



# Human population history

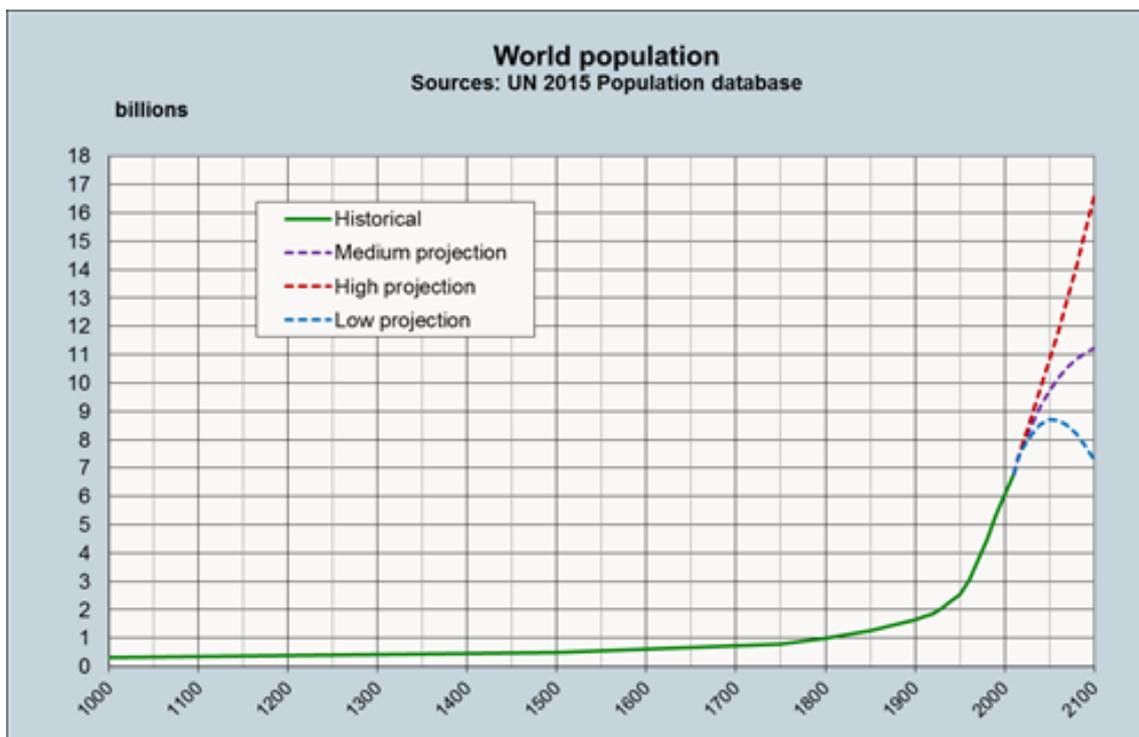
## World population

Genetic information suggests that around 70,000 years ago there was a dramatic collapse in the world human population, and it fell to very low numbers.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, numbers recovered and the development of agriculture and settled communities enabled populations to grow.

Despite localised population collapses brought about by famine, war and disease on a global scale, the population then continued to increase, reaching between 200 and 300 million by 1 AD. It then took the

next 1,600 years to double to 600 million by around 1600, and had reached 800 million by the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Between AD 1 and 1750, the average annual increase in world population was around 0.1 per cent, but between 1750 and 2000 it was close to 0.8 per cent, with the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century showing a figure of 1.8 per cent.

By 2000, there were nearly eight times as many people on Earth as there had been 250 years earlier; the figure for 2015 was around 7.3 billion.



### British population

For England, the first good record comes from the Domesday Book of 1086, which provides an estimate of 1.4 to 1.9 million. The population is believed to have grown strongly in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries to reach 4–6 million.

However, the 14<sup>th</sup> century was characterised by famine and epidemics. The Black Death of 1348–50 is estimated to have killed one third of the English population.<sup>3</sup>

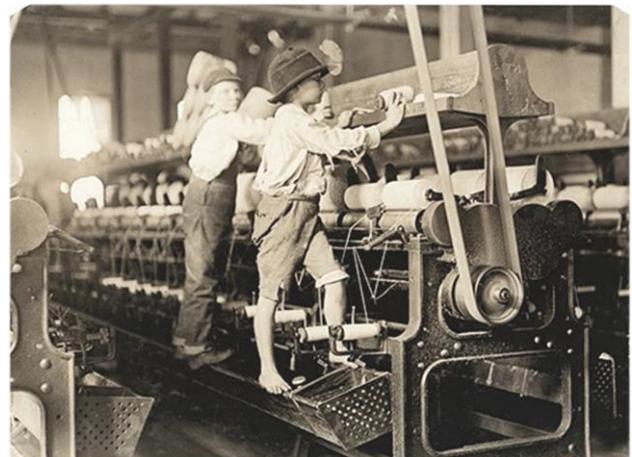
Following this, for the next 400 years, population growth was slow — held back by late marriages, celibacy, emigration and high mortality, with war and famine also being significant factors.

By 1750 — less than 300 years ago — the population of England was still less than six million, about the same as it had been in 1300. The trend in the rest of the United Kingdom was doubtless similar.

By 1800, the beginning of more rapid population growth was seen, with the first census recording over eight million people in England, up by almost half in just 50 years, and 10.5 million in Great Britain as a whole. By 1840, the population of England had almost doubled in 40 years to 15 million, while more than eight million people lived in Ireland.<sup>4</sup>

The explosion in human numbers coincided with the introduction of new and improved crops and agricultural techniques, together with the other developments of the Industrial Revolution that

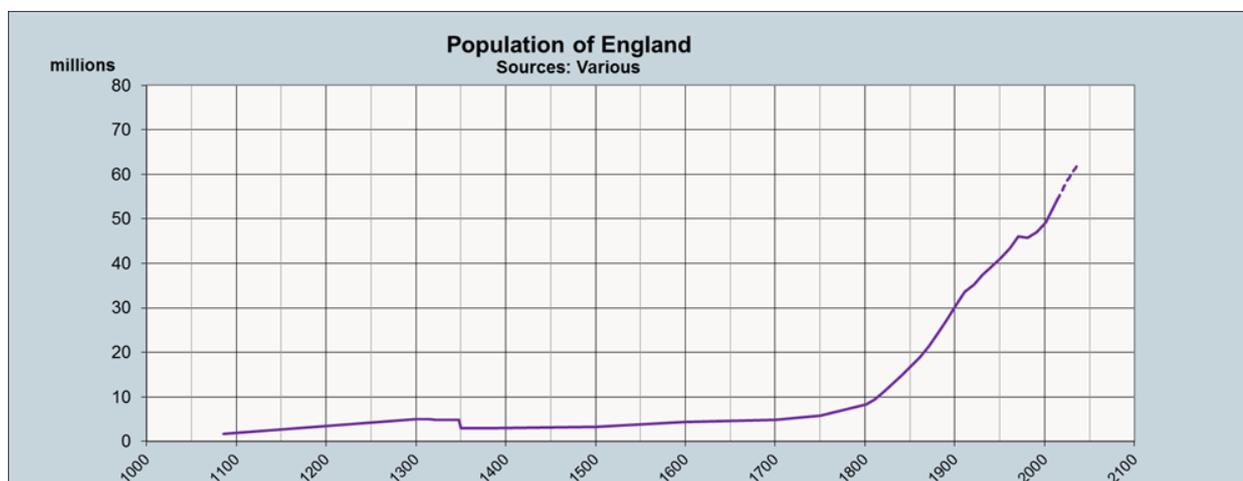
allowed humans to achieve a step change in the rate that natural resources were exploited. Improved public health, particularly vaccination and sanitation, all supported this growth.



The English population doubled again over the next 60 years to reach 30 million in 1900. The growth rate slowed somewhat in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to reach 40 million by 1950, and almost 50 million by 2001. It had grown six-fold in just two centuries. The trend is similar for Scotland and Wales, though they grew faster in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and more slowly in the 20<sup>th</sup> in response to changing economic dynamics.

Read more about [current population trends](#).

Several websites provide further insights by allowing population data to be explored in an interesting manner. Links can be found in our list of [visual and audio resources](#).



## References

Internet references accessed 12/04/2016

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<sup>1</sup> Ambrose, S. H. (1998). Late Pleistocene human population bottlenecks, volcanic winter, and differentiation of modern humans. *Journal of Human Evolution*, 34(6), 623-651. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0047248498902196>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/sixbillion/sixbilpart1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/fertility-analysis/focus-on-people-and-migration/december-2005/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> English census data