which confirmed the findings of earlier returns. The first detailed census was not taken, however, till 1841 and it is not until 1851 that it is possible to give details of population movements. The earlier statistics are really more accurate than the above would indicate since the bulk of the population was rural which made for a more accurate enumeration by the ministers in Webster's census and the O.S.A., and by the schoolmasters who sent the count for the first official decennial census to London in 1801.

The use of these figures as a base for the investigation of population change is restricted in places by changes in the boundaries of the areas to which they refer. In some cases, as when two parishes were united, e.g. the parishes of Dumbennan and Kinnoir united into the modern parish of Huntly in 1727, there is no break in the continuity, but some parishes were broken up into two parishes without any indication in the earlier returns of the population of each. The most extensive boundary changes occurred in 1890 when an attempt was made

to reconcile the administrative arrangements of parishes and counties by incorporating detached portions into the neighbouring unit. The parish of Tarland in the Howe of Cromar had, for example, a detached portion in the Highland parish of Strathdon. After the boundary changes in 1890, the detached portion in Strathdon became a part of that parish, while to the section of Tarland parish in Cromar was added a part of Migvie parish, which itself had been in two parts. These boundary changes account for the sharp breaks in the population graphs and also for the choice of 1891 as one of the years for study rather than 1901. The break is especially evident in the parishes of Banchory-Devenick and Nigg which contained a portion of the suburban population of Aberdeen and Torry respectively.

The cartograms indicate the demographic changes in the North East; they have been constructed using certain key years on which to base the calculations. These form periods which correspond as closely as possible to the fundamental changes which have occurred in the historical development of the region.

The Pattern of Population Change

The period from 1696 to 1755 (Fig. 2)

The first half of the eighteenth century was marked by a widespread increase in the population of Aberdeenshire, and it is to be expected that the included parts of Banffshire and Kincardineshire would have shown a similar increase had data been available. This increase was in part a recovery from the effects of the high mortality rate of the Seven Ill Years from 1693 to 1700 and appears to have taken place in spite of the recurrent famines, as in 1740-41, which occurred during the eighteenth century. Since agricultural improvements were practically non-existent at this time in the North East, except in the Monymusk Basin and on one or two farms of the improving landlords, the causes of the increase cannot be ascribed to changes in agriculture. Home industries, especially the woollen industry, were important and may have attracted population and given an economic basis for natural population increase, while the fact that a number of new fishing villages were erected at this time seems to indicate that the fishing was attractive, though not so important as it was to be later with the advent of the herring fishing.

Although there was an increase in population in the whole

of Aberdeenshire, except in three parishes along the Highland border and the parish of Logie Buchan astride the Ythan estuary, the increase was far from uniform (see Fig. 2, which is a cartogram showing percentage increase or decrease in population on a parish basis). The greatest increase occurred in the industrial suburbs of Aberdeen along the lower Don where, from early in the century, textiles were being manufactured using the abundant water power available from the rejuvenated river. The parish of Newhills increased in population from 310 to 959, representing a percentage change of over

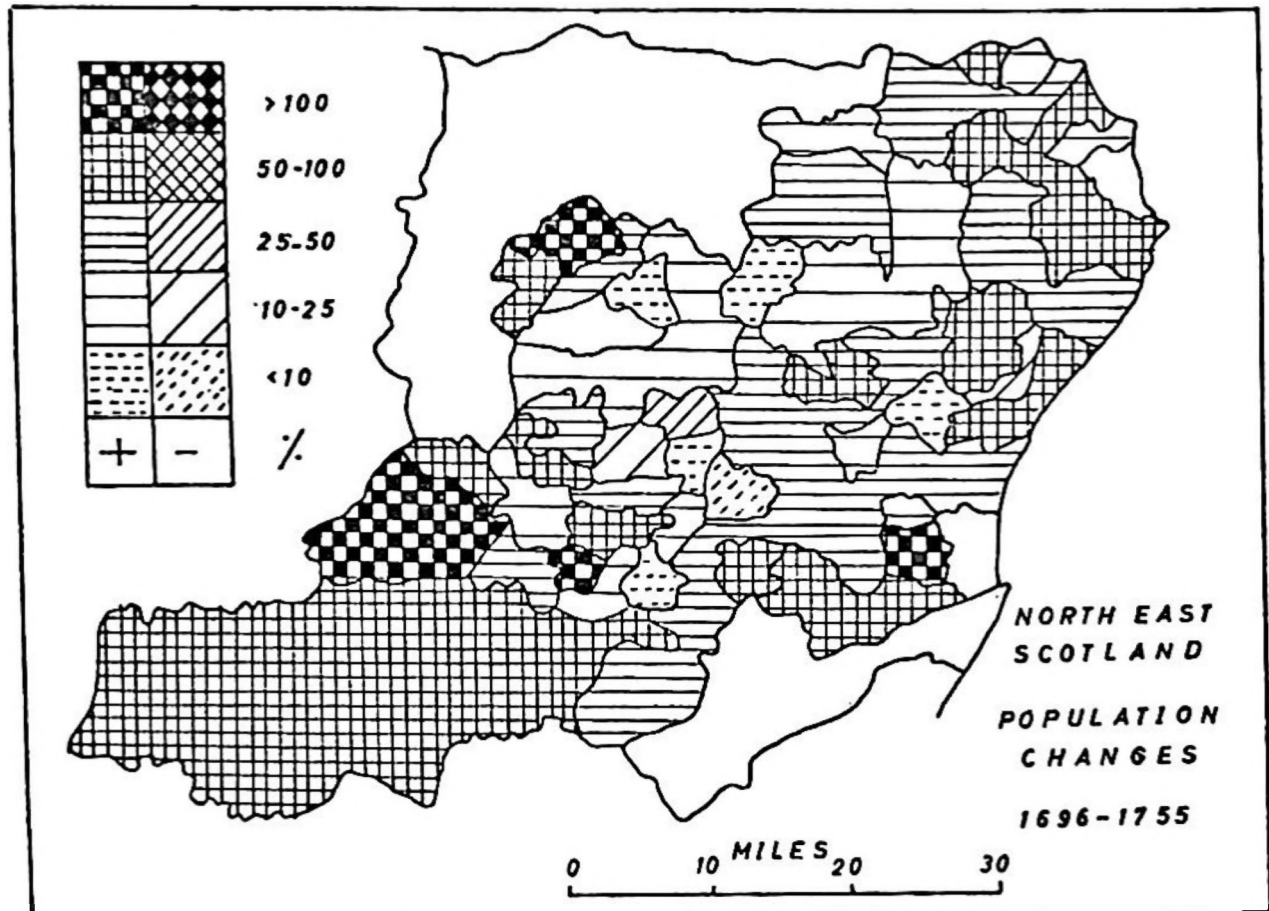


FIG. 2

200. Elsewhere the areas with an increase from 50 per cent to 100 per cent had usually strath or coastal situations. The parish of Ellon which lies astride the lower Ythan showed an increase of nearly 58 per cent, while the population of Strichen, in the strath of the North Ugie, increased by nearly 95 per cent. Similarly, the parishes of lower Deeside had increases ranging from 58 to 66 per cent. Coastal parishes tended to show a high increase also. The parishes of Foveran, with the then flourishing seaport of Newburgh, Slains with the fishing and smuggling village of Collieston, and Pitsligo which contains the fishing town of Roseheartly all increased by over 50 per cent. The fishing, at this time mainly white fishing, seems to have been

prosperous since records indicate the foundation of a number of fishing villages along the Moray Firth Coast. Salmon fishing must also have helped to attract population to the coastal and river parishes.

The remainder of the Lowlands was characterised by two broad belts of population increase. The more easterly belt, extending from Aberdour, west of Fraserburgh, to Kincardine O'Neil on Deeside showed increases varying from 25 to 50 per cent, while to the west lay another belt with increases of less than 25 per cent. This belt was interrupted by the higher increase of the famine districts of Monquhitter and Turiff. Only two Lowland parishes showed a decrease. The parish of Logie Buchan declined by over 15 per cent, while in the shadow of Bennachie the parish of Monymusk showed a population decline of 5 per cent. This decline may be merely the result of imperfection of data or it may possibly have resulted from the early improvements in the district with some rearrangement of population.

The changes in the Highland border zone, where no two parishes altered by the same amount, varied considerably. The smallest increase was on the eastern flank of the Alford Basin, where the parish of Keig increased by only 7 per cent. It was in the Alford Basin, however, that there was an actual decline, though here the changes may be more apparent than real as a result of changes in parish boundaries. Nevertheless two parishes contiguous to the parish of Tullynessle but over the Correen Hills-Bennachie watershed decreased by about 30 per cent in the same period. As might be expected the greatest increase was in the southern part of the Alford Basin with the largest extent of fertile, easily cultivated ground. The northern part of the Alford area increased by about 32 per cent, while Leochel Cushnie showed a high increase with over 75 per cent. This area is adjacent to the high increase parish of Tarland in the Howe of Cromar, where the combination of fertile clay loam soils of the old lake flat, easily cultivated because of the lack of stones, the southern aspect, and the fact that it was a centre of the woollen stocking industry led to an increase of over 100 per cent. Other very high increase areas in the western parts of Aberdeenshire, such as Cairnie parish, one of the very few with abundant supplies of lime, may have had their main increase in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, but even among the Highland straths and glens there was high increase also.

The Highland area, in fact, generally showed a high increase during the first half of the eighteenth century. Strathdon had a population increase of over 100 per cent. Upper Deeside increased by 67 per cent, while the glens of the Gairn and the Muick had an increase of about 55 per cent. The increase of population in the Highlands was generally greater during this period than at any period since. The causes of population increase in the Aberdeenshire Highlands at this time are not definitely known. It is suggested that cattle rearing, the summer grazing of cattle and sheep of which traces may be found in the form of sheiling foundations on the flat surfaces above the river Quoich and the hosiery industry, together with certain nefarious pursuits such as distilling and cattle thieving, may have assisted in the increase of population. The military posts established at Braemar and Corgarff may have accounted for a tributary population to the stations. In the Birse district on the south side of the Dee the population increased partly through colonisation of the Forest of Glen Birse which was settled from 1724. In the case of the parishes of Crathie and Braemar, which include the cul-de-sac of Upper Deeside, the population in 1755 was greater than before or since (Fig. 2), a distinction shared with the parish of Cairnie in the extreme north-west of the county.

The period 1696 to 1755 was thus, for the major part of the North East, a time of increasing population in an era when agricultural improvements, and hence the ability of the land to support a dense population, were in their infancy. In some measure the changes must be regarded as a high natural increase—a recovery from the famine conditions and the generally unsettled state of the country in the seventeenth century. The changes which followed in the second half of the eighteenth century were caused primarily by economic changes under the stimulus of food shortages. They have been more fully recorded and a more detailed view of cause and result in relation to the physical environment may be obtained.

The period 1755-1801 (Fig. 3)

Compared with the frequent high increase shown in the early part of the eighteenth century, the second half of the century is distinguished primarily by the fact that the majority of parishes show a decline in population, a decline which is common over the whole region except under certain environmental conditions. The change pattern now becomes far

more irregular; one parish may differ very considerably from its neighbours, which would seem to indicate that purely local conditions were of great importance amongst which must be mentioned the human factor. Landowners approached the problem of agricultural improvement in different ways with consequent demographic repercussions.

There are indications that for some parishes there was not a steady decline from 1755 to 1801. In fact the population increase which was very evident in the first half of the century seems to have continued as late as 1770 and 1775. According to the ministers in the O.S.A., the turning point was probably the years of famine in 1782-3 after which a decline took place. The figures given by the S.P.C.K. tend to support this. Strathdon had a population of 2000 in 1770, an increase of 250 over Webster's figure, but the number declined to 1524 at the time of the O.S.A. The parish of Glass was said to have had a much larger population in the years before 1782, while the accompanying figures for the parish of Skene show a similar change; 1755 1,251 persons; 1777 1,306; 1787 1,256; 1791 1,233; and 1801 1,140. On the population change map this is indicated by a slight decline over the period which masks the population fluctuation.

The pattern of population change on the Lowlands shows a response to economic changes. In the north-east of Buchan a compact group of parishes all continued the increase which they had shown in the first half of the century. The majority increased by between 10 per cent and 25 per cent but the famine parish of Monquhitter showed an increase of 47 per cent. The parishes making up this group have many similarities; they contained a high proportion of wasteland on the higher parts away from the rivers, land which was rapidly coming under the attack of the colonising crofter and the improving farmer; they contained moss in plenty for use as fuel and lime from the calcareous schists was available on the spot, or sea shell sand from close by was available for agricultural improvements. This group of parishes corresponds closely with the parishes which, in the O.S.A., were recorded as being ahead in agricultural improvements. Meanwhile the formation of new villages in the Ugie Basin and on the higher land of Buchan had attracted a number of immigrants who were to participate in the village linen industries. In Monquhitter, for instance, the population was said to have increased partly by the practice of dividing large farms to accommodate small tenants, partly

by reclamation of the wasteland, but principally by the establishment of the village of Cuminstown by Cumine of Auchry in 1763 and Garmond shortly afterwards. Cuminstown was also an important centre of the Aberdeenshire linen industry, one of the reasons for its foundation being to participate in this thriving manufacture. As another example, the increase in the population of the parish of Strichen is ascribed to the establishment of Mormond Village in 1764. A number of coastal parishes also showed an increase, especially those which contained fishing villages. The coastal tract from the R. Deveron to Troup Head had a considerable population increase, the increase being put down to the thriving state of the fishing villages as well as to the break up of farms into smaller units and the attack on the wasteland by the crofters. The successful prosecution of the fishing also led to a large increase in the parish populations of Peterhead and Fraserburgh.

South of the north Buchan colonisation village and fishing area was a group of parishes which all decreased by amounts up to 37 per cent. The causes of the decline were varied. In some parishes such as Bourtie and Keithhall, the reasons given included the amalgamation of farms and the prohibition of sub-letting, while in others scarcity of peat for fuel was given as the principal reason for the decline. This was the case in the two parishes above and also on the Inch and Garioch Lowland. These two factors in the decline, it will be noted, were the opposite of those operating to the north. The attraction of Aberdeen was also stronger in these southern parishes.

In lower Deeside, areas of increased population were confined to the north side of the river and were mainly in the Peterculter district where a paper mill had been established in the middle of the eighteenth century. Apart from Banchory Devenick where colonisation was taking place on the mossy wastes of the Kincardineshire Plateau, the parishes on the south side of the river showed a general decline with lack of fuel and the attraction of the manufacturing and commercial centre of Aberdeen causing the emigration. Even the southern shores of the Dee estuary showed a decline. Two of the causes given were the result of the close association of the inhabitants with the sea. There had been a considerable drain of men to the fleet in the various wars of the eighteenth century and an increasing turn to a seafaring life by many of the small farmers. At the same time the cutting of peats for the fires of Aberdeen had to be stopped owing to the exhaustion of the peat mosses.

Even the feuing of new ground was not sufficient to offset the decline nor the beginnings of the granite industry on the south bank of the Dee near Torry.

Farther north along the coast in Belhelvie parish, the causes of the decline were peculiar to the parish. A great part had been taken over by the York Building Company after the forfeiture of the lands by the Earl of Panmure for his part in the rising of 1715. On this land particularly exhausting soil management was practised. Short leases encouraged the tenants to take as many crops of oats from the soil as possible and this together with the practice of paring and burning the peaty ground quickly exhausted the soil. It was not until 1782 that an improvement took place when the estate changed hands.

Conditions in the Banffshire strath and coastal districts were varied. The coastal parishes all showed an increase as did the parish of Keith. The causes of the increase along the coastal slope were the result of the rise in the fishing towns, but in the case of Keith parish the increase was caused mainly by the influx of crofters to the wasteland since the flax spinning and dressing industry of the villages was on the decline. It was in "a very unprosperous condition, so much so that many flax dressers have been dismissed by the employers and with their families have left the place".² The other parishes, however, showed a decline for which the amalgamation of farms and the lack of fuel were held responsible. The parish of Cairnie which had shown such a great increase in the first half of the century also declined slightly, notwithstanding the prosperous nature of the lime trade which was centred in the parish. The lowland of Strathbogie, however, showed an increase, especially in the northern portion. This was partly as a result of the growth of Huntly which commands the northern end of the corridor routeway. The population of Huntly town and parish was said to have "increased within these fifty years in so much that, where all round it for some distance was barren heath, swamp, or marsh, there is now scarcely one uncultivated spot to be seen".³ To the south, however, the population on the dry, sandy, outwash soils of the Kildrummy district had decreased, a feature shared by most of the Highland and Highland border areas.

Within the Highland zone in fact only one parish showed a significant increase in population. The causes of the increase in the glens and strath of the parish of Birse were the lime

works and illicit distillation. The population increased "through the facilities by which families were maintained among the hills by its profits".⁴ As the distillation was controlled so the population later declined. This district was, however, exceptional. The lime trade and distillation were not so important in the parishes of the Alford Basin and its neighbourhood. The southern part of the Vale of Alford showed a population decrease of about 26 per cent, while the parishes on the eastern rim decreased by a lesser amount. The cause of the decrease in the parish of Keig was ascribed to the increase in the trade and manufactures of Aberdeen which proved an inducement to the population affected by crop failures in 1782-83. This reason was also put forward for the decline in Leochel Cushnie parish.

The effects of the scarcity occasioned by the poor harvests of the 1780's appear, as one might expect, to have been most important in the poorer and harsher Highland valleys and glens. The high basin of the Cabrach decreased in population by between 25 and 50 per cent and this was attributed to the poor harvests. It was said, for instance, that "the number of inhabitants had decreased by about 200 since 1782 and 1783; at which period the householders or crofters were driven in quest of subsistence to other countries and towns where manufactures were carried on".⁵ Similar reasons are given for the depopulation of the parish of Mortlach to the north-west. Meanwhile Upper Deeside and Strathdon showed either decrease or insignificant increase.

Thus many areas of the North East showed considerable depopulation by the end of this period. In some cases it was the result of changes in agricultural management as when small farms were amalgamated into larger units, or when subtenants were forbidden because of scarcity of fuel in the inland districts and the rapid exhaustion of the peat mosses. The amalgamation had been stimulated partly by the effect of years of scarcity, which led to considerable emigration from the higher western districts. The attractions of the more highly paid manufacturing employment available in Aberdeen also drew off considerable numbers from the inland districts, especially from Deeside and from the country to the west and north-west of Inverurie. To offset this decrease there was an increase in other parts of the region, especially in the north of Buchan, in the fishing villages and the manufacturing centres, especially Aberdeen. The population of the County of Aberdeen,

in fact, increased from 116,836 in 1755 to 122,921 in 1792 at the time of the O.S.A. This general increase was the result of many causes including one mentioned by Sinclair in his Analysis. He notes that an important factor was the decreasing mortality resulting from the increasing use of vaccination against the smallpox which had been noted by many of the parish ministers. In the parish of Birse, for instance, it was said that "innoculation is practised a little with success; sensible people do not seem averse to it",⁶ but there was

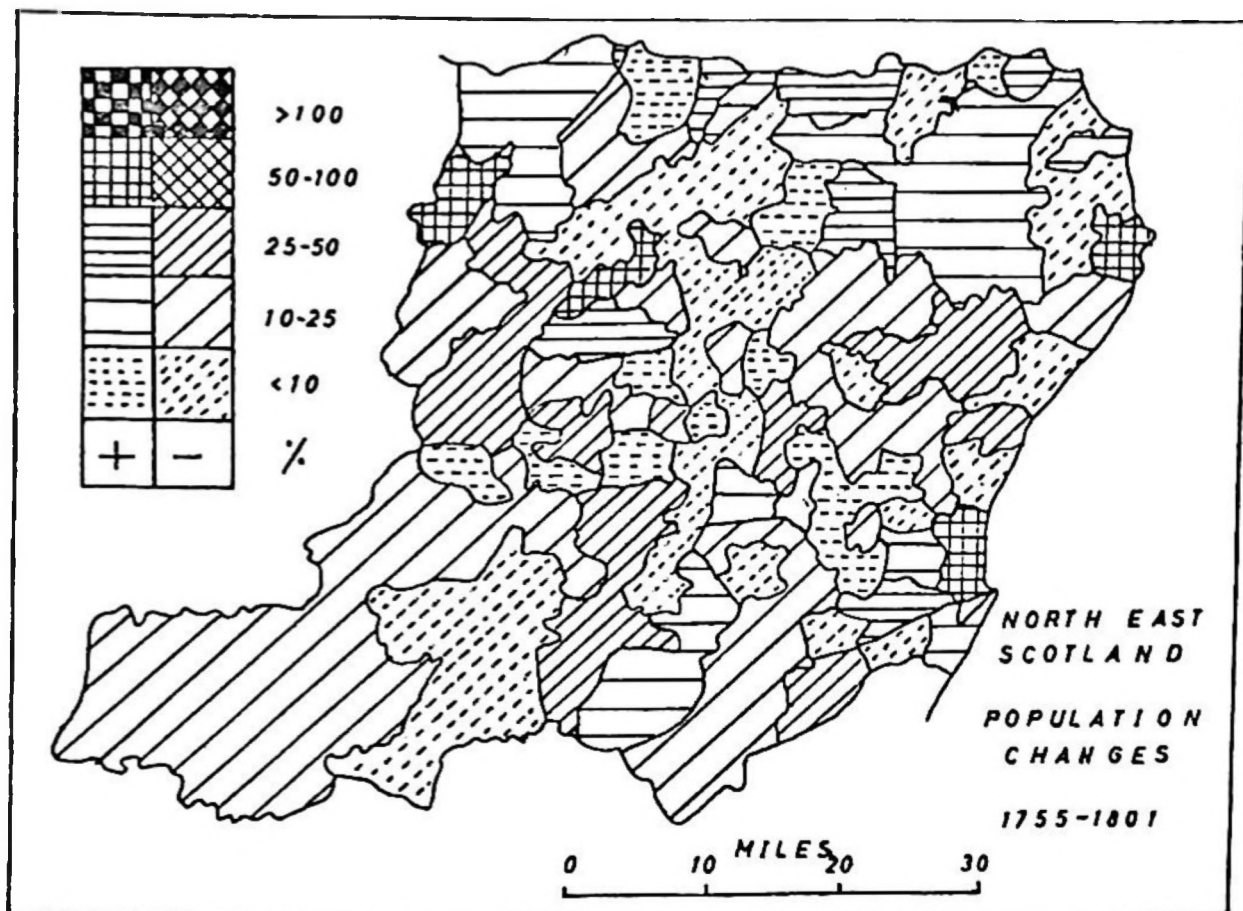


FIG. 3

considerable variation in acceptance of the new technique. In the eastern part of the Alford Basin, people were strongly against inoculation for the smallpox.

The agricultural improvements were, therefore, not the cause of widespread depopulation. A comparison of a map showing the most improved parishes at the time of the O.S.A. and the population change cartogram for this period indicates that the increase took place in parishes which were among the most improved in the region. Nevertheless, where there was little waste ground for new cultivation, as a result perhaps of long settlement in good soil districts, there appears to have been a decrease or only a slight increase. The changes in this period are complex; individual parishes differed

considerably from their neighbours in the same geographical environment indicating that non-geographical factors influence population change.

The period 1801-1851 (Fig. 4)

The first half of the nineteenth century shows many profound changes in the state of the population of the North East compared with the eighteenth century. Whereas many districts had shown a significant decline in the last fifty years, the present period was one of almost universal increase. Many of the parishes showed an increase of between 50 and 100 per cent, though it will be shown that some of the rural parishes which had shown great increase earlier were now increasing at a lower rate. In this period new factors came into operation. Apart from the agricultural changes there was also a great development in communications with the turnpike roads, the coaches, the Aberdeen-Inverurie canal and the introduction of the steamship, which gave a great impetus to the cattle trade with the south.

The pattern of change on the Buchan Lowland was almost entirely one of increase though it varied in amount. Apart from the parishes of Peterhead and Fraserburgh, where the great increase was the result of the rise in importance of the herring fishing and other local causes, and apart from the parish of Inverurie where the town began to grow rapidly after the opening of the canal to Port Elphinstone in 1805, the other area of high increase was that of Tyrie parish. Here the population had increased principally as a result of the erection of the village of New Pitsligo at the end of the eighteenth century. A high increase was similarly shown in the parish of Longside where a village had been erected in 1801. After a mere thirty years, however, the population of this village became almost stationary with the closing down of the woollen mill in 1828. Longside forms one of the group of parishes which had shown a decline in the second part of the eighteenth century. Along with the others in the group, it now showed a greater increase compared with those which had increased in population earlier. The cause of the increase was very much the same in both cases, though stimulated by the communication improvements effected by the turnpike roads which often required a temporary influx of labour to build them. The reasons for increase given in the New Statistical Account (N.S.A.) were often concerned with the reclamation of the wasteland and settlement by crofters.

The increase in the population of Fyvie, for instance, a parish which contained a great deal of wasteland in the watershed areas, was said to be the result of reclamation and the increase in new crofting settlements. The increase in the lower Ythan district was also ascribed to crofting development, though the village of Ellon was also enlarged in the same period.

These factors were common to a great deal of Buchan Lowland though, along the coast, the lucrative state of the herring fishing led to an increase in population in some parishes and a

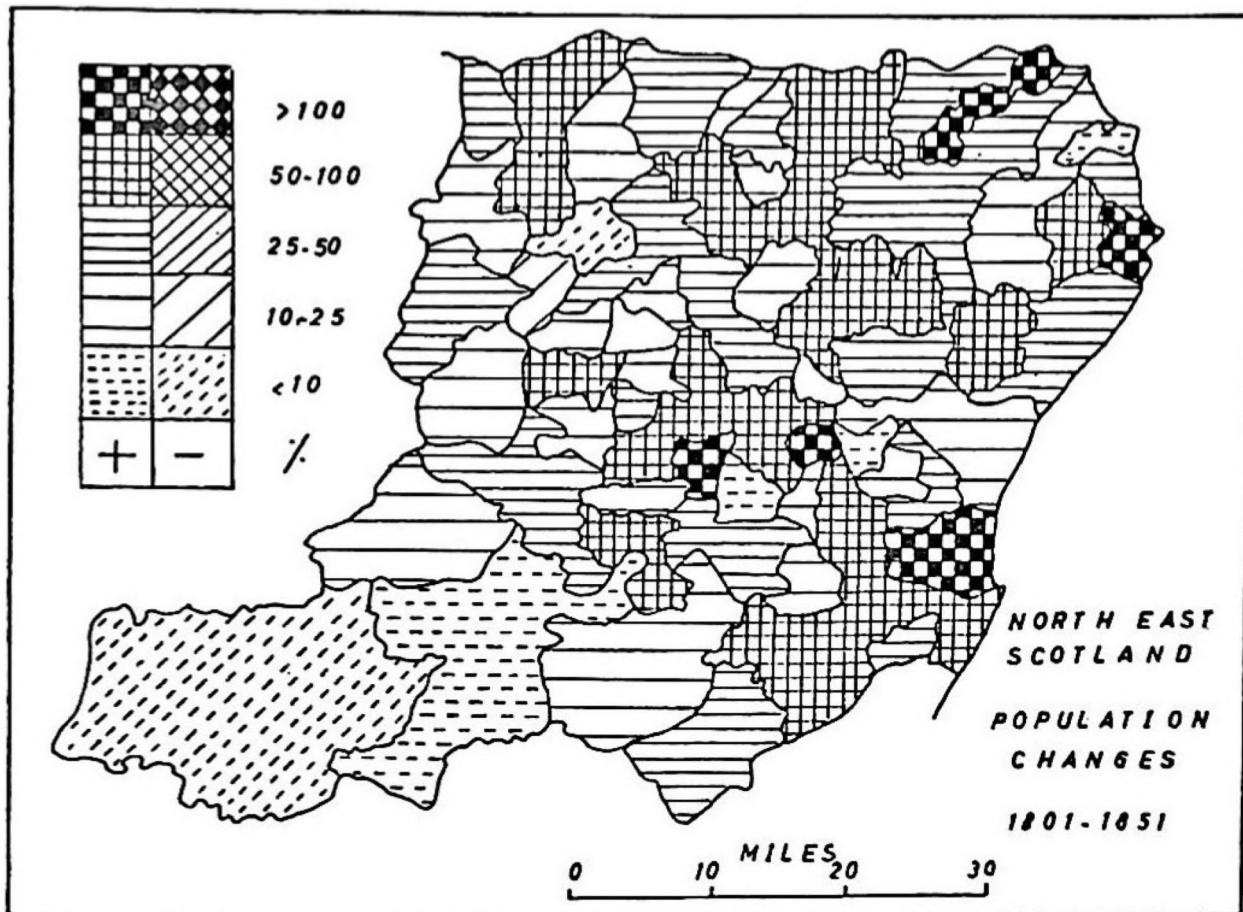


FIG. 4

decline in others. Some of the fisherfolk from Rattray moved south along the coast to Peterhead, while in the case of Pitsligo, it was said that "the increase in population may be ascribed in great measure to the more extensive prosecution of the herring fishing, which, until thirty years ago, had never been attempted on this coast".⁷ Similar features may be noted along the coast of Banffshire, but there was also an increase in the inland districts of the coastal plateau. Here the cause of increase was no longer the importance of the linen industry which had steadily declined after the end of the eighteenth century. The emphasis was now on the improvement and colonisation of the waste ground, the attack on the "drearier districts". This led to population increase as in the parish of Boharm where

there was a development of cottages along the new lines of road and on the waste ground. The Hill of Aultmore, north of Keith, continued to be attacked by the crofters' plough, especially alongside the new turnpike road from Cullen to the Isla valley by way of the valley of the Burn of Deskford.

Population increased also in the valley of Strathbogie, especially on the low watershed between the Don and Deveron drainage systems, where the village of Lumsden was founded. The increase continued along the Inch and Garioch Lowland, where the group of parishes which had earlier shown such fluctuation and divergence now showed an increase ranging between 50 and 100 per cent. The causes of the substantial increase in this long settled district were linked, among other things, with the development of the Aberdeen-Inverurie canal which now allowed the importation of lime and other materials necessary for improvement and the export of produce. For various reasons the parishes of Deeside and Donside showed a similar high increase. Granite working led to an influx of people though, as in the case of Dyce, fluctuations in the demand for granite were often reflected in the population figures. In Newhills and Aberdeen the increase was the result of expanding manufactures, commercial activities and fishing, while in the suburban parish of Peterculter the growth of population was largely the result of the increasing prosperity of the paper mill and the reclamation of the higher valley slopes away from the River Dee. At this time, also, there was an increasing number of summer residents attracted by the river scenery, the southern exposure and the close proximity to Aberdeen.

There was also a well marked increase in the population of the basins of the Western Uplands, where agriculture was extended as improvements were commenced at the turn of the century. This was particularly marked in the north-east of the Alford Basin where crofts were established on the upper slopes of the hills and patches of reclaimed land began to extend fingerlike into the moorland. The Highland zone, however, was beginning to show a decrease at the time of the N.S.A. though in 1851 Strathdon still had a greater population than at the beginning of the century. The decrease in the glens of Deeside away from centres such as Ballater was the result to a great extent of the suppression of the illicit distillation which had helped to support numbers of Highland folk. This was also true of Strathdon and Birse where it led to a considerable

amount of emigration. Harvest failures also led to an exodus. The decline in the population of Upper Deeside continued, a decline which had been evident since 1755. This was, no doubt, partly the result of the remoteness of the district, together with a certain amount of eviction of tenants to make way for sheep.

Extension of agriculture seems to have been the main cause of population increase in the rural districts of North East Scotland during the first half of the nineteenth century. New techniques, new crops, the encouragement of crofters, the high prices obtainable for agricultural produce and fewer harvest failures in the Lowlands seem to have stimulated the growth of the population, while the increase in the herring fishing caused a rapid growth of the fisher populations around the coast. Nevertheless by the end of this period a great many areas had passed the population peak and were beginning to decline. In some parishes a number of leases ran out in 1841; numerous small farms were incorporated into larger units and, since by this time most of the available land had been reclaimed, depopulation of even fertile lowland areas began to occur.

The Period 1851-1891 (Fig. 5)

The second half of the nineteenth century shows many changes compared with the period just discussed. In place of generally high increase, the theme is now one of moderate increase, relative stagnation or decline. New factors had come into operation: the advent of the railway to the North East, the evergrowing steamship trade and, with this improvement in communications, the development of the granite industry in inland districts. The fishing industry was prosperous but agriculture was to suffer a setback as prices fell and the "Dismal Eighties" followed a long period of agricultural expansion.

In the Lowlands, apart from the fishing villages, the maximum increase did not exceed 25 per cent except under certain circumstances. The agricultural areas mainly increased by less than this amount and in some districts, there was a decline by up to 25 per cent. This decline had begun in some parts of the Lowlands as early as 1841 when the cycle of changes in farm size had turned full circle and amalgamation became common, as it had been in the latter part of the eighteenth century. In the Huntly area, for instance, it was said that "at the last letting in 1841, the system was adopted of throwing many of the smaller farms into one",² while in an

adjacent parish, Cairnie, the crofter system was much discouraged and the large farm system advocated. The effect was to reduce the number of people living in the area. Thus the parish of Cairnie, by 1891, showed a further decline of 7 per cent over the 1851 figures and in other agricultural districts the decline was even more marked. Although some districts showed a moderate increase, especially those along the route of the Aberdeen-Fraserburgh railway, other areas increased by less than 10 per cent or even lost population. This was

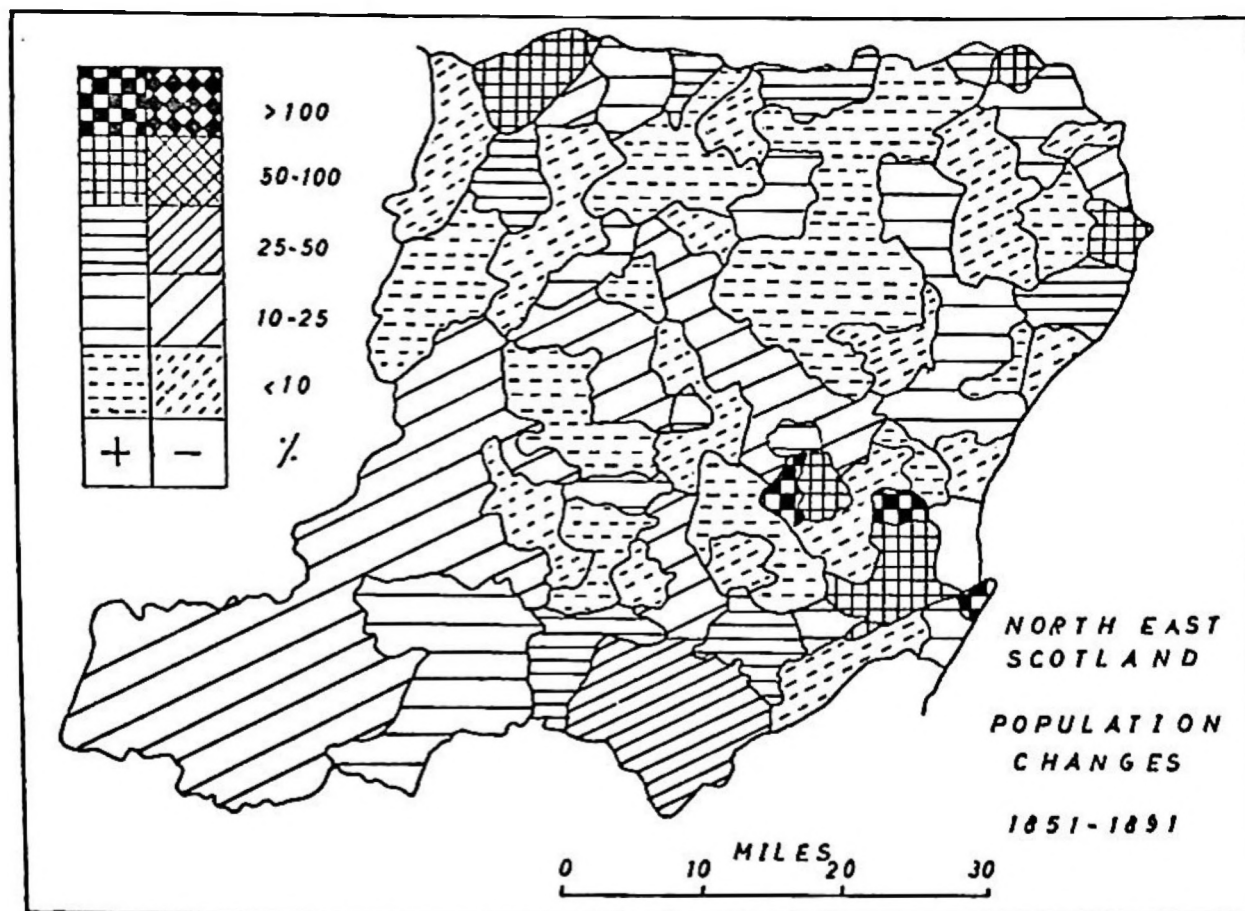


FIG. 5

especially true of a belt of country extending north-west from Inverurie, including such parishes as Chapel of Garioch, Rayne and Forguc. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century villages do not appear to have retained their population, because their main reason for existence had disappeared with the loss of function as rural industrial centres.

Nevertheless there were centres of increase in the Lowlands. These were notably the coastal areas, especially those which contained harbours capable of coping with the increasing size of vessels. In some cases, harbours were rebuilt or newly erected. Thus most of the Banffshire coastal villages showed a substantial increase; the population of Rathven parish, which contains such fishing towns as Buckie and Portknockie increased

by nearly 70 per cent. In 1851 Buckie had a population of only 2,500 people: by 1891 it had risen to 5,849. The population of Findochty increased from about 450 to 1,148 in the same period. Farther east Macduff increased from 2,527 to 3,722 while a small centre, Gardenstown, increased by about 700 persons in the forty year period. The population of Fraserburgh almost doubled, while that of Peterhead almost trebled, though accompanied by a decrease in the neighbouring rural areas.

Inland, the greatest increase in the population took place in the granite working districts of the Lowlands, especially at Kemnay, where the arrival of the railway permitted the exploitation of the light coloured granite of the district on a scale which far surpassed any earlier working: the population as a result increased by 164 per cent, while that of the parish of Dyce, where granite was worked on the slopes of Tyrebagger Hill, showed an increase of 184 per cent.

The rural areas of the Western Uplands and Highlands all show either decrease or almost stable population in this period. The main areas of substantial decrease were in the most remote districts, especially those of Upper Deeside and Strathdon, while the parish of Glenmuick, Tullich and Glengairn would have shown a decrease of like amount had it not been for the increasing importance of Ballater as a holiday and tourist resort. The population of this parish as a whole decreased by 315 persons in the period, in which time Ballater had increased by 500 persons, which represents a decline in the glens and the Dee valley of about 200. In Strathdon, where there was no parallel to Ballater, there was a decrease of about 22 per cent, but the greatest decline was found in the glens on the north side of the Mounth. In the parish of Birse, which had earlier supported a considerable population by illicit distillation and other practices, there was a decline of almost 30 per cent, while the neighbouring parish of Strachan, which includes the basin of the Feugh, showed a decrease of just over 30 per cent.

Although the reasons for the decline varied from district to district, it is possible to see regional causes for the decrease in the rural population. While the crofts were, in some areas, being amalgamated into larger farms, those that remained were often uneconomic unless the land was very good and near a suitable market for the sale of the produce of the croft. There was not sufficient work to maintain a man and his dependents without doing casual labour on neighbouring farms. Such crofts had been kept going earlier by the activities

of the women, by the knitting of stockings, by the linen industry, or by the men who burnt lime where deposits were available. The cessation of most of these activities tended to cause a decline in the crofting population once the peak of high agricultural prices was passed. The railways which, during their construction, often caused temporary increases in population, also tended to bring greater realisation of the poor standard of living obtainable on the marginal land which is present in quantity away from the river valleys. The railway was helping to increase the importance of the North East fisheries and the cattle trade by opening up nation wide markets and employing members of the rural population; yet it drained away some of the people to whom it brought amenities and trade. At the same time the increase in size of the southern towns had seen the creation of police forces necessary to maintain law and order, which offered a further outlet for young men from rural districts. The manufacturing industries were offering urban amenities and higher wages than could be obtained in the rural areas. Whatever the fundamental causes of population change, the result was very often migration away from the rural areas of the North East.

The Period 1891-1951 (Figs. 6 and 7)

The dominant note in the change pattern over the period 1891-1951 is one of almost universal decline, which far surpasses the decline in the second half of the nineteenth century. New techniques had come into the region in the interim and two world wars had helped to redistribute the population of the area. The advent of the steam trawler, which profoundly affected the fortunes of the coastal districts, was followed in about twenty years by the omnibus, which has both maintained life in the rural areas and also helped the exodus of the rural population. These factors, coupled with agricultural depression and other factors common throughout the whole country, have co-operated in depriving the North East of many of its rural inhabitants.

In the eastern half of the Lowlands the population decreased from 1891 to 1931 by between 10 and 25 per cent. The western and north-western lowland areas which include districts of poor opportunity, such as the Banffshire Plateau, or better endowed districts such as Strathbogie and the Inch and Garioch Lowland, generally declined by between 25 and 50 per cent. On the coastal strip the changes in fishing methods

are also reflected in the population changes. The growing emphasis on concentration, as a result of the special needs of coal-fired trawlers and drifters, led to the migration of fisher folk from the small creeks to such centres as Buckie in the north-west, to Peterhead and Fraserburgh in the north-east, and to Aberdeen. These larger centres, however, show a more moderate increase than during the earlier periods and the population of Peterhead parish actually declined between 1911 and 1931 and showed only a small increase between 1931 and 1951. The granite industry which, between 1851 and 1891,

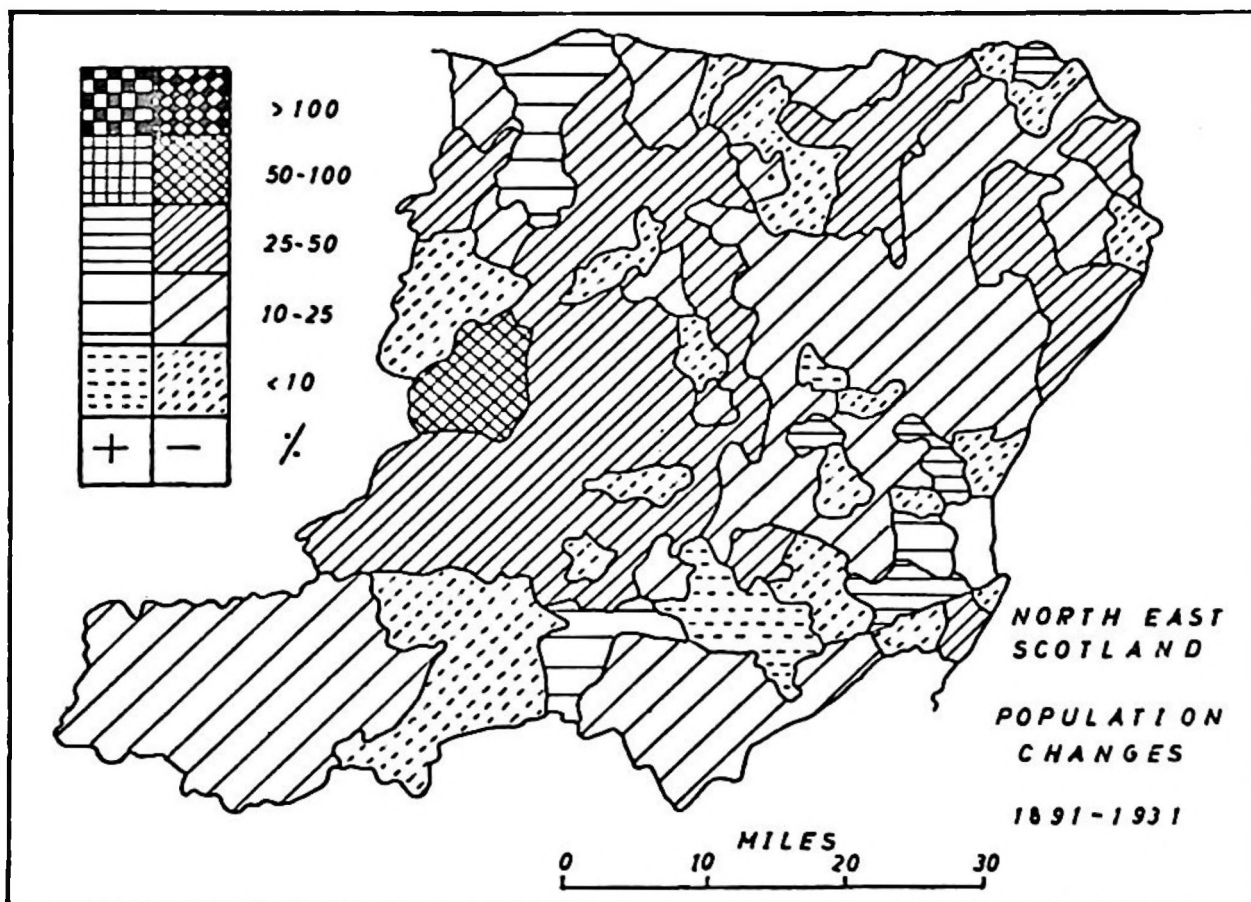


FIG. 6

had led to such a high increase in the vicinity of the quarries, was now past its most prosperous period and these districts shared in the general decline to 1931. Even the manufacturing districts of Lower Donside show only moderate increase, except where there is an extension of the suburban influence of Aberdeen. There has continued, as a result of intensive suburban bus services, an increase in the lower Deeside dormitory districts on the north side of the river.

The remoter districts of the Western Uplands and the Highlands generally show a decline of between 25 and 50 per cent up to 1931, and continued decrease from 1931 to 1951. There are, however, exceptions to this generalisation. The

parish of Alford shows a lesser decrease occasioned by the function of Alford village as a centre for retired people and river fishing resort. This feature has been shared by Deeside villages such as Torphins and Tarland, while from 1931 to 1951 even the most western parish of Crathie and Braemar increased slightly in population. The high and remote basin of the Cabrach, however, shows a large decline while the glens near Ballater continue to show a slight decline.

During this last period of population change, the motor bus has carried on and increased the functions of the railway

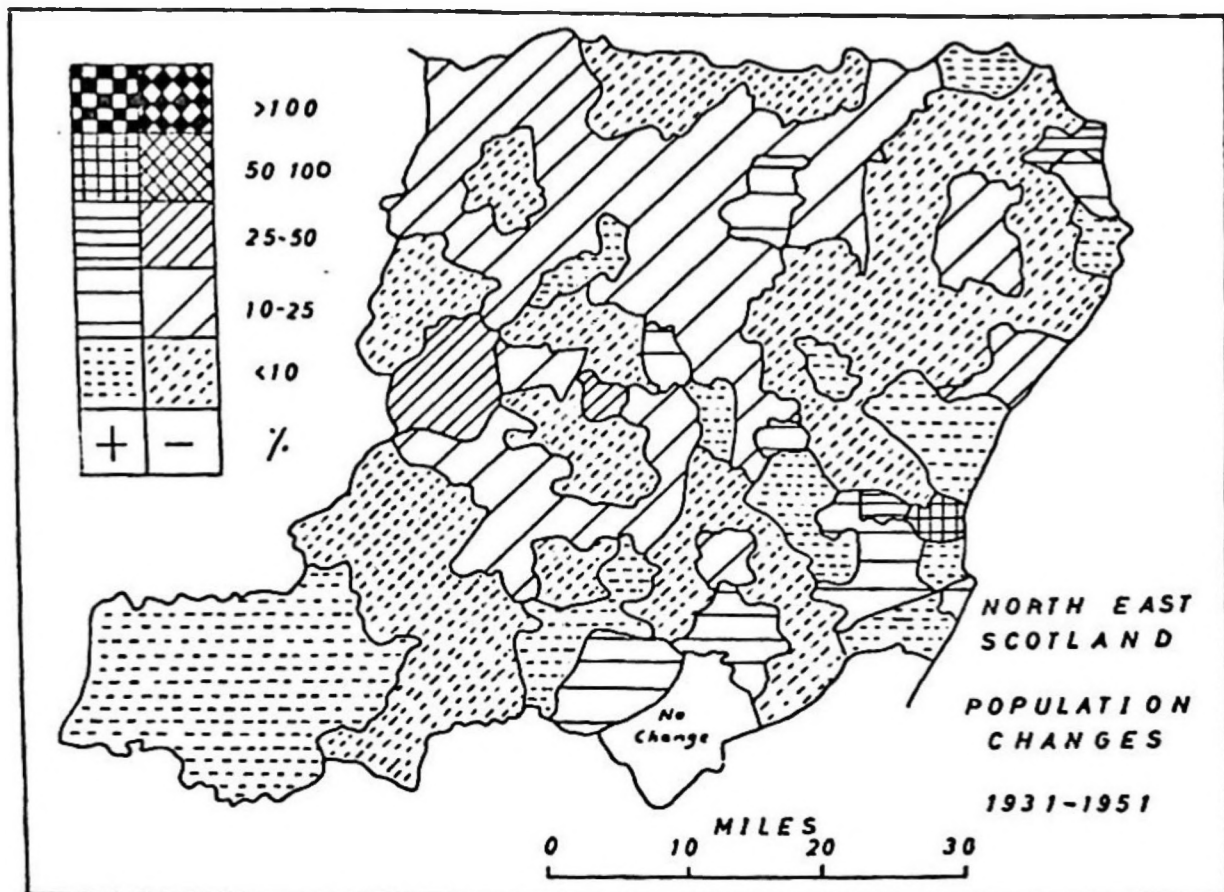


FIG. 7

as a population factor. In some places, the reinstatement of a centre on a main bus route helped to retain or increase population as at Kincardine O'Neil, which had suffered an eclipse when the Deeside Railway made the northerly loop to include the Basin of Lumphanan. In other districts it put the rural population within easy reach of the larger market centres such as Aberdeen, which attracts people from a great distance for shopping, farming and entertainment facilities. In districts such as Strathdon, the school bus has helped to retain population who would normally have moved because of the lack of facilities in the immediate neighbourhood for secondary school education for the children. It has facilitated long distance

travel at cheap rates leading, for instance, to people living in Stonehaven but working in Aberdeen. Many come in daily from Inverurie and Ellon, while some make a daily journey from Peterhead or Strichen. The concentration of the fishing in Aberdeen led to a movement of fisherfolk from Stonehaven, Newtonhill, Portlethen, etc., to Aberdeen followed by a reverse movement of people in all varieties of occupations who travel in and out each day. The motor bus has thus carried on and extended the function of the railway as a passenger-carrying agency.

Nevertheless this ease of movement to the larger centres and more frequent journeys by the rural population has led to a greater realisation than ever before of the amenities enjoyed by the urban dweller. The inhabitants of the high glens, or the crofters in treeless windswept Buchan compare their physical and social environment most unfavourably with that of the town—the shopping, schooling, entertainment and housing facilities, not to mention the wage rates, are poor compared with those offered to the urban dweller. This applies especially to the younger people many of whom, for various reasons, have gained a knowledge of conditions outwith Scotland, while to the older people the rural environment remains part of their life and philosophy. Nevertheless they are well acquainted with the urban centres of the region; for a long period they have moved to swell the populations of such centres as Aberdeen and Peterhead, Inverurie, Turriff and Huntly. The population changes in these towns have differed considerably from the rural changes and it is necessary to examine the development of these larger centres as far as population statistics will permit.

Urban Population Changes

To attempt to investigate population change in the towns of the North East is made difficult by the paucity of population statistics. Some figures are available for the Burghs but they are not generally available till 1841 and, even after this date, the position is complicated by changes in the various administrative units. In most cases it is possible to furnish data for the nucleated settlements in Aberdeenshire for 1696, but there is a big gap from this date to the end of the eighteenth century. The first figures for the Burghs commence in the census of 1821 or that of 1841. However, with these defects of material in mind, it is possible to indicate in general how the

population in some of the nucleated settlements of the North East has changed.

The bulk of the smaller towns remained the same size during the eighteenth century, many being little larger than villages. The Royal Burgh of Inverurie, for instance, had a population in 1696 of about 237 which had increased to 400 at the end of the eighteenth century. After this date progress was rapid and by 1900 the population had increased to over 3,000 as a result of improved communications which included the erection of a bridge over the Don, the canal from Aberdeen and later the railway. The latter had an important effect on later development since it was chosen by the Great North of Scotland Railway as the site of the railway repair works. By 1931 the population had increased to just over 4,500, and by 1951 to just over 5,000. Its neighbour, Kintore, situated on dissected fluvioglacial terraces like Inverurie, lacked the benefits of the other Royal Burgh and had a very slow increase in population. In 1696 the population was about 160, which had only risen to 228 at the time of the O.S.A. Thereafter the population rose slowly till 1911 after which there was a decrease to 1931 followed by an increase to 1951. Farther north, Oldmeldrum, which had a greater population than Inverurie in 1696, also had a greater population at the end of the eighteenth century, during which time it served as a headquarters of the stocking industry. Lacking the paper, railway and milling industries, it rose to a maximum of 1,579 in 1851 and thereafter declined to 1931 when the population numbered only 980. It rose, however, to 1,103 by 1951. Similarly, Turriff, with a population of about 250 in 1696, showed a rise in the nineteenth century, reached a first maximum in 1911, with decline to 1931, then later higher maximum in 1951. The rise was slow throughout though more marked than that of Kintore or Oldmeldrum.

Huntly, at the northern end of the Strathbogie routeway where routes gather to cross the watershed between the Deveron and Isla, differs from the towns already discussed because the rise in population in the eighteenth century was more marked, the result of its association with the linen industry. The population of about 200 in 1696 had risen to 1,700 in 1793. The increased population continued during the nineteenth century, in accordance with its important focus of routes and market facilities, but in some decades the rate of increase was very low, as between 1871 and 1881. An early maximum was reached in 1911, followed by decline. In 1951 the population of the

town was still less than it was in 1911. Keith, the most important inland settlement in Banffshire, owes some of its importance to its position as a route centre and market, where roads converge from the Banffshire Highlands along the Isla, from the Lowlands of Moray through the Mulbean Gap and from the fishing towns. This town, or village agglomeration, which had grown steadily throughout the eighteenth century, increased in population with the erection of the planned villages of New Keith (1,000 persons in 1793), Newmill and Fife Keith. This increase, based mainly on the linen industry, came to an end in 1831 when there were 2,332 persons in the village group. Thereafter, there was a sharp decline to 1841, when the linen trade finally petered out, followed by an increase to 1901 with later decline and more recent recovery, though the 1901 maximum was not exceeded in 1951.

The changes in the populations of the fisher towns are quite different. Together with Aberdeen, they show the most marked increase of all the urban settlements. The population of Buckie, for instance, rose steadily throughout the nineteenth century to a maximum in 1911 but declined to 1951. The small harbours of the Banffshire coast showed an almost stable or declining population in the nineteenth century as the population tended to move to larger harbours. Buckie, for instance, collected some of the population of neighbouring centres such as Portknockie and Findochty. The population of Banff, however, declined after the peak in 1881, as the harbour became unsuitable for the increasing size of vessels, and as the Deveron mouth silted up on its western side. In comparison, Macduff on the eastern side of the estuary showed a greater increase in the latter part of the nineteenth century, though here also decline followed after 1891.

In contrast to these settlements, Peterhead, Fraserburgh and Aberdeen had a much greater increase. Apart from Aberdeen, Fraserburgh was the largest settlement in the North East in 1696 with a population of about 400. It had a slow increase throughout the eighteenth century rising to about 1,000 in 1793. The enhanced rate of interest at the end of the century, occasioned by the increasing importance of the fishing, was continued in the nineteenth century, as, under the stimulus of whaling and herring fishing, the town grew in size, new harbours were erected and the settlement advanced in an atmosphere of prosperity. The maximum population, 10,574 persons, was reached just before the 1914-1918 war

and the depression in the fishing industry which followed is reflected by a decrease in the population. Even in 1951 the population was only 10,444 notwithstanding the establishment in the town of engineering and other industries.

For Peterhead and Aberdeen, figures are available which fill in the gaps which have been present in the statistics for the other urban settlements. There are figures for Peterhead at frequent intervals from the date when the town was first feued out in 1593. The population estimate for this date was approximately 56, constructed from the known number of feuars, 14, and allowing four to each family. In 1696, almost a century later, the population had risen to about 370, to 900 in 1727, about 950 in 1734, 1,266 in 1764, 1,518 in 1769, and by the time of the O.S.A. had risen to 2,550. Between this date and the end of the century there was a further increase of about 600. Fishing and trading was not the only reason for the increase in population. Peterhead was foremost among the smuggling towns of the North East; it was engaged in weaving and, during the latter part of the eighteenth century, gained some importance as a spa and holiday resort. This latter function was short lived. Henceforward the inhabitants gave increasing attention to, first, the whaling, and, later, the herring fishing; in fact, herring fishing practically supported the town during the nineteenth century based on the markets which had been built up earlier when attention was primarily focused on the export of dried cod. Apart from minor fluctuations, there was a great increase throughout the nineteenth century with roughly the same pattern of change as Fraserburgh. The population in 1951 was still less than in 1911.

Meanwhile, the first city of the region, Aberdeen, has shown a steady increase in population during the last two hundred and fifty years. Figures for the period before 1696, however, indicate that there was a downward fluctuation in the middle of the seventeenth century caused by an outbreak of plague. The population had declined from 8,750 in 1643 to about 5,100 at the time of the Poll Tax Returns. Thereafter a marked increase took place. By 1708 the population had risen to 5,556 and had trebled by the middle of the eighteenth century. The increase continued to be rapid as the town began to draw off the rural population, attracted by the higher wages and amenities offered by its expanding manufactures and trade, an increase which has continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, until it has become the largest city north of the Highland line.

Analysis of the Change Pattern

From a study of these cartograms of percentage change, it will be seen that certain parts of the region tend to show the same demographic characteristics, which may be often also related to the environmental regions and the ancient territorial divisions of the North East. From population graphs, but with modifications where it is felt that the presence of large settlements obscures the pattern of rural population change, has been constructed the map which makes a tentative division of the North East into its regional demographic types (Fig. 8). It

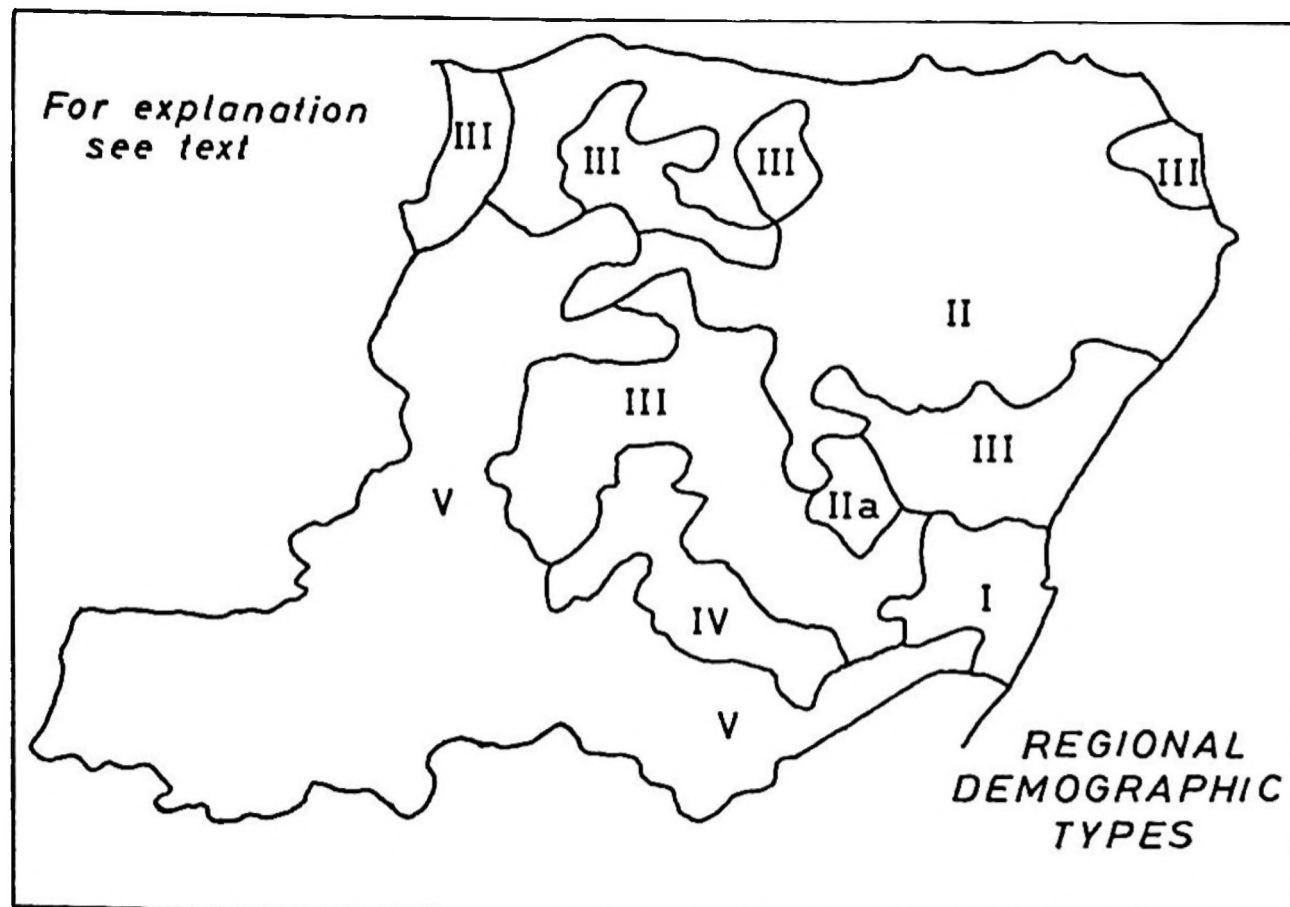


FIG. 8

will be seen that there are five main types with some minor variations.

Type I. High rate of increase, often continuous from 1696 to 1951.

Type II.

(a) High rate of increase but with fluctuations. In some cases there was a big increase from 1696 to the end of the nineteenth century, in others there was a decline in the latter part of the eighteenth century, but the later pattern was almost the same.

(b) High rate of increase with some decline in this century.

Type III. Moderate or variable increase but no marked increase over the 1696 or 1755 levels.

Type IV. Periods of high but variable increase with recent decline.

Type V. Variable decline from the early periods to recent times. The "depopulation" type.

Each of these demographic types may be associated with specific areas. Type I includes the City of Aberdeen and the surrounding district, where there has been a high rate of increase in the town itself and the immediate neighbourhood has grown along with it. The increase is based on the varying fortunes of trade, manufactures, fishing, the granite industry and its development as the focus of the region, supplying entertainment, market, commercial and financial facilities for the North East and even farther afield. Type II(a) includes a great deal of the Buchan Lowland and the coastal districts of the Moray Firth. In some cases, the increase is based on fishing with some trading and commercial interests, but the inland districts owe their increase at such a high rate to the colonisation of wasteland by the crofters, the erection of the planned villages with rural manufactures, and the gentle slopes which facilitated agriculture once techniques were available for improving the soil by manures and fertilisers. Type II(b) shows somewhat similar characteristics to Type II(a) but the increase came later and was associated primarily with the development of the granite industry, the influence of railway communications and proximity to Aberdeen. Type III is less compact, occurs in different parts of the region, and is best exemplified by the Inch and Garioch Lowland. It is a land which has been long and permanently settled, as have most of the other areas belonging to this type. In each, the amount of land available for agricultural occupation was almost all in use at the time this survey begins and, in many cases, the land was supporting almost as great a population at the end of the seventeenth or middle of the eighteenth centuries as at the present day. They are areas of almost static population yet fertile with gentle slopes and extensive valley development. They stand in contrast to Type II which has seen such a high rate of population increase. These are the districts which usually lacked the village development of the period 1750-1850 and the local manufactures, apart from the stocking industry. They have been continuously agricultural regions with few other interests. Type IV comprises

MIGRATION FROM ABERDEENSHIRE
BY RESIDENCE

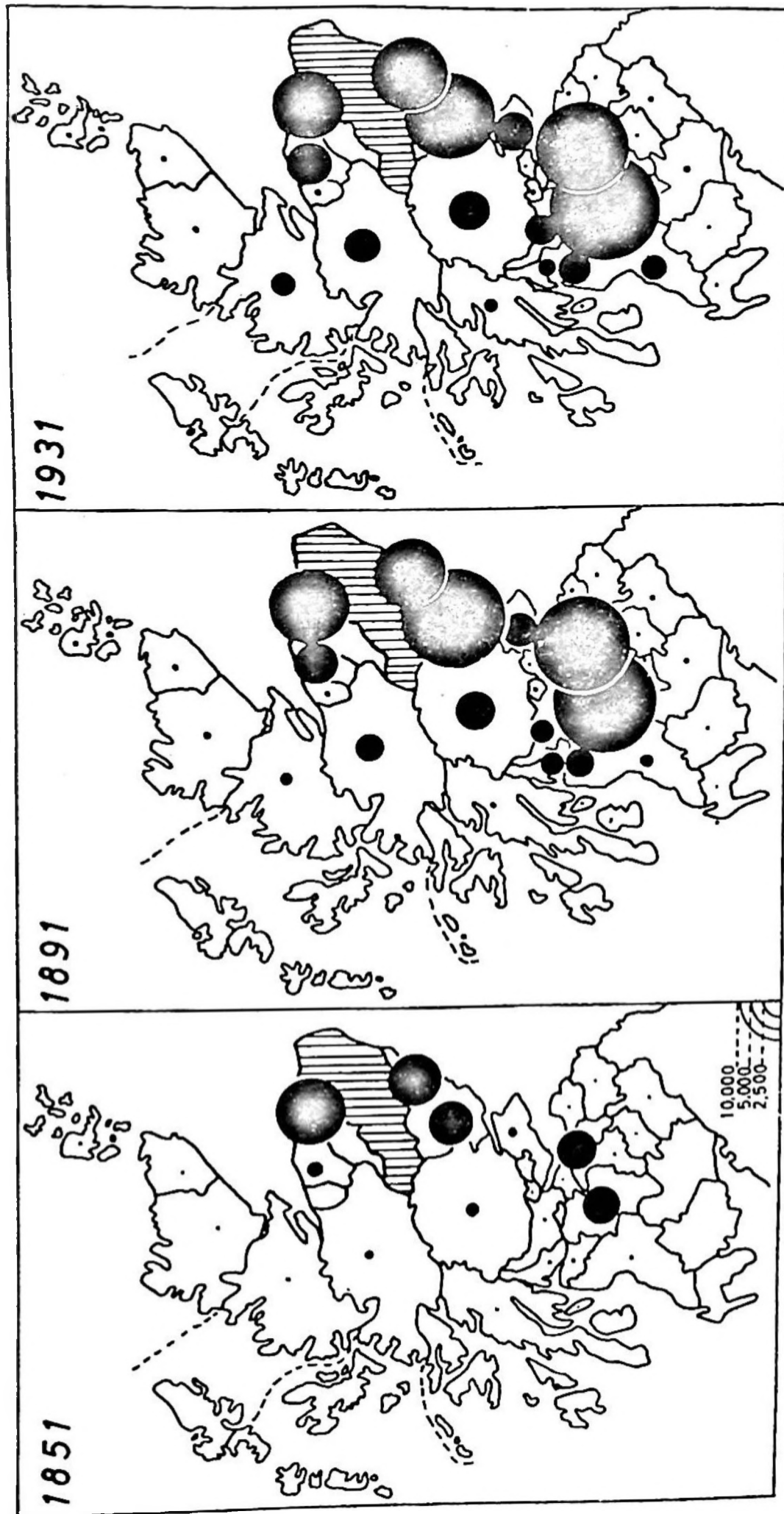


FIG. 9

the basin areas of the Western Uplands and Deeside, such as the Alford Basin, the Howe of Cromar and the Basin of Lumphanan. It differs from Type III in having higher rates of change and, apart from agricultural interests, has shown changes which are the result of a local immigration of retired people into the villages as well as holiday makers. It includes villages which have played an important part in population change, villages such as Alford, Tarland, Torphins, Lumphanan and Banchory. Type V is the "depopulation" type which includes most of the Highland zone of the region—the Banffshire Hills, the Grampians and the glens of the Mounth. In many cases, the maximum population was reached in 1755, while for Upper Deeside the population in 1931 was less than in 1696. These are the remote districts of the North East which now offer little attraction for permanent residents, though in some cases there was a late nineteenth century increase with the development of holiday resorts and the tourist industry.

The correspondence between the areas covered by these regional demographic types and the fundamental Lowland, Upland and Highland zones of the North East is plainly marked. In each case the population development has proceeded differently in the different environments. It is clear that, during the early periods, population in the rural districts was sustained not only by the produce of the land. There were often subsidiary occupations which brought in money and enabled the area to support a denser population than soil resources would have permitted. With the removal of these items of additional income, the more marginal areas became overpopulated and a progressive redistribution has followed. Many of the people have migrated within the region, but in addition there has been a southward migration, as Fig. 9 indicates. The migration from the North East has not been confined to destinations in Scotland or even the British Isles, however; there has been also a major flow of emigration particularly to India, S. E. Asia, and the New World.

NOTES

¹ Macdonald, D. F., *Scotland's Shifting Population 1750-1850*. Glasgow. 1937.

² O.S.A. Keith: Vol. V, No. 29, p. 419.

³ O.S.A. Huntly: Vol. XI, No. 39, p. 472.

⁴ N.S.A. Birse: Vol. XII, p. 793.

⁵ O.S.A. Cabrach: Vol. VII, No. 36, p. 367.

⁶ O.S.A. Birse: Vol. IX, No. 8, p. 106.

⁷ N.S.A. Pitsligo: Vol. XII, p. 398.

⁸ N.S.A. Huntly: Vol. XII, p. 1041.