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. Subsequently, numbers recovered and the development of agriculture and of 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 in 1600 and had reached around 800 million by the mid 18th century.

Between AD 1 and 1750 the average annual increase in world population was around 0.1%, but between 1750 and 2000 it was close to 0.8%, with the second half of the 20th century showing a figure of 1.8%. This 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 which 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. By 2000, there were ten times as many people on Earth as there were 300 years ago; the figure for 2010 is around 6.9 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 12th and 13th centuries to reach 4–6 million. However, the 14th century was characterised by famine and epidemics. The Black Death of 1348–50 is estimated to have killed one third of the English population. Following this, for the next 400 years 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 was still less than 6 million, about the same as it was 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 8 million 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 over 8 million lived in Ireland. The English population doubled again over the next 60 years to reach 30 million in 1900. The growth rate slowed somewhat in the 20th 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 19th century and more slowly in the 20th 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 on the Multimedia page.

References
Internet references accessed 06/12/2010
1 UN1999 data and http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/warsta0.htm#Population