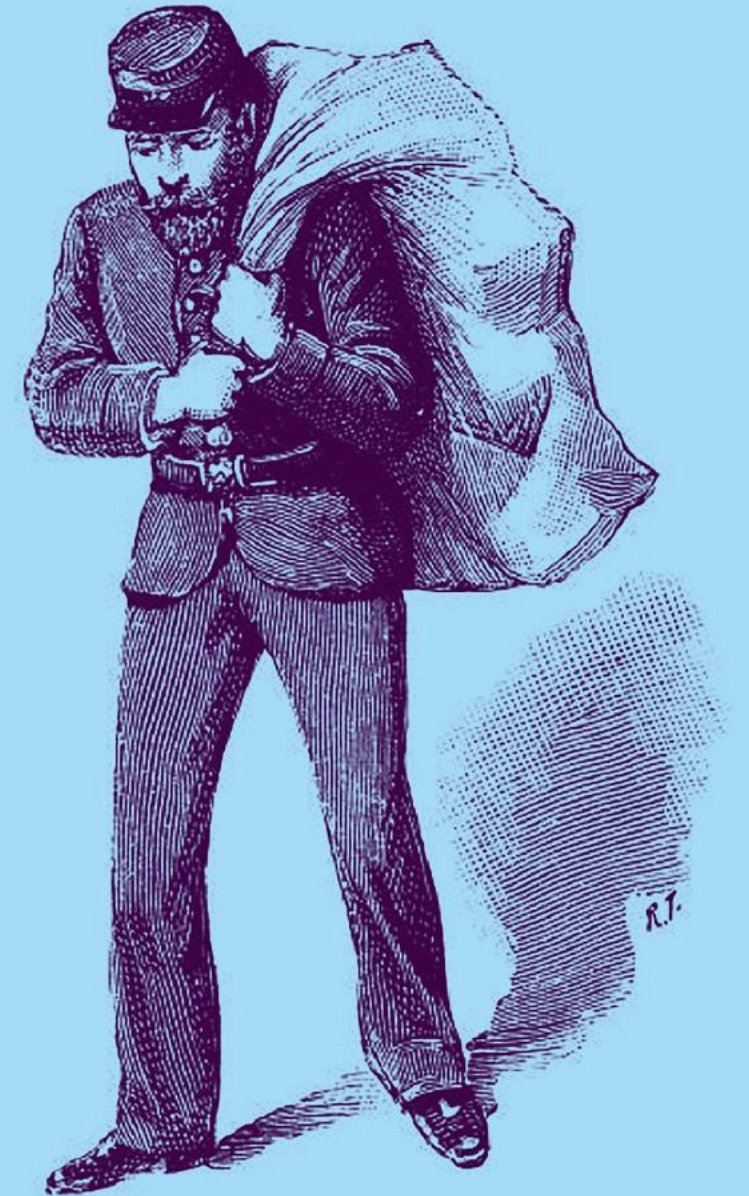


Death Certificate Histories

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10th December 2020



Origins of Civil Registration

- England and Wales – 1836 Act
- Concern with property:
 - ‘No adequate proof of pedigree, or means of proving or tracing ancestral descent ... the value of property is diminished by the difficulties incident to its transfer, and the insecurity with which it is so often held and acquired.’
 - Select Committee on Parochial Registration, 1833.*
- Amended in 1856 and 1874.

A

B I L L

For Registering Births, Deaths and Marriages
in England.

[Note.—The Words printed in *Italics* are proposed to be inserted
in the Committee.]

WHEREAS it is expedient to provide the means for a complete Register of the Births, Deaths and Marriages of His Majesty's Subjects in England : Preamble.

5 And whereas an Act passed in the fifty-second year of the reign of his late Majesty King GEORGE the Third, intituled, “ An Act for the better regulating Parish and other Registers of Births, Baptisms, Marriages and Burials in England,” and also an Act passed in the fourth year of the reign of his late Majesty King GEORGE the Fourth, intituled, “ An Act for amending the Laws respecting the Solemnization of Mar-

Scotland

- Bills brought before Parliament in 1829, 1830, 1834, 1835, 1837, 1847, 1848 and 1849 – all failed.
- Considerable opposition to changes in Scottish marriage law.
- Eventually passed in 1854.
- Amended in 1855 and 1860.
- Scottish certificates have more information on them than English, Welsh or Irish ones.

Registration of Births, &c. (Scotland) Bill.

ARRANGEMENT OF CLAUSES.

- Present System of Registration to cease on 31st December 1854, and this Act to come into Operation; Sect. 1.
- Her Majesty may provide an Office, and appoint a Registrar General; 2.
- The Registrar General may appoint a Secretary; 3.
- Appointment of Clerks and other Officers; 4.
- Expenses of Registry Office and Books, &c., how to be provided; 5.
- Regulations for Management of Office and Duties of Officers to be framed; 6.
- Abstract of Registers to be laid annually before Parliament; 7.
- Registrar for each Parish to be elected by the Parochial Board; 8.
- Meetings of Parochial Board to be called by the Inspector of the Poor; 9.
- Parishes may be divided; 10.

Ireland

- Irish registration bills introduced in 1846, 1859, 1860, 1861 and 1862 – all failed.
- Disagreement about the Registration system's relationship to the existing Irish Poor Law and Police.
- Eventually passed in 1863.
- Amended in 1880.
- Certificates similar to English and Welsh ones.

Births and Deaths Registration (Ireland) Bill.

ARRANGEMENT OF CLAUSES.

Preamble.

Preliminary.

Short Title; Sect. 1.

Act to extend to Ireland only, except, &c.; 2.

Interpretation Clause; 3.

PART I.

Registrar General.

General Register Office to be provided; Registrar General to be appointed; 4.

Seal to be provided, and certified Copies given at General Register Office to be sealed therewith; 5.

Registrar General may alter Forms; 6.

Officers, Clerks, and Servants to be appointed; 7.

Salary of Registrar General to be increased, and to include Remuneration for all public Duties performed by him; 8.

Registering a Death

- Within 7-8 days of someone dying, the death had to be registered with the local registrar of births and deaths.
- The death was registered by the 'informant' who was 'some person present at the death or in attendance during the last illness.'
- The registrar issued a certificate which authorized burial.
- Burial could happen without a death certificate but in those cases the officiant had to inform the registrar of the death within 7 days.

No.	When died.	Name and Surname.	Sex.	Age.	Rank or Profession.	Cause of death.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When registered.	Signature of Registrar.
17	4 February	William Green	Male	43	Carpenter		Rebecca Green, Widow, 17, North Street, Mary-le-bone.	5 February	John Cox, Registrar.

Scottish and Irish death certificates

- Scotland more detailed– have information on the parents of the deceased, their marital status, and details of their partners if they were married.

No.	Description of the Deceased.						Particulars of Death.				Signature of Informant	When and where registered, and Signature of Registrar	
	Name; Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Sex.	Age.	Where born and How long in this District.	Parents' Names and Rank, Profession or Occupation.	If Deceased was married,		When died. Year, Day of Month, Hour.	Where died.	Cause of death, and how long Disease continued. Medical attendant by whom certified, and when he last saw Deceased.			Burial Place. Undertaker by whom certified.
					To whom.	Issue in Order of Birth, their Names and Ages.							
301	CANTY William, Labourer	M	62	County of Cork, Ireland 36 Years in Edinburgh	Timothy Canty, Shoemaker, deceased. Mary Canty, Maiden Name Nicholas, deceased	Honorina M'Carty	1. Timothy, 31 2. William, 30 3. Mary, 29 4. John, dec aet 27, in 1854 5. Catherine, dec aet 1 in 1828 6. Stephen, 21	1855, February Twenty- eighth. 6h 30m. a.m.	At 16, Collage Lane, Edinburgh	Pneumonia — 2 months. As certified by H. Bloomfield, M.D. who saw Deceased Feb 27th	Burial ground of Greyfriars, Edinburgh As certified by George Watkins, Undertaker.	Honorina Canty, her X Mark Widow Informant James Johnston, Shoemaker, Edinburgh Witness George Henderson, Clerk in Register Office, Edinburgh Witness	1855. March 3d. At Edinburgh. John Smith, Registrar.

- Ireland – same as England and Wales

No.	Date and Place of Death.	Name and Surname.	Sex.	Condition.	Age last Birthday.	Rank, Profession or Occupation.	Certified Cause of Death and Duration of Illness.	Signature, Qualification, and Residence of Informant.	When registered.	Signature of Registrar.
1	24 January 1864. 10, High Street, Kingstown.	James Green	Male	Married, Bachelor or Widower (as the Case may be).	43 Years	Carpenter	Pneumonia, Two Months, Certified.	Sarah Green, Widow, High Street, present at Death.	25th January 1864	John Cox. REGISTRAR.

Historians uses of death certificate data

- Death certificates provide useful data for historians to study mortality by time and place.

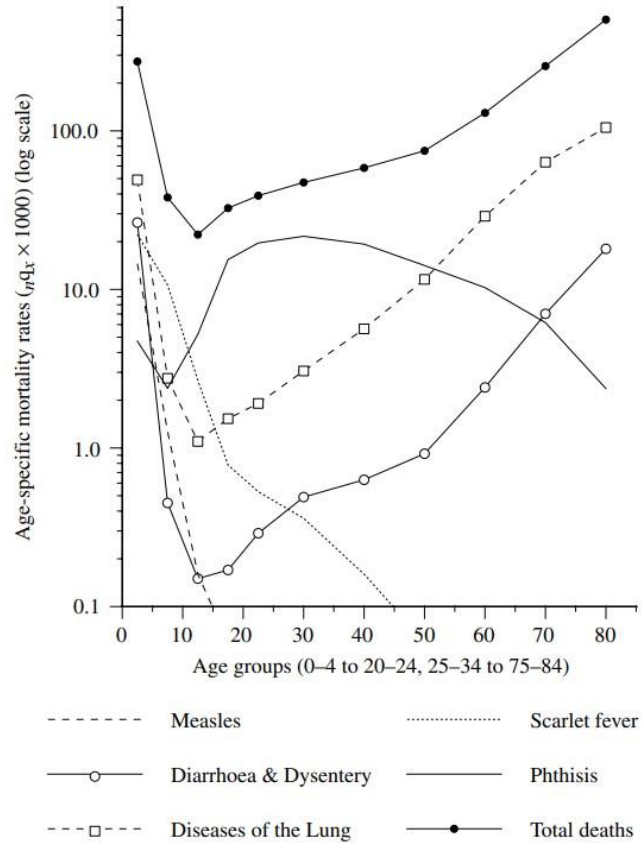


Figure 8.2. Age-specific mortality patterns from selected causes among females, England and Wales, 1861-70
Source: See table 8.1.

Robert Woods, *The Demography of Victorian England and Wales* (2000), 317.

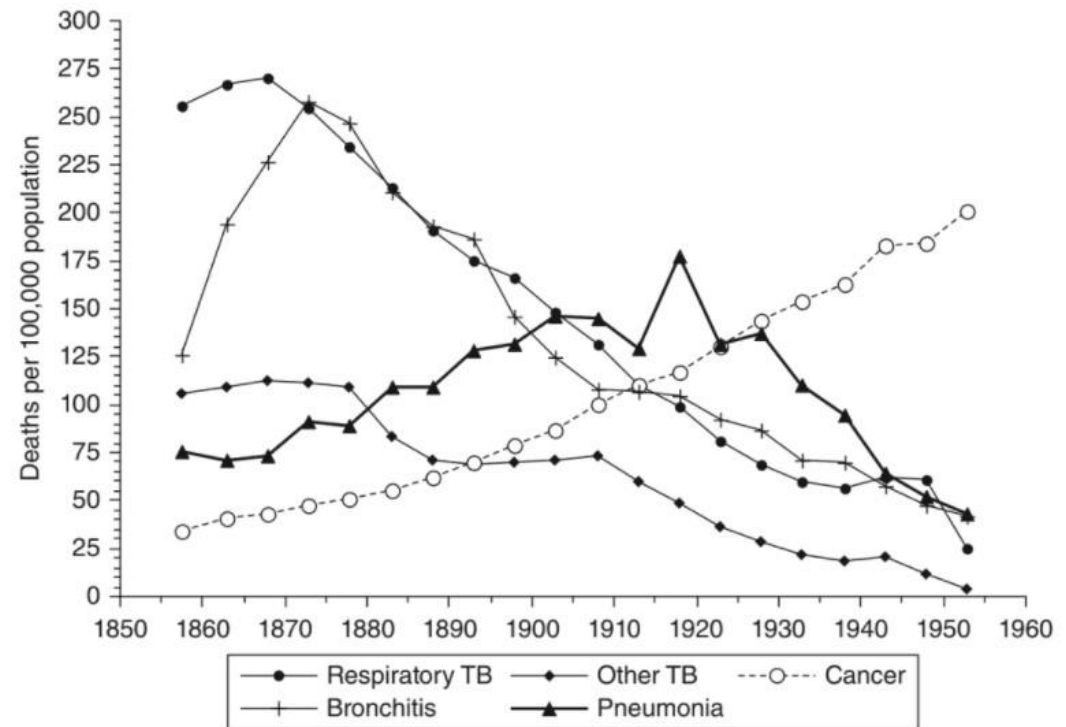


Figure 17.5. Reported crude death rates per 100,000 population from selected other major causes, 1855-60 to 1951-5

Source: AR 1956, Table 40 which brings together various historic subheadings that GROS considered were the most consistent with the then International Standard Classification.

Michael Anderson, *Scotland's Populations from the 1850s to Today* (2018), 360.

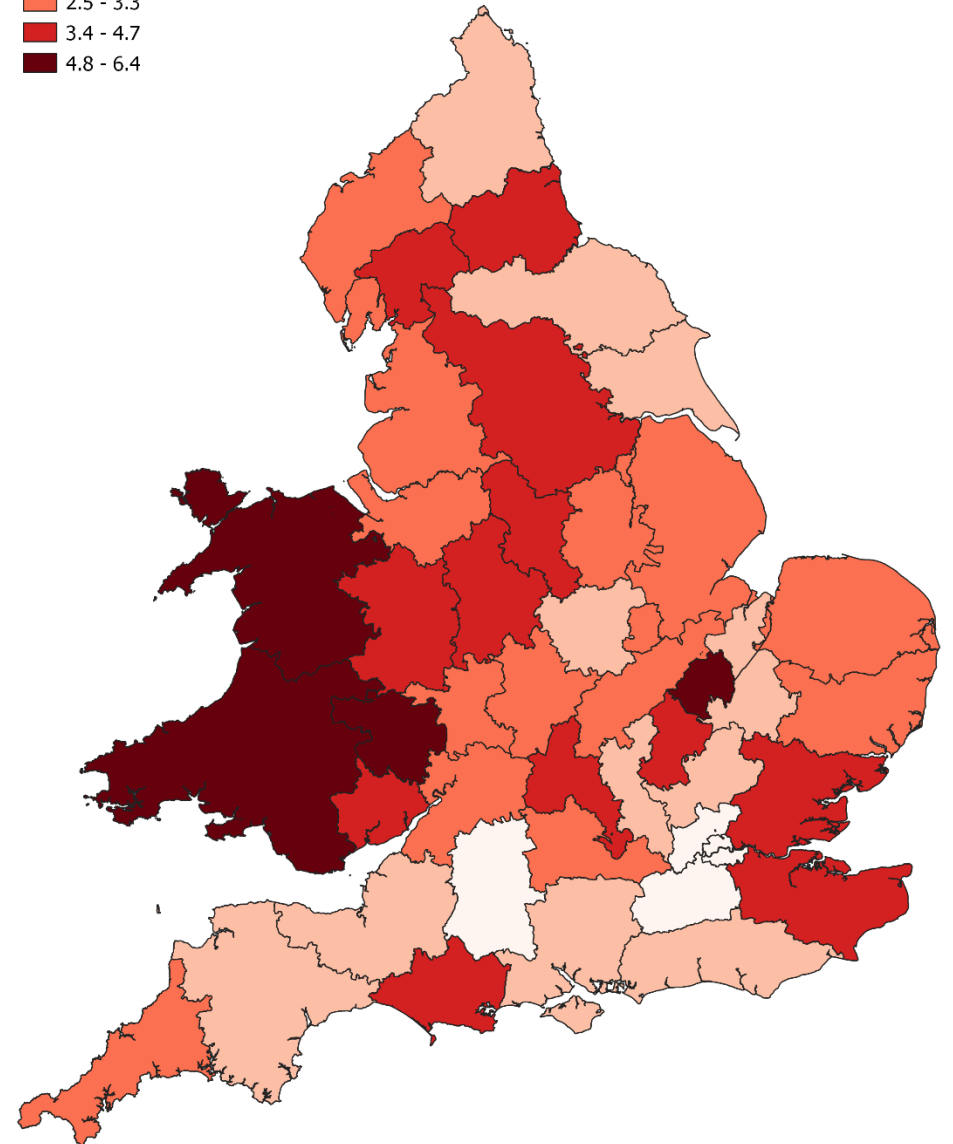
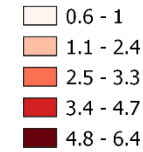
Under registration

- Not thought to be a problem in England and Wales.
- Level of registration in Scotland improved across the period, but worries about the Highlands.
 - 1856 General Register Office examiner commenting on north-east Scotland: 'Unfortunately it often happens that there are no Church Officers; and even when there are, parties frequently break open the gate, dig the grave, and bury the dead, in spite of all opposition.'
- In Ireland non-registration of death was a problem throughout the period and continued to be one in the twentieth century.
 - Dublin 1864-1870 – 9.7% of all deaths were not registered.
 - County Meath 1992 – 11.5% of deaths were not registered.

Death Certification

- Causes of death could be provided by medical professionals or by the informant.
- The proportion of deaths that were medically certified varied by time and place.
- England and Wales – improved everywhere over the century; 1860 80% certified, 1891-1900 97.7%.
- Remained worse in rural areas.

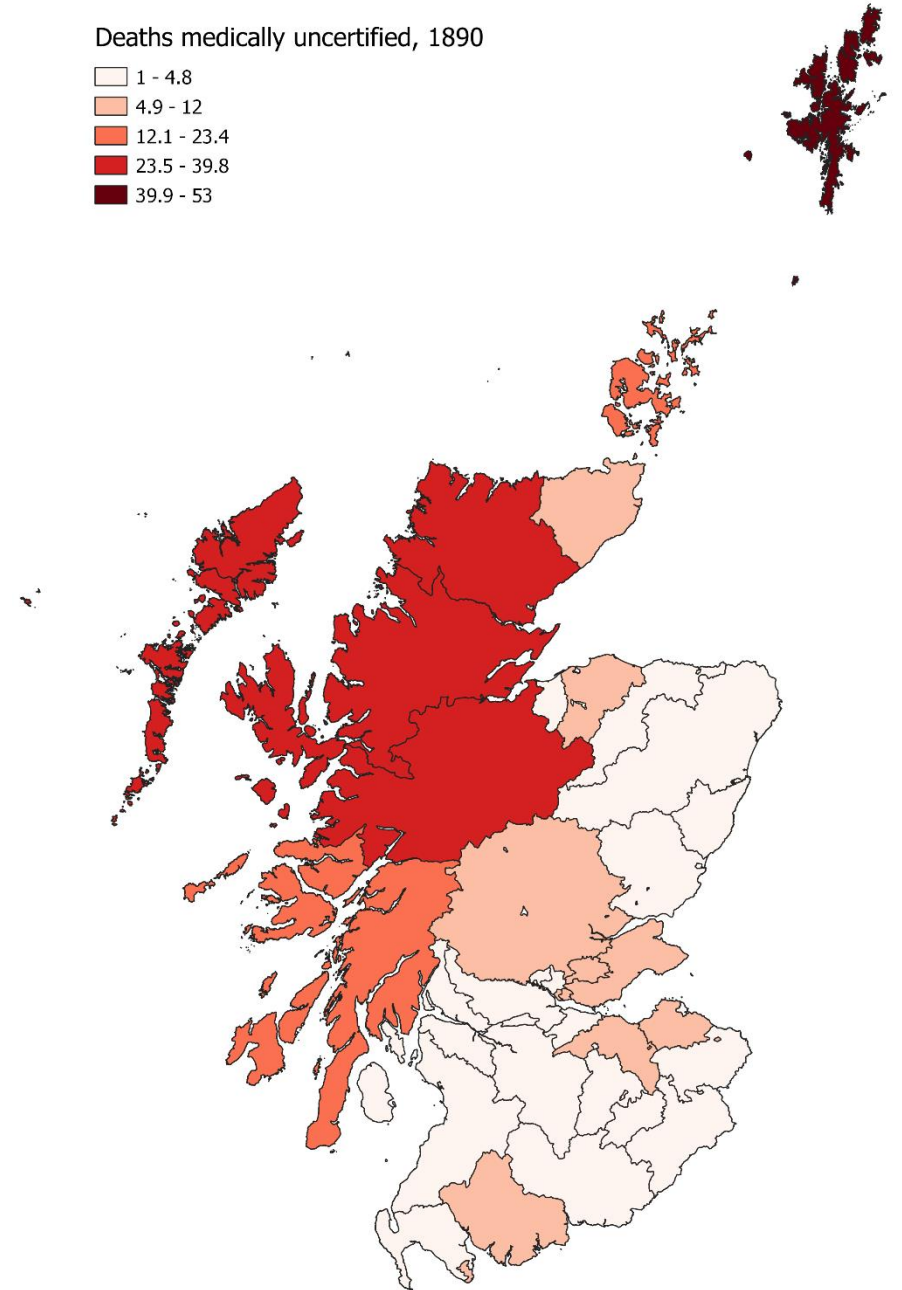
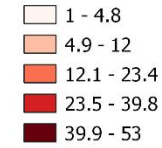
Deaths medically uncertified, 1890



Death Certification - Scotland

- As in England and Wales, there was improvement across the period.
- 1880 – 10.9% per cent uncertified
- 1890 – 5.8% uncertified
- Substantial geographical variation remained.
- Towns could vary a great deal:
 - Glasgow – 3%
 - Edinburgh – 7.6%
 - Kilmarnock – 1.8%
 - Aberdeen – 1%
 - Greenock – 5%

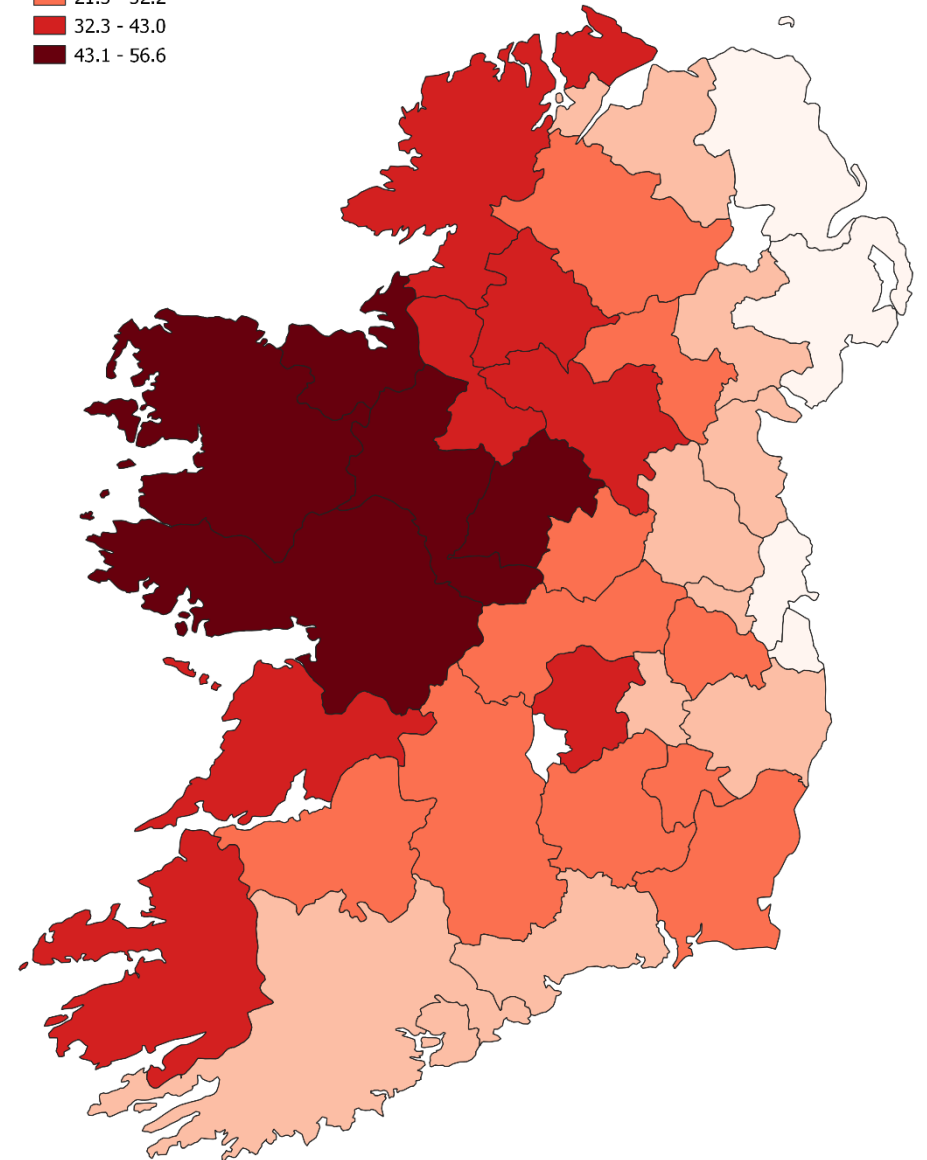
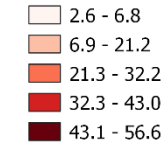
Deaths medically uncertified, 1890



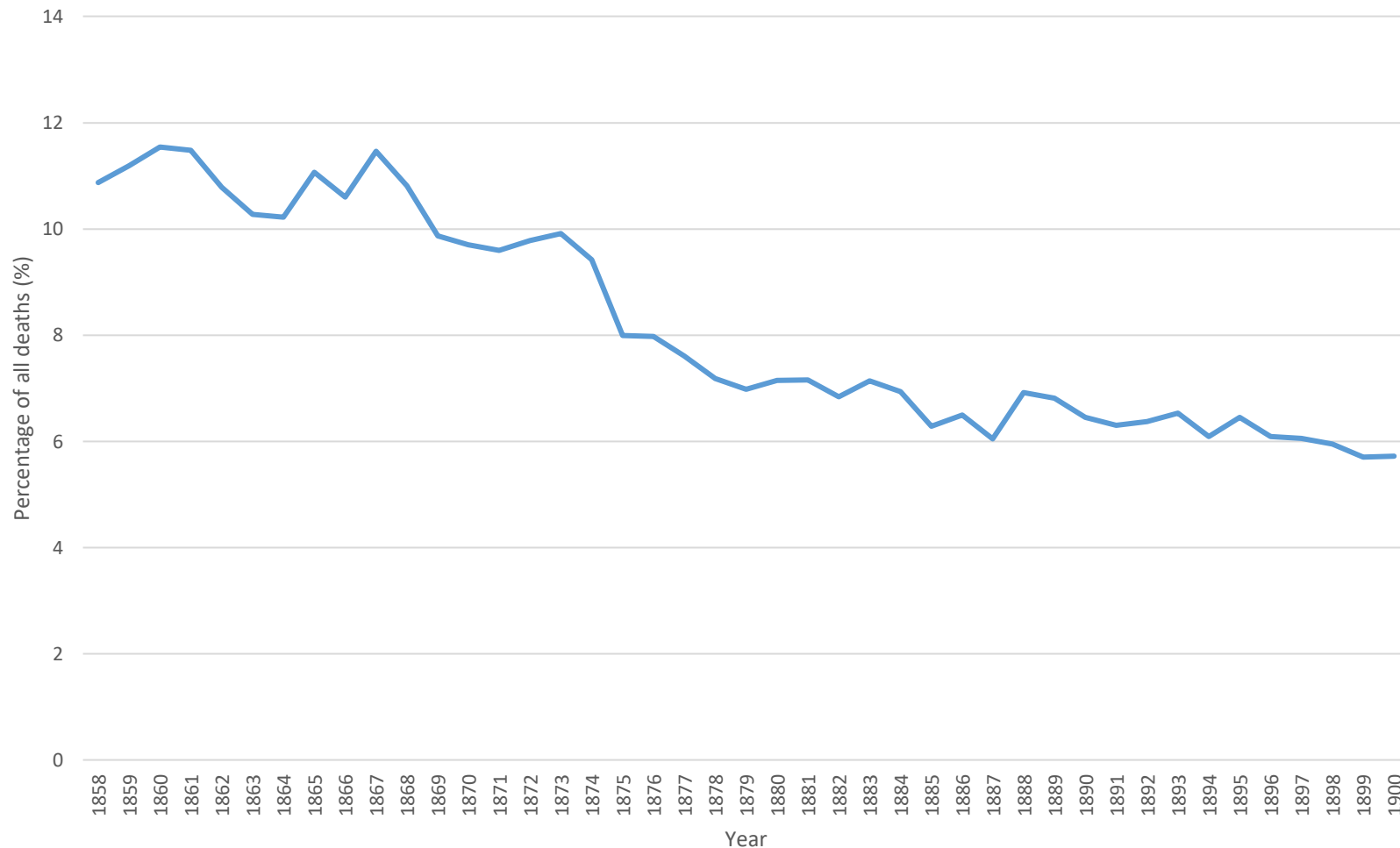
Death Certification - Ireland

- More substantial issue in Ireland than in England or Wales.
- 1911 – 22.59% of all deaths were uncertified in Ireland, compared to 1.38% in England and Wales.
- The Registrar General commented repeatedly that the rates were better in towns than the countryside.
- In 1910 the Registrar General commented that ‘in some parts of the country in cases of chronic illness, it is not customary to seek medical advice and that sufficient importance is not attached to the benefits of continuous medical attendance for the aged.’

Deaths medically uncertified, 1911



Ill-defined cause of death



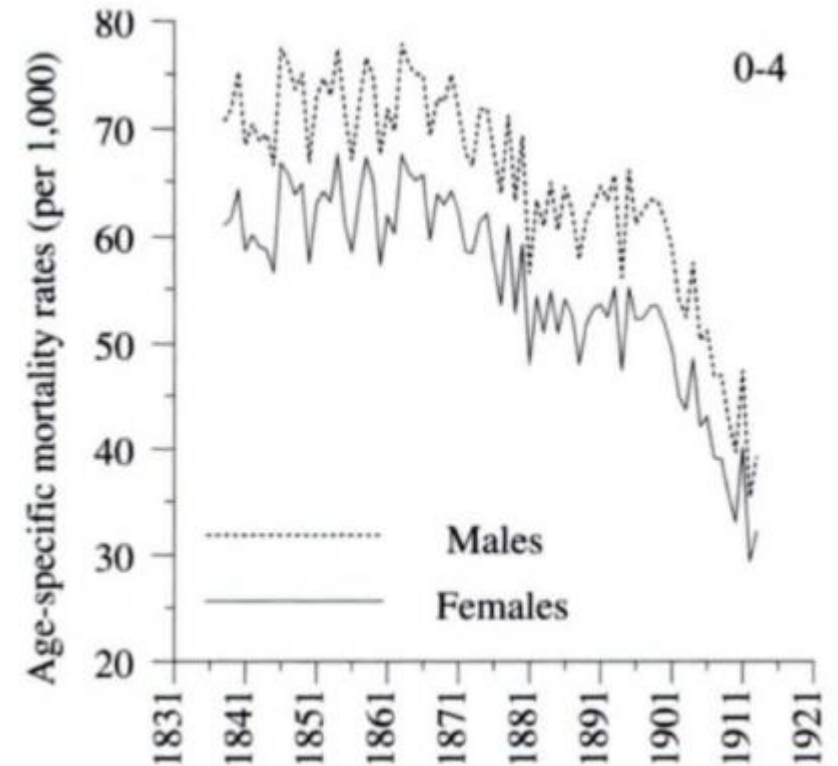
Data from Romola Davenport, *Annual Deaths by Cause, Age and Sex in England and Wales, 1848-1900* [data collection], 2nd edition (2019), UK Data Service, SN: 5705, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5705-1>

Uses – retirement and death

<i>Cause</i>	<i>Medical retirements</i>	<i>Old Age retirements</i>
Phthisis and other tubercular conditions	24.5	1.8
Diseases of the heart	23.6	18.6
Respiratory diseases (not TB)	18.9	16.8
Old age	17.9	34.5
Diseases of the brain	16.0	11.5
Other	9.4	4.4
Cancer	5.7	8.0
Diseases of the digestive system	2.8	3.5
Orthopaedic conditions	2.8	0.9
Mental Health	1.9	0.0
Accidents	0.0	0.9

Conclusion

- Death certificates have been used by many historians to construct grand narratives about population change over time.
- However, they are problematic sources because:
 - Coverage and certification varies by time and place
 - Causes of death vary from doctor to doctor depending on education, age, working practice
- Using them, therefore, requires care. But they can tell us a great deal about mortality and about the history of the medical profession and the state.



Male and female age-specific mortality rates, England and Wales, 1838-1913
Woods, *Demography of Victorian England and Wales*, 186.