

2 RURAL STATISTICS: A SUMMARY

2.02 The Growth, Size & Distribution of the Rural Population

Significant for our own needs are the categories & ranges of data produced that allow us to look either at the rural population specifically or, helpfully, to compare the rural population of England with the population as a whole ... or with the urban population of England. Such comparisons will be considered in the next section. The size of the rural population depends on how the measuring is done. Recalling our survey of 'rural' definitions, it depends - crucially - on how 'rural' areas of England are identified.

[CLICK HERE](#) -> to go to Unit 1a.04 "RURAL DEFINITIONS: GENERAL SURVEY - Addendum"

The overall population of rural England has been growing since the 1960s. This is in contrast to virtually every other Western, industrialised nation. From the underlying data that reflects this, it is possible to draw two important general conclusions about the rate at which the rural population has increased (measured as 'percentage change' over a 10 year period corresponding to the decennial census):

- It is *more than twice* the rate of increase for the overall population of England
- It is *more than three times* the rate at which the urban population has increased

LOCATION		1961-71 % change	1971-81 % change	1981-91 % change	1991-2002 % change	1981-2002 % change
All England		5.9	0.4	2.3	3.5	5.8
All URBAN Areas	Conurbations	-4.3	-8.1	0.7	2.2	3.0
	Towns outside Conurbations	8.7	2.5			
All RURAL Areas		17.9	9.7	6.6	6.7	13.7

[Created with data from H.Carter "Urban & Rural Settlements" (1990) & "State of the Countryside 2004"]

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From 1981-2002, the largest growth of *rural* population was in the South West Region: 18.0% increase (i.e. 24% of England's total *rural* population growth). By contrast the smallest growth of *rural* population was in the North East Region: 1.4% increase in 1981-2002 (i.e. 0.2% of England's total *rural* population growth). No region saw a decline in *rural* population; but the North East, North West and Yorkshire & Humber Regions all saw a drop in *urban* population over the period 1981-2002.

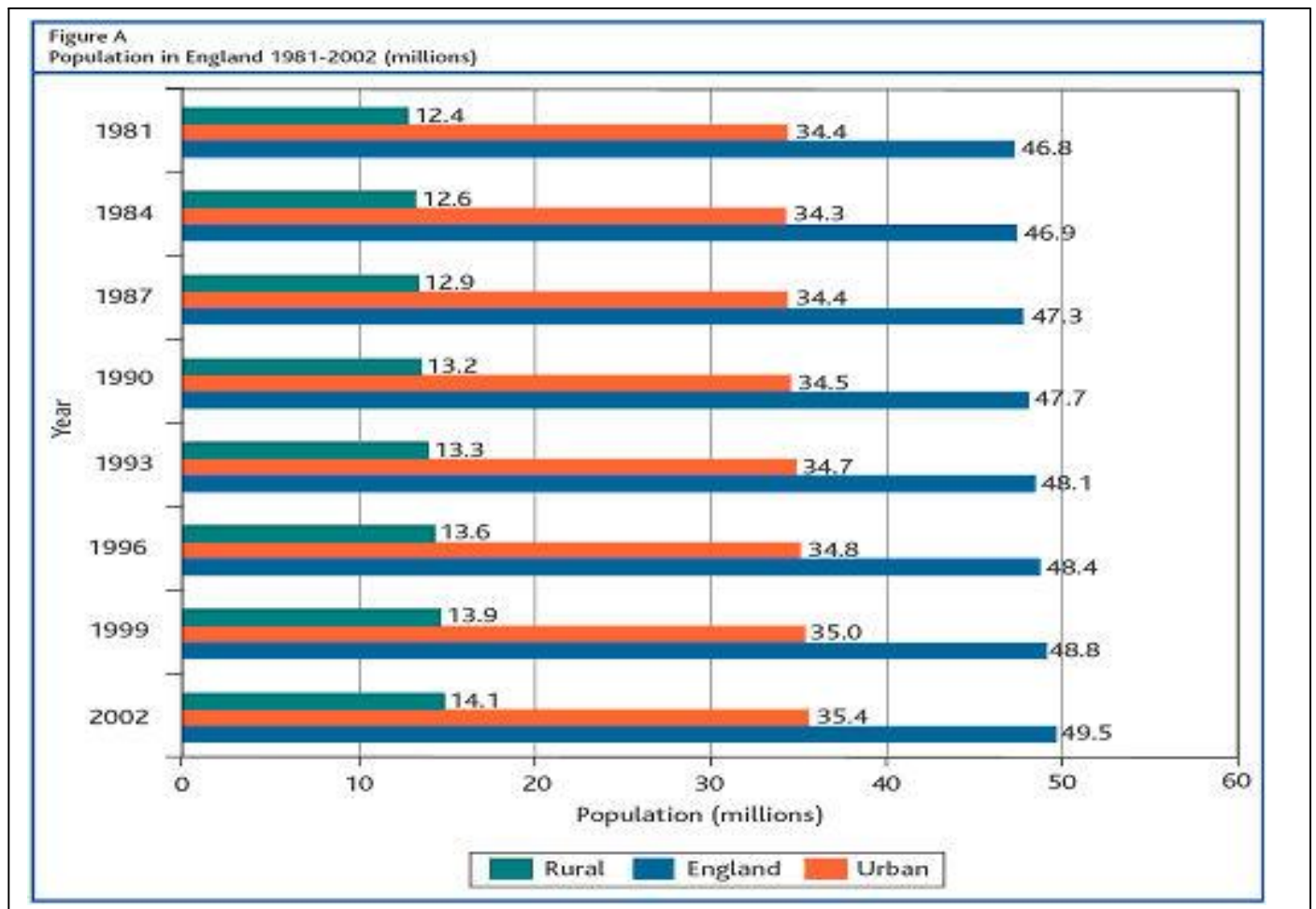
Care should be taken when comparing the data of 1961-81 with that from 1981-2002:

- The *source of the data* may have differed - in neither case is the data source clearly specified, and in 1981-2002 estimated figures appear to have been included
- The *preparation of the data* may have differed - especially since working definitions of rural & urban varied during the whole period 1961-2002

The figure for rural population growth 1961-71 seems rather high, despite 'counter-urbanisation'. [This will be considered more in **Unit 3** of this Module, "Rural Communities".]

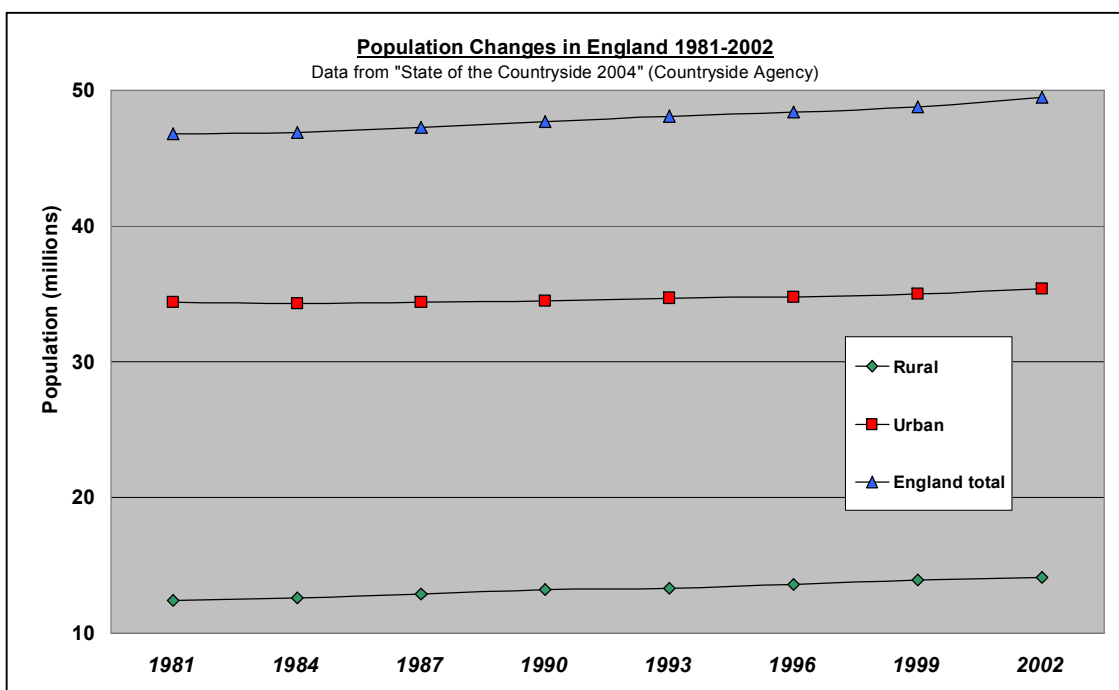
The data for the period 1981-2002 is available in more detail, portrayed by 'snapshots' of rural, urban & total populations for England every 3 years. Looking at the actual population figure for every 3rd year shows little except that all three have grown, and what the average growth over the period might be.

COMPARISON OF RURAL-URBAN POPULATIONS IN ENGLAND 1981-2002



[Taken from "The State of the Countryside 2004"]

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Year	Population (millions)		
	Rural	Urban	England total
1981	12.4	34.4	46.8
1984	12.6	34.3	46.9
1987	12.9	34.4	47.3
1990	13.2	34.5	47.7
1993	13.3	34.7	48.1
1996	13.6	34.8	48.4
1999	13.9	35.0	48.8
2002	14.1	35.4	49.5

Year	% Change over previous 3 years		
	Rural	Urban	England total
1981	n/a	n/a	n/a
1984	1.6%	-0.3%	0.2%
1987	2.4%	0.3%	0.9%
1990	2.3%	0.3%	0.8%
1993	0.8%	0.6%	0.8%
1996	2.3%	0.3%	0.6%
1999	2.2%	0.6%	0.8%
2002	1.4%	1.1%	1.4%

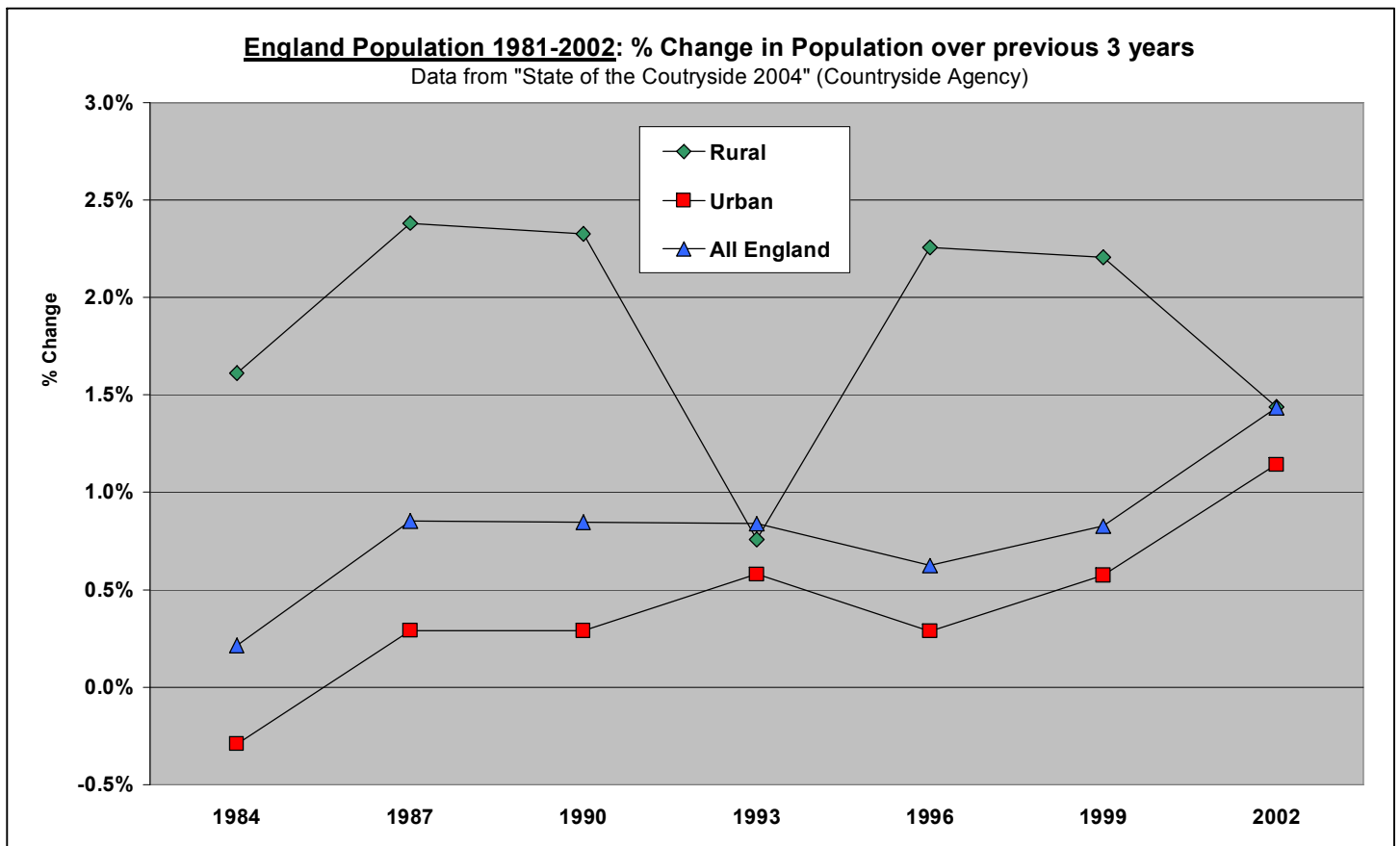
[Created with data from "The State of the Countryside 2004"]

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However, by analysing the *proportions* by which the three populations changed over each 3-year period, it is possible to look at the *rates of growth* and the *changes* in those rates. It shows if there have been any trends in the rural, urban or overall populations of England over this 21 year period:

- The average *urban* growth rate was ca. 0.2% per annum
- The average *overall* growth rate for England was ca. 0.3% per annum
- The average *rural* growth rate was ca. 0.6% per annum

These figures matched the rough figures for the 40 years 1961-2002 discussed earlier.



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The *pattern* of increase for *urban* & *overall* populations was similar:

- growth rate increasing in the early '80s (for 'urban', change from decline to growth)
- remaining reasonably steady from mid-'80s to mid-'90s
- growth rate increasing again from mid-'90s onwards

This is not surprising, as nearly 80% of England's population is to be found in 'urban' areas, and - despite the unique trend in England of rural population growth - England has for more than 150 years been one of the most urbanised nations in the world.

The *rural* population shows a rather different *pattern*:

- growth rate increasing to maximum by late '80s
- consistent high level of growth through late '80s and '90s, but with a sharp decrease in growth rate between 1990-1993 (matched by a corresponding, but smaller, *increase* in urban growth for the same period)
- decrease of growth rate towards the *overall England* figure by the early '00s but still growing, all the same

The details of these patterns are not our major concern, but they reflect an important fact: for between 15-20 years the rural population of England has been growing at a rate nearly double the national average. The reasons behind this phenomenon are important, and need to be understood when reflecting on the way the church relates to, and works with, rural communities. We will look at some of these reasons shortly (in **Part 2.04** of this unit "The 'Make Up' of - and Changes to - the Rural Population").

FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

Do your own observations agree with the statistical conclusion: "the rural population of England has been growing at nearly double the national average rate"?
Have you any insights on what lies behind this phenomenon?

FOR ACTION & REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

Find out what others in your local community *feel* about changes in population.
Do these feelings match with your observations/actual statistics?
Can you offer explanation(s) for any such 'discrepancies'?

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"The Nature of Statistical Information"

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"Rural definitions & Rural Numbers"

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