



DISCOVER  
**GROOMSPORT**

# **The Population of Groomspport 1821-2021**

The rise and fall – and rise – of the  
population of the village  
over two centuries of censuses.

This paper has two aims:

Firstly, to collate all the census returns from 1821 to 2021 for all the different geographical entities that are referred to as “Groomsport”. This has only become possible recently thanks to the surviving reports of the earliest censuses being made available at:

<https://www.virtualtreasury.ie>

Secondly, to discuss the changes in the population over 200 years of what is currently known as the Groomsport village.

The appendix defines the various Groomsport geographical entities and has maps of some of them.

All of the census reports have population numbers for what is referred to as Groomsport village today. In the census reports up to 2011 Groomsport is also referred to as a town and a settlement. As is discussed in the Appendix, both the Griffith’s Valuation (1863) map and the 1900 Ordnance Survey map indicate the boundaries used by censuses in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. More recently, when the village was referred to as a settlement, its boundary was enlarged to include the housing developments of the 1960s onwards.. As can be seen from the table below, from 1841 to 1951, few people lived in the rest of Groomsport Townland.

**Table 1. Population data for all Groomsport geographical entities from 1821 to 2021.**

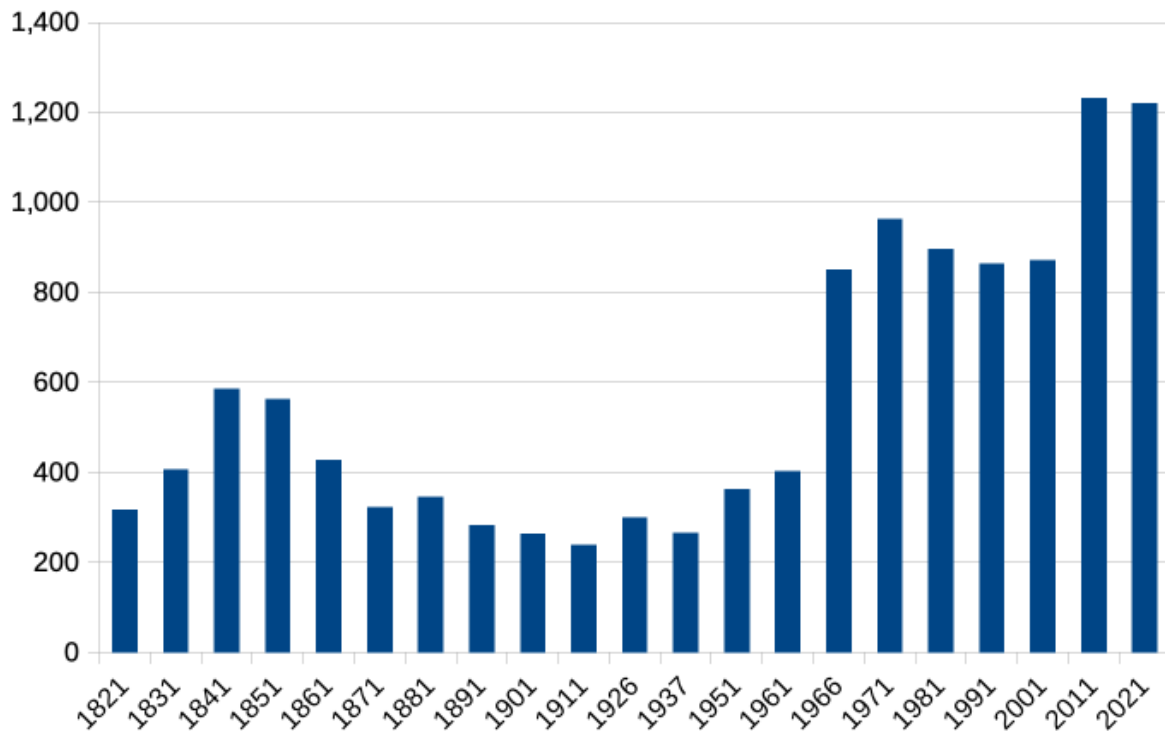
Census Year	Groomsport Village			Groomsport Townland		Groomsport DED <sup>^</sup> Population	Groomsport Ward Population
	Population	Houses*	Designation	Population	Houses		
1821	318	57	<i>Village</i>				
1831	408	67	<i>Village</i>				
1841	586	97	<i>Town</i>	586	97		
1851	563	112	<i>Town</i>	570	113		
1861	428	100	<i>Town</i>	463	102		
1871	324	78	<i>Town</i>	362	85		
1881	346	81	<i>Town</i>	359	85		
1891	284	76	<i>Town</i>	295	79		
1901	264	92	<i>Town</i>	281	95		
1911	239	79	<i>Town</i>	261	84		
1926	301	125	<i>Town</i>	321	129	1,750	
1937	266	135	<i>Town</i>	274	140	1,773	
1951	363	149	<i>Town</i>	374	155	1,989	
1961	403	149	<i>Town</i>			1,628	
1966	851	286	<i>Town</i>			1,652	
1971	963	305	<i>Town</i>			1,738	
1981	897	316	<i>Town</i>				3,870
1991	864	367	<i>Town</i>				2,838
2001	873	427	<i>Settlement</i>				2,616
2011	1,233	611	<i>Settlement</i>				3,005
2021	1,220	620	<i>Data Zones</i>				3,630

<sup>^</sup> District Electoral Division

\* Households from 1981

The populations of Groomsport Townland, DED and Ward include the population of the village.

Sources: Census Reports 1821-2021



**Figure 1. Population of Groomsport village 1821-2021**

### **Possible reasons for population change**

Figure 1 demonstrates clearly how the population of Groomsport village has varied over the past two centuries. A rise between 1821 and 1841 was followed by a steady decline in population until 1911. A modest increase between 1911 and 1961 was followed by two periods of significant growth – in the 1960s and again in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The changes in the village’s population in the nineteenth century seem to reflect the state of the fishing industry in the village. The decline in population after 1841 may also be related to the Famine of the late 1840s and early 1850s.

#### The decline of fishing

It is thought that fishing in the village peaked in the early 1800s and that there were some 20 fishing boats and 80 fishermen in Groomsport in the 1830s and 1840s. This could have contributed to the increase of population by 84% between 1821 and 1841.

That fishing declined from that point was recorded in newspaper reports of evidence given by Groomsport fishermen to government inspectors in the 1880s.

In 1886, William Orr, a Groomsport fisherman, gave evidence that catches of fish in Belfast Lough were greatly decreased compared with catches in the 1830s. (*Belfast News Letter* 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1886).

In 1889 evidence was given that catches were one-tenth of the catches taken in the early 1850s. Furthermore the dumping in Belfast Lough of dredgings by the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and of “clinker” (cinders) from steamships negatively affected the fishing in the lough. At that time there were three trawlers and 15 line-fishing boats operating from the harbour. (*Belfast Weekly News* 7<sup>th</sup> September 1889).

In 1885, W G Lyttle, wrote in *The Bangor Season*:

*“In the village there are about two dozen fishermen, but... the fish are becoming very scarce and consequently a Groomsport fisherman’s life is not as envious as it once was.”*

By the 1911 Census there were only 16 fishermen, 8 seamen and 2 sailors living in Groomsport.

## The Famine

The village’s population in 1841 (586) was the highest it would be for over 120 years. This was the last census taken before the Famine of 1845 to 1852 (*An Gorta Mór* – the Great Hunger).

Ireland’s population in 1841 stood at 8 million. After the deaths caused by the Famine and almost a century of emigration, the population had almost halved – to 4.2 million – in 1931. Today, nearly two centuries after the Famine, the population of the island of Ireland has still not recovered, standing at just over 7 million.

During the Famine, the northern part of county Down was not affected as badly as areas in the south and west of Ireland by the failure of potato crops from 1845 onwards. Mitigating factors included:

- From the 1810s, farming societies in Bangor and Newtownards encouraged farmers to change adopt new ways of farming – including improving drainage and livestock breeding and sowing new crops. As a result local farmers were not as dependent on the potato crop as some farmers in other parts of Ireland.
- Groomsport was a fishing village and fish were a source of food that could be harvested relatively easily.

However, north county Down did not avoid the effects of the Famine.

- The Banner of Ulster, on 30 December 1845 published the following from Rev Mack, Groomsport's Presbyterian minister:

**The Rev. J. Mack, of Groomsport, Bangor, says—**  
“ I think that there may be some potatoes preserved till August, if care be taken in drying and sorting them; though I was at first afraid that few, if any, could be preserved till May. It is quite certain, in my opinion, that small farmers and labourers will be, in a short time, obliged to purchase potatoes for food at an enormous price from those larger farmers who may be enabled to preserve some. Those who had not many to lose will soon be entirely dependent upon those larger farmers for a supply. There may be some of the present crop preserved until the new crop comes in, but that which will be thus saved will be out of the reach of the poor on account of the great price which it will bring in the market. One-half of the present crop has been lost in this neighbourhood; however, the remaining half may be preserved, with care, as the disease has not increased much where the plant has been kept dry and separated from the diseased.”

- The Freemans Journal, dated 20<sup>th</sup> August 1846 reported:

**From Ballymena, Holywood, Newtownards, Bangor, and other places, correspondents write in the most desponding terms as to the almost wholesale destruction of the potato crop in fields which but a short time since gave fair promise of an abundant and healthy crop.**

- Newtownards Workhouse, which had been built by the Guardians of the Newtownards Poor Law Union (which included Groomsport) to house 600 paupers, had to be extended to accommodate an additional 200 people who had become destitute because of the Famine.

## Population changes from 1841 to 2021

The famine does not appear to have had an immediate effect on the population of Groomsport as it had decreased by only 23 between 1841 and 1851. However, during the next decade the population decreased by 135, to 482 in 1861. A further considerable decrease (158) occurred before the 1871 Census when the population was 324.

In the 30 years from 1841 to 1871 the population of the village had decreased by 262 (45%). The village's population continued to decrease until 1911 when it stood at 239 – 41% of the 1841 population.

The reasons for the steady decline in the village's population may include:

- The decline in the fishing industry, discussed above: and
- The economic downturn during and after the Famine may have encouraged people to move to Great Britain, or further afield.

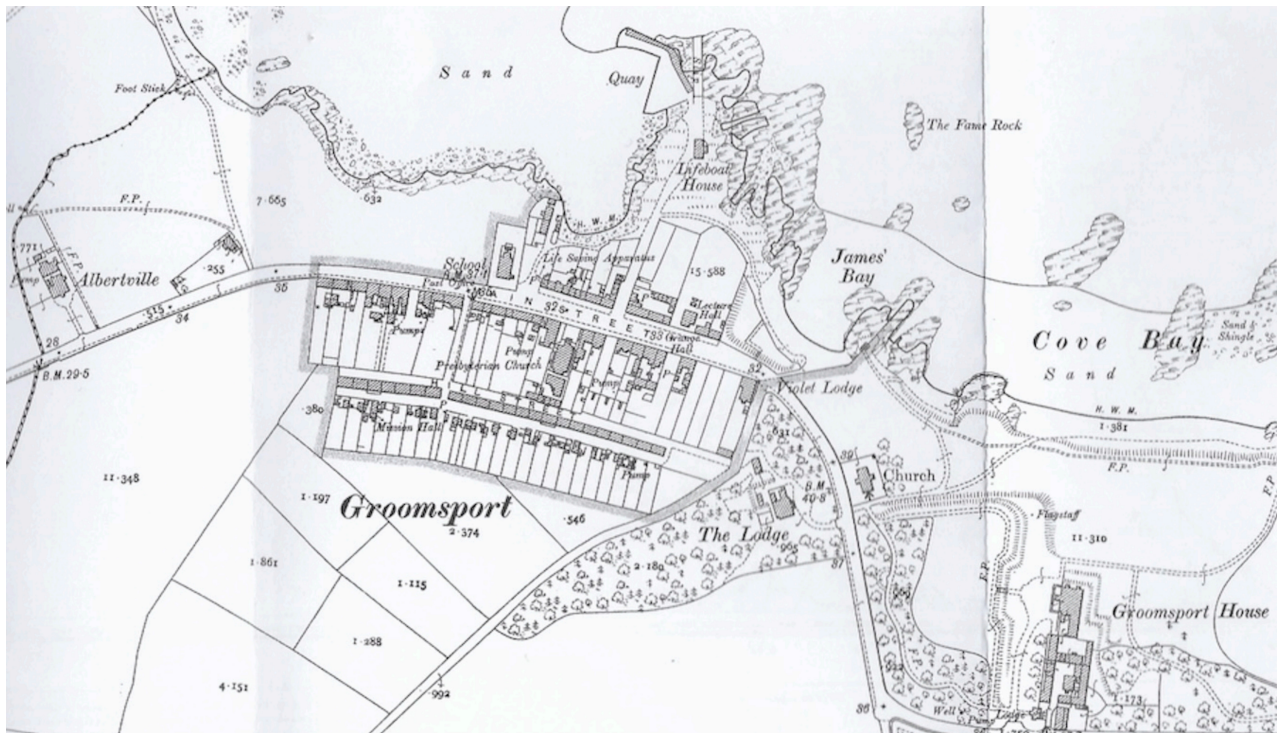
After 1911, the population of the village gradually increased but it was not until the early 1960s that it regained its 1841 level.

The 1960s saw a dramatic increase in the population of the village. This period saw the building of the Springwell estate (partly in response to the clearance of old cottages which were seen as no longer fit for human habitation) and new houses built on The Brae and nearby streets. Between 1961 and 1971 the population of Groomsport more than doubled – from 403 to 963 – an increase of 140%.

The village's population then remained fairly stable until the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century during which the population increased by 41% - to 1,233, by 2011. That decade saw the development of Cove Bay (about 150 houses) Groomsport House (more than 40 apartments) and other apartment blocks in the village.

Peter Gibson  
May 2026





**Figure 3. Map of Groomsport, 1900**

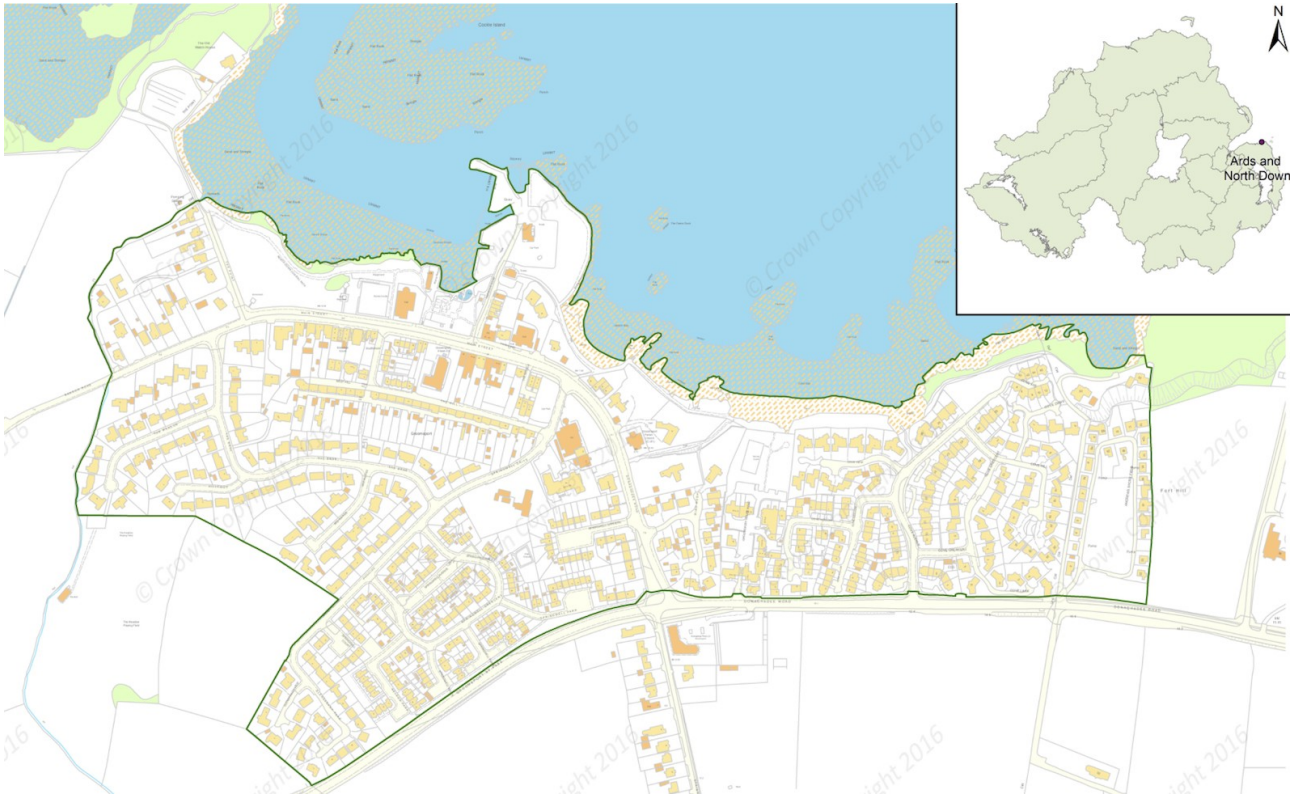
*Ordnance Survey Map, 1900. Published (2009) by Alan Godfrey Maps with the permission of Trinity College, Dublin.*

The second map is a version of the large scale Ordnance Survey map which was revised in 1900. This map defines the boundary of the village with a thick grey line and it is almost identical to the boundary in the Griffith's Valuation map.

In both these maps, to the west, Albertville (for many decades the Church of Ireland rectory), the Watch House and the Coast Guard cottages are all outside the village. Similarly, to the east, the Parish Church, the Lodge and Groomsport House are not included within the boundary of the village.

## 2 Groomsport Settlement

In advance of the 2001 Census, NISRA (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency) defined a number of “settlements” in Northern Ireland, including Groomsport. The 2001 and 2011 Censuses have information about Groomsport settlement.



**Figure 4. Groomsport Settlement**  
*Ordnance Survey map from [ninis2.nisra.gov.uk](http://ninis2.nisra.gov.uk)*

Groomsport settlement is bounded on the north-west by the stream that flows into the sea at The Point. This stream is the boundary between Groomsport townland and Ballymacormick townland. Because the Watch House is in Ballymacormick townland it is not included. In earlier times the Watch House (and the nearby Coast Guard cottages) were not included in Groomsport “town”.

To the east, the settlement includes the Cove Bay development and Andrews’ Shorefield, but none of the houses farther along the A2 (Donaghadee Road). To the south, the A2 is the boundary, so Springwell Road is not part of the settlement.

Despite these omissions, the geography of Groomsport Settlement is very close to what most people regard as being Groomsport Village.

Groomsport Settlement was not included in the report of the 2021 Census. Instead NISRA defined three Super Data Zones, within Bangor East and Donaghadee which, when combined, fit exactly within the boundaries of Groomsport Settlement.

- Super Data Zone A2 covers Cove Bay and Andrews' Shorefield.  
Population: 362 in 158 households.
- Super Data Zone A3 is bounded by Main Street, Springwell Drive and the A2 bypass and includes the housing estate and the Glenganagh area.  
Population: 373 in 206 households.
- Super Data Zone A1 covers the rest of the village that is not included in the above zones.  
Population: 485 in 256 household.

The three Super Data Zones had populations of 1,220 in 620 households.

### 3 Groomsport Townland

Townlands have been used as land divisions in Ireland since at least the 8<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps earlier. They were mapped in detail by the Ordnance Survey in the 1830s.



**Figure 5. Groomsport Townland**

Ordnance Survey map (1952-1967) from Historical Map Viewer at:  
<https://apps.spatialni.gov.uk/PRONIAApplication/>

Groomsport townland comprises 315.18 acres (128.356 hectares), most of which is farmland.

The northern part of the eastern boundary is the lane between Cove Bay and Andrew's Shorefield. Much of the western boundary is the stream which enters the sea at The Point.

#### 4 Groomsport District Electoral Division 1923-1973

District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) were created in rural parts of Ireland to elect councillors to the County Councils and Rural District Councils that were established in 1899. DEDs were made up of townlands and, initially, Groomsport townland was part of the Bangor Rural DED.

In 1923, the Government of Northern Ireland decided to revise the boundaries of DEDs. As a result Groomsport DED was established. In addition to “ten Islands off the coast”, it contained the following 13 townlands:

Balloo, Balloo Lower, Ballycroghan, Ballygrainey, Ballyholme (the part of the townland outside Bangor Urban District), Ballymacconnell, Ballymacormick, Ballymagee, Ballyminteragh, Ballyree, Cotton, Gransha, and Groomsport.



**Figure 6. Groomsport District Electoral Division**

Original map by Ros Davies at: <https://www.rosdavies.com/MAPS/BangorTownlands.htm>

## 5 Groomsport Ward – from 1973

When local government in Northern Ireland was reorganised in the 1973, 26 District Councils, consisting of 526 wards were established. These new wards replaced the existing wards in urban areas and DEDs in rural areas. Groomsport Ward was created as part of North Down Borough Council.

Groomsport ward consists of 5 townlands – Ballymacormick, Groomsport, Orlock, Balloo Lower and Ballyminteragh.



**Figure 7. Groomsport Ward**

Original map by Ros Davies at: <https://www.rosdavies.com/MAPS/BangorTownlands.htm>

Much of the Ward is rural, however, the southern part of Ballymacormick townland is the highly populated Towerview area on the outskirts of Bangor. The Towerview area contains over half of the total population of the ward.

The 2021 Census reported that Groomsport Ward had a population of 3,630, while the equivalent of the Groomsport settlement had a population of 1,220.

The organisations which run the “Ulster in Bloom” and “Best Kept” competitions use the population of the Ward and therefore categorise Groomsport as a “large village” with a population of 3,630.

## Sources

### Censuses of Ireland 1821 to 1861

Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland at: <https://virtualtreasury.ie>

### Censuses of Ireland 1861 to 1911

Central Statistics Office at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/census/>

### Censuses of Northern Ireland 1926-2021

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency at:  
<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/people-and-communities/census>

Newspapers were accessed at the newspaper archive of [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)