

Population, Now and Then

While we await the detailed outcome of the 2021 census for Hook Norton, we must for the present rely on the data released so far by Google, which is not certain that it is using the correct parish boundaries. It reports that in 2021 there were 2,355 of us in this parish, with slightly more women than men (52.5%-47.5%). It gives 2,117 as the equivalent figure for the same area in 2011,¹ making a population increase of 1.1 per cent in the preceding decade. In 2021 489 of us (20.7%) were under 18, 1,295 between 18 and 64 (55%), and 564 over the age of 65 (24%). According to the Google figures, 93.5% of us were born in the U.K., and 97.8% declared ourselves to be “white”. 58.7% of us considered ourselves to be “Christian” and 40% declared ourselves of “No Religion”. These initial figures for 2021 suggest some significant changes in the last decade in how we see ourselves.²

So far, the figures for 2021 do not give the same rounded picture of our population as those of 2011. At that time, thirteen years ago, sixty per cent of us were married; while 103 people (4%) were widowed (or widowered). Our average age was 43. Over ninety percent of us were born in England, and over 99 percent spoke English. Two-thirds of us considered ourselves Christian, a quarter claimed to have no religion, and nine said they were Jedi knights. More details of the 2011 returns are given towards the end of this article, and the 2021 results will be reported when available. The wait is frustrating – but if only we had earlier censuses that offered such detail!

The first count of the population of Hook Norton parish came in 1086 with the William the Conqueror’s Domesday survey of England.³ The parish then probably had about 400 people, which was more than Chipping Norton. Over the next 600 years the population, so far as we can tell, slowly grew to around 600 people, though there must have been periods of decline. The Black Death almost certainly had a

¹ In 2011 the census area included Wigginton and South Newington and it was not easy to disentangle the three parishes. The other two parishes were much smaller than Hook Norton. In the 2021 census Hook Norton appears in its own right,

² <citypopulation.de/en/uk/southeasternengland/admin/cherwell.E04008052_hook-norton>

³ See “Hook Norton in the Domesday Book”, in the Middle Ages section of this website.

negative impact, especially with its first disastrous impact in 1349, and across the country as a whole population did not begin to increase again until after 1500.

By 1800 Hooky's population had passed 1,000 and reached 1,500 about 1830. After 1850 it tended to decline, as any growth in population was more than cancelled out by out-migration to the cities and abroad. Only after 1971 did in-migration begin to increase the population: after a burst of expansion in the seventies, population grew more slowly in the next twenty years but by 2001 Hooky had grown by 640 in thirty years. Then another 595 people were added in only ten more years—with more to come after 2011.

It is easy to calculate Hook Norton's population after 1800 because a new census was taken every ten years from 1801 onwards. Those figures follow after the next section.

Before 1801, everything is based on guesswork. Although enumerations were taken from time to time, it is not always clear which people were being counted. Commonly the count was restricted to adult males, adult meaning over the age of twenty-one. Conventionally, British population historians assume that the population was made up of roughly equal thirds of adult males, adult females, and children (who of course covered a shorter age range, many of them dying before adulthood). On that basis, a count of adult males has to be multiplied by three to learn the likely total population.

Before 1801

We have no estimates for the Anglo-Saxon period or before. What follow are random counts that have survived, which are usually vague about who was actually being counted; this makes it difficult to extrapolate the total population of the parish from them.

Domesday Book in 1086 found 84 landholders of various kinds, which older local historians translated into a total population of between 350 and 450; that can be averaged at Margaret Dickins's suggested figure of about 400. Various counts for the Middle Ages exist but their meaning is not clear enough to allow a calculation of total population, but after 1086 Hook Norton was consistently second in size only to

Chipping Norton within the Hundred of Chadlington, which they were both part of.⁴ The Black Death of 1349 and the subsequent outbreaks of plague must have reduced the population: the evidence is thin, but toward the end of the century, and into the fifteenth, some landholdings were reported as deserted and derelict, though Hook Norton retained its position as one of more populous places in the area. Most usefully, an assessment for poll tax in 1377 reveals that there were 203 inhabitants over the age of 14 in Hook Norton.⁵

A hundred years later the Bishop of Lincoln's Register suggested that in 1481 there were 72 houses in Hook Norton, which would mean 360 people if an average of 5 lived in each house. Seventy years on, in 1548, a different survey claimed there were just 60 people in Hook Norton parish old enough to take communion, that is, over 16 years of age, which is puzzlingly low – unless it implies many were boycotting the newly reformed Anglican Church.⁶

The most usable counts were taken in the mid-seventeenth century at a period when demographic historians think the English population was static, and so the counts should be comparable. In 1642 all persons over the age of 18 were required to take an oath in support of the Protestant religion; only “men” took it in Hook Norton, where every man in the parish was said to have sworn it. There were 197 of them, suggesting there were about 400 men and women over 18 and a total population over 16 of about 600.⁷ In 1676 an ecclesiastical census found 434 people of both sexes old enough to take Communion (i.e., over the age of 16), which, after allowing for those aged 16-18, is compatible with the 1642 figure, and again suggests a total population of just over 600.⁸

⁴ Percy Hackling noticed that the Lincoln Farthing Quota of 1200 reported 360 in Hook Norton, other counts gave 260 in 1278 and 570 in 1449, but who was being counted? Similarly, the new VCH reports 63 taxpayers in Hook Norton in 1316 and 77 in 1323 (with 52 in Southrop and Swerford in both years), but who paid? Percy Hackling's Notes, Village Museum; *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, vol. 21, draft chapter on Hook Norton.

⁵ *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, vol. 21, draft chapter on Hook Norton, 1: 7; Fenwick, ed., *Poll Taxes, 1377-1381*, vol. 2, 291.

⁶ Dickins, 45-46; Rose Graham, ed., *The Chantry Certificates for Oxfordshire* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1920), pages 39, 142.

⁷ Christopher S.A. Dobson, ed., “Oxfordshire Protestation Returns, 1641-1642”, *Oxfordshire Record Society*, vol. 36 (1955), pages 58-60; Dickins,

⁸ Anne Whiteman with Mary Clapinson, eds., *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Collection* (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), pages 421. Historians have worked out a formula for checking these figures from the Hearth Tax returns for the 1660s. Unfortunately, when applied to Hook Norton, these returns seem to suggest that that either our households were on average unusually large (5.4 persons) or, if they approximated the national average of 4.5 or even 4.25 persons each, our population numbered only 400. Whiteman, pages lx-lxxiii; Maureen B. Weinstock,

Demographic historians suggest that the English population as a whole doubled between 1676 and 1801. Hook Norton reached only 1,032 by 1801, which suggests that the parish grew more slowly than the national average in the eighteenth century. The Bishop's Visitation in 1738 reported that there were "160 houses and upwards" in the parish, which, at the national average of 4.5 persons per household, would give Hook Norton a population of 720 "and upwards". That would suggest that population growth accelerated significantly in the last sixty years of the century, as the number of houses increased to about 200 in 1771 and 215 in 1801.⁹

After 1801

The table below shows the totals for Hook Norton's population as recorded by the national census. Some care must be taken with the figures as it is not always clear whether the figures included those temporarily absent, or whether the census area always defined in the same way or whether it was restricted just to Hook Norton parish.

The schedule reveals a 46 per cent increase in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, followed by a long slow decline that reflected the departure of many both for the cities and abroad, though the ironstone boom of 1890-1920 saw a temporary recovery. The process went into long-term reverse only after 1961, with population increasing by about 20 per cent (i.e., about 300 persons) per decade from 1971 to 1991. In the next twenty years population increased more slowly – 2.5 per cent in the 1990s and 5.8% in the 2000s – before exploding again with the building of new estates between 2014 and 2020.

ed., "Hearth Tax Returns: Oxfordshire, 1665", *Oxfordshire Record Series*, vol. 21 (1940), pages 163-164. Using these figures, Kate Tiller calculated the population in 1676 at around 720. Tiller, "Hook Norton, Oxfordshire: An Open Village", in Joan Thirsk, ed., *The English Rural Landscape* (Oxford, 2000), page 287.

⁹ A. Lloyd Jukes, ed., "Articles of Enquiry Addressed to the Clergy of the Diocese of Oxford at the Primary Visitation of Dr Thomas Secker, 1738", *Oxfordshire Record Society*, vol. 38 (1957), pages 83-84; *VCH Oxon.*, vol. 21, draft. Using the 1738 source, local historians Percy Hackling and Reginald Dand calculated the 1738 population at near 700. See their papers in the Village Archive.

Hook Norton's Population, 1801-2021

1801	1,032	
1811	1,129	
1821	1,351	
1831	1,506	
1841	1,525 (includes 103 in the lunatic asylum, including staff).	
1851	1,496 (About 60 patients in the asylum in 1851, and none by 1854)	
1861	1,393	
1871	1,259	
1881	1,232	
1891	1,265	
1901	1,386	
1911	1,349	
1921	1,236	Average household size: 3.73 persons
1931	1,153	Average household size: 3.38 persons
1941	No census during the war	
1951	1,249	
1961	1,198	
1971	1,361	
1981	1,656	
1991	1,952	
2001	2,001	Average household size: 2.46 persons
2011	2,117	Average household size: 2.44 persons
2021	2,355	

Hooky's Population in 2011

The census of 2011 put Hook Norton in a ward somewhat larger than the Hook Norton parish by including Wigginton and South Newington. Thus, without care, the figures it records can be read to number Hooky's population at 2,596 (when 2,117 is the proper figure), thus exaggerating both the size of Hook Norton's population and the rate of increase since 2001. The characterisation of our population that follows really refers to the whole Census district, but the inclusion of Wigginton and South Newington can scarcely seriously distort the make-up of our population in 2011.

The census revealed that the population of the district was divided into 52% female and 48% male. The average (mean) age was 43, while the median age was higher at 46. Nearly one in five of the population was aged 65 or over, twelve per cent were under 10 and another ten per cent were between 10 and 18. Of those between the ages of 16 and 74, one in six was retired and only 1.7% unemployed; eight per cent of the population were over the age of 74 and presumed "economically inactive". Virtually 87% of the population enjoyed good or very good health.

Nine out of ten of us were born in England, and about 4% in other parts of the UK or Ireland. Other birthplaces included South Africa, Australia and the United States – with about twelve people each – and half that for Pakistan and Hong Kong. Over 99% of people living in Hook Norton spoke English. The other languages reported included French, German, Japanese and Afrikaans.

Two-thirds of us considered ourselves Christian, and 0.5% were Buddhist. About a quarter declared "No Religion", only a handful described themselves as Agnostic or Humanist, and 184 people did not mention religion at all. Nine people identified themselves as Jedi Knights.

Sixty per cent of adults were married, eight per cent cohabited with a member of the opposite sex, and under one per cent lived with a partner of the same sex. Seventeen per cent were single and had never married or been in a registered same-sex partnership; six and a half per cent were separated or divorced. There were 103 widowed people living in the district (4%). On average, about two and a half people resided in each of the 1,071 households.

Of the 1,154 dwellings in the ward, just over 7% of them were owned by "non-usual residents". Of the 2,596 residents, about 100 had a second address in the UK and fifty outside it. Over ninety per cent of households had a car or van, forty per

cent had two, and nearly twenty per cent had more than two. Thirty-three households had no central heating.

Detailed information for 2011 is available on many other subjects, not all of it easy to understand, but including categories of employment, numbers on benefits of various kinds, and living conditions. It may be found most conveniently on the Office of National Statistics website, at www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination.

The figures for 2021 will in due course appear here.

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For fuller context and additional relevant information, look at the Introduction to Approaches and at the Table of Contents.
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References:

Great Britain Historical Database: Census Data: Parish-Level Population Statistics, 1801-1951

Office for National Statistics, Official Labour Market Statistics,
<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

GB Historical GIS, University of Portsmouth, *A Vision of Britain Through Time*, at:
www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10343471/cube/TOT_POP .

The details for 2011 come from <http://localstats.qpzm.co.uk/stats/england/south-east/cherwell/hook-norton> and www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination.

Percy Hackling's Notes in Village Archive.