

## **Sample study six**

**Title: A study of census material to examine a single household in Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow in 1901.**

### **Outline Plan:**

This research study will examine a specific household in Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow at a particular point in time. The lives of ordinary people are now studied as part of our social history. Local history is becoming ever more important and more popular, and is contributing significantly to our knowledge of national history. The 1901 census was a very detailed survey of every part of Ireland and provides an excellent primary source for a local research study. This study will use primary source material from that census and will examine data regarding one household. The research study has been written from primary source information and will add to the body of historical knowledge about Dunlavin and about the local history of Co. Wicklow.

### **Evaluation of sources:**

The principal source used for this study was the Census of 1901. This census information is available in the National Archive of Ireland in Bishop St., Dublin. Both household and street return forms (forms A and B) were examined. They are accurate primary sources. The main disadvantage of the censuses is that they contain a huge amount of information. The study will only concentrate on information regarding one household. One of the skills that I learned while doing this research study was to use only the information that I needed and interpret it in a historical way, in light of the general situation in Ireland at this time, which I found out about from the secondary sources listed at the end. The secondary sources gave a good overview, but were very general for a local study such as this one.

## **Extended Essay**

This research study looks at one household at a moment in time. The census of 1901 was a very detailed survey of all of Ireland and every single household in the country had to answer questions and fill out a form. The answers to the questions were filled in on a form called 'Form B' and the head of each household had to fill in a different form called 'Form A', which contained information about all the people who were in the house on that census night in 1901. This study will focus on one household in the village of Dunlavin in the west of County Wicklow and will try to build up a picture of the household and its inhabitants on the night that the census was taken.

The household at the centre of this study is that of a lady called Sarah Lawler. Sarah was fifty four years old in 1901 and her house was quite large, containing eight rooms. She ran a public house in Dunlavin village and she described herself as a 'merchant', so the pub may have sold some other things as well as alcohol. The size of the house meant that Sarah's house was described as a 'first class' house. This meant that it was the best type of house. Sarah's position as a merchant and publican probably meant that she was fairly wealthy, so she would be able to afford to live in a good house like this. She may not have owned the house, as many houses at this time belonged to local landlords, but she could still afford to pay rent on a first class house because of her position among the business community of Dunlavin village.

Sarah Lawler had a large family. The census form B states that there were ten people in her family. There may have been, and census form A certainly shows that there were ten people staying in her house that night. However, not all of these people were members of her family. Some of them only worked for Sarah, but she still had three of

her own children and two grandchildren in the house that night. Her eldest son, James, was twenty nine years old and was also described as a merchant. He may have been a partner in the business or even run the pub, because he is the only one of Sarah's children described as a 'merchant' like herself. James was married, but there was no mention of Sarah's daughter-in-law on the census form. James's wife was not in the house that night – for whatever reason; she may have been elsewhere or even dead.

Sarah also had two daughters staying in the house that night. Marie and Agnes were both in their twenties. Marie was twenty four and married; Agnes was twenty six and single. There was no mention of Marie's husband. Once again, he may have been elsewhere. The form A definitely states that Marie is Sarah's daughter, but in some ways the structure of this household would be easier to understand if she were a daughter-in-law and married to James. However this study can only work from the information given in the primary source document.

The two children, Sarah's grandsons, were both very young. Nicholas was two and John was only nine months. The Lawlers were an example of three generations of the one family living in the same house. Such arrangements were quite common in Ireland at this time. The Lawler family were typical in another respect too. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the development of a strong and wealthy Catholic middle class. In the countryside, strong farmers emerged, but in the villages and towns the wealthy Catholic middle class was represented by the business people.

The Lawlers were a Catholic family who were wealthy enough to employ four people. The size of the house and the nature of their business and family meant that these four

people 'lived in' on the premises. Sarah Mapes was described as a domestic servant. She was twenty three years old and a single girl who probably acted as a housekeeper and perhaps a cook for the Lawler family. Maggie Fay was a seventeen-year-old girl who was employed as a nurse, so she probably looked after the two young children. At that time, very few seventeen year olds went on to secondary school, so Maggie was typical of many young girls who went into service for wealthy families. John McGough was also seventeen, but he worked in the pub. He was described as a shop assistant, and this may be further evidence that the Lawlers sold more than alcohol. The final servant was twenty-year-old Eddie Whittle. He was described as a porter, so he probably did a lot of fetching and carrying for the business and for the wealthy Lawler family in general.

The Lawler family of Dunlavin were Catholics and so were all the servants that they employed. This may not show religious discrimination in their hiring however, as there was a large majority of Catholics in the village at this time. All the servants were local as they were all born in County Wicklow, as were the Lawlers themselves. In those days, many local businesses were self-sufficient and took on local employees. The wealthy Lawler family were among those self-sufficient villagers in 1901.

This research study has used the census returns of 1901 to build a picture of a Dunlavin household at a particular point in time. The census provides an excellent source of information for a local research study. History is not just about the famous, powerful and rich. It is about ordinary people too. Studying one household in depth can add to our overall knowledge of history. This study has examined a Dunlavin household, and added to our knowledge of the local history of Co. Wicklow in 1901.

**Sources:**

1. Census of Ireland 1901, County Wicklow, (Dunlavin), Form A files.
2. Census of Ireland 1901, County Wicklow, (Dunlavin), Form B files.
3. F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland since the famine, London 1971.
4. R. F. Foster, Modern Ireland 1600-1972, London 1988.