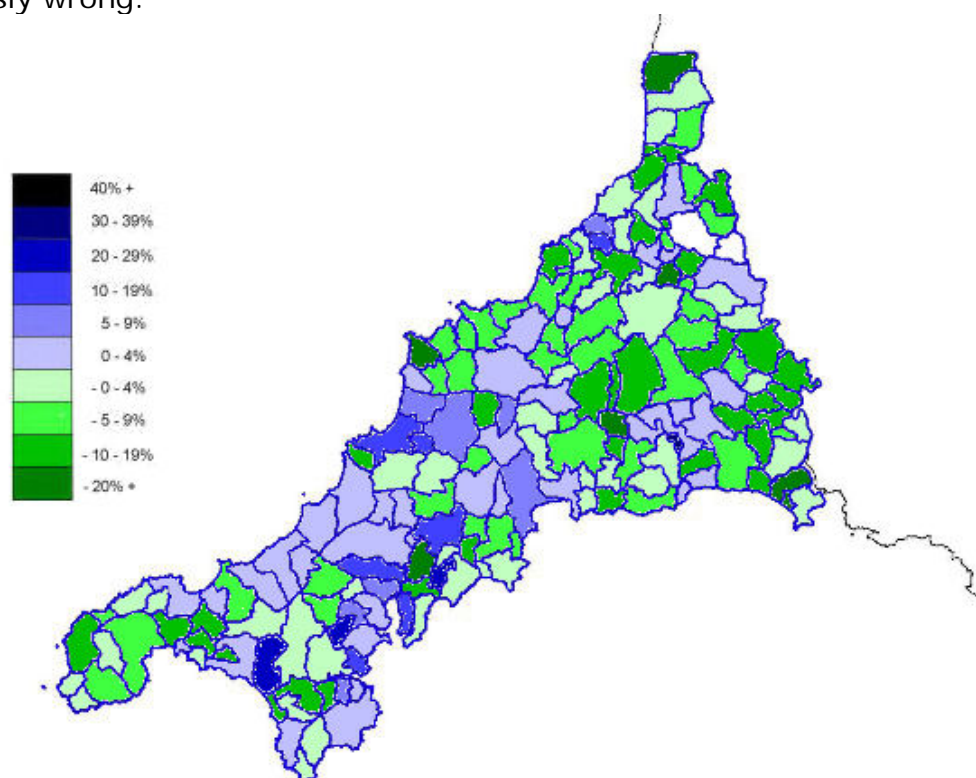


Population change in Cornwall 1951-2001

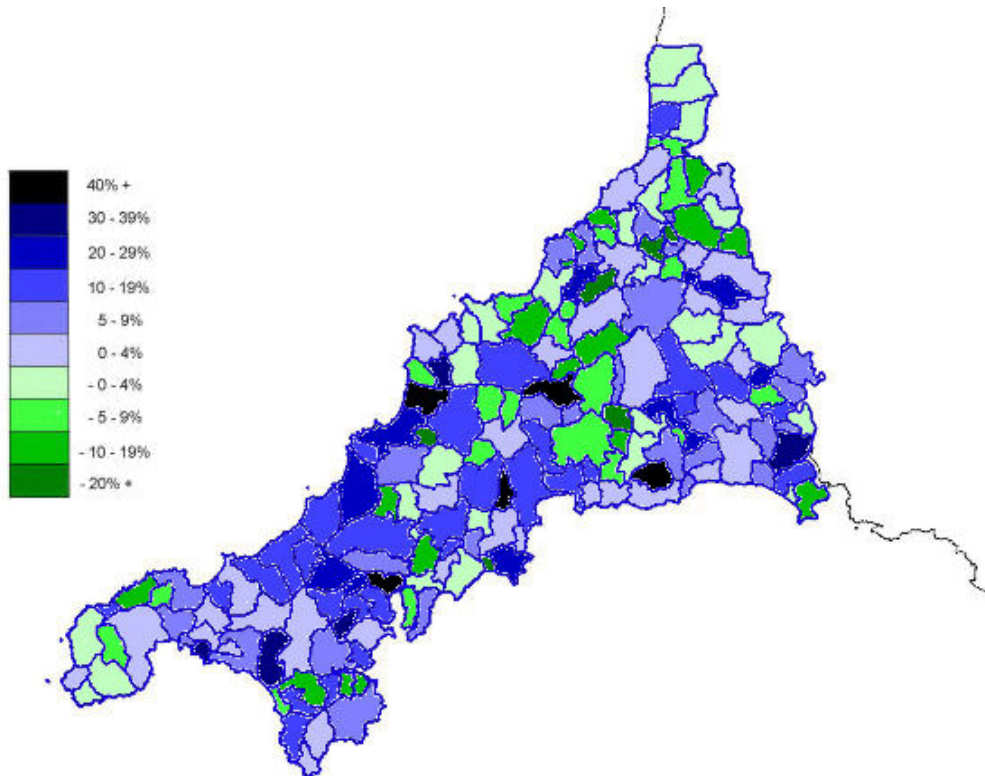
1951-61

At mid-century Cornwall seemed to have resumed the pattern familiar from the 1860s. Overall, there was another slight absolute drop in population in the 1950s. Several parishes in rural east Cornwall lost more than 10% of their population. Things were different in mid-Cornwall where the growth of Newquay was maintained and here more parishes gained than lost people. Population growth was particularly striking in some rural parishes near Truro – in Probus, Ruanlanihorne, Kea and St Just in Roseland. Meanwhile, boosted by cold war military spending, Helston grew quickly. But in west Penwith, like east Cornwall, the picture was reminiscent of the second half of the nineteenth century, with widespread population falls. Cornwall seemed irrevocably locked into population decline, so much so that the County Council planners in 1952 forecast that population would only grow slowly, if at all, to 1971, as net out-migration and an ageing population structure combined to produce a sustainable steady-state population regime. But events were soon to prove them hopelessly wrong.



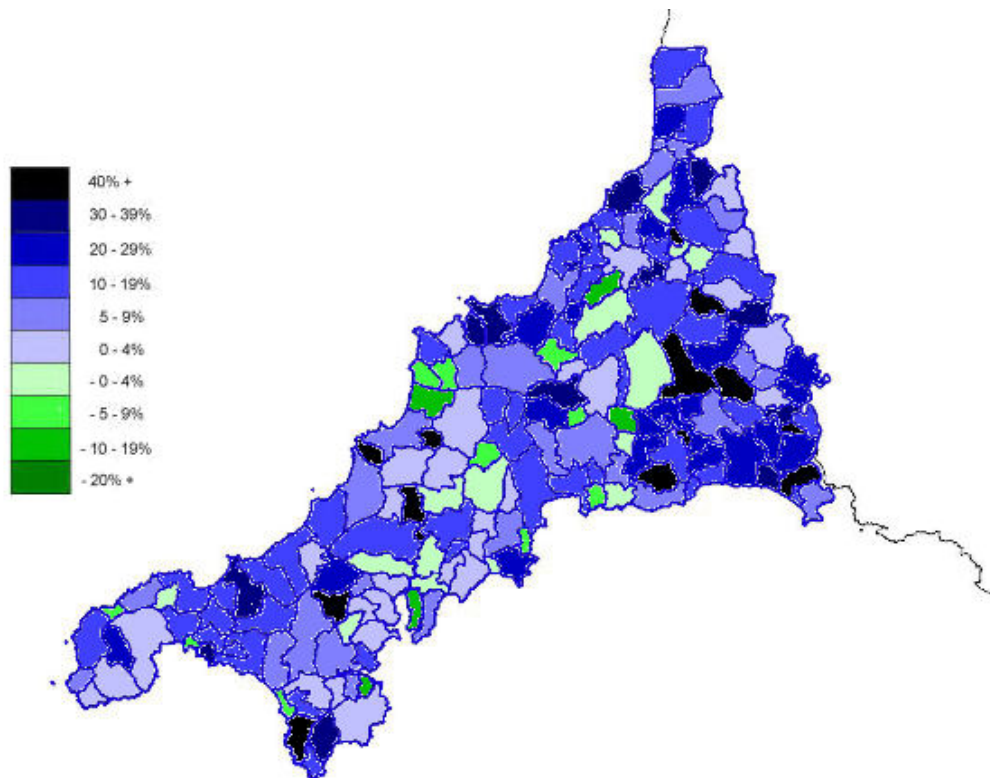
1961-71

During the 1960s a fundamental shift occurred in the demographic regime, the first major turning point since the 1860s. From a state of population stability Cornwall was now set to experience a state of population growth. And not just growth, but major growth. Population rose in the 1960s at a rate of 11.5%, something not seen since the 1830s. And this was to prove to be no temporary phenomenon. It was followed by further growth of 9.2% in the 1970s, 12.3% in the 1980s and 7.0% in the 1990s. In the 1960s very rapid growth was seen in Bodmin, the only town in Cornwall to have accepted an 'overspill' scheme from the Greater London Council. But massive growth was also a feature of rural parishes such as Pelynt, St Mewan, St Mawgan and Feock. In general those areas that were already growing in the 1950s grew at a faster rate and those areas that were losing population lost less in the 1960s. Nonetheless, there were still pockets where numbers were declining – notably in the far north; in a belt of rural parishes east of Bodmin from St Veep in the south to Endellion in the north; and in the far west.



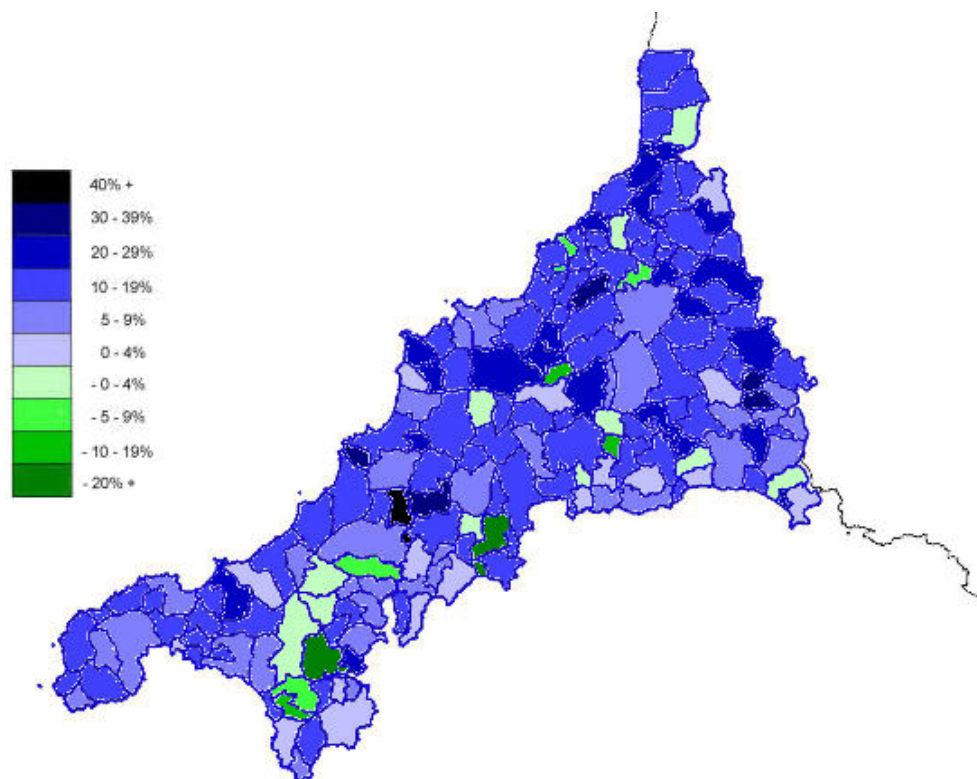
1971-81

Although the rate of growth eased off in the 1970s, it became more evenly spread across Cornwall. The fastest growth in this decade occurred in Caradon district. Counterurbanisation was more akin to suburbanisation here as people moved to a new life but one within easy commuting and shopping reach of Plymouth. Outside Caradon the fastest rises were in places such as Cubert and St Erme, receiving an overspill effect from Newquay and Truro. Stithians and Mullion were two other rural parishes in the west where a spate of housebuilding produced rapid population growth and fundamental community change. Some parishes to the east of Bodmin still lost population, as did those near St Mawgan, presumably as a result of cutbacks at the nearby air base. A few parishes around the Fal also saw population falls, but some of these were among the surviving closed parishes of Cornwall, residual sites of the landlord hegemony of the nineteenth century. Here, control by one dominant landowner was able to keep the housing developers at bay and stem the westwards moving tide.



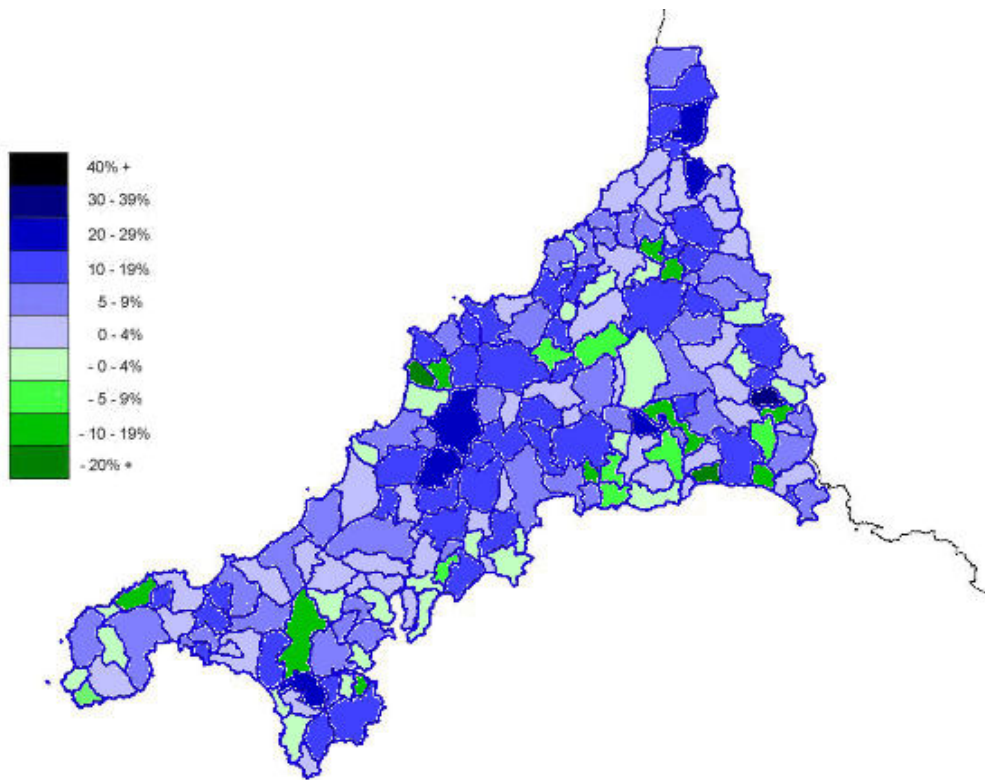
1981-91

The 1980s, decade of Thatcherism and the injection of an even more materialist, get rich quick, individualism into English culture saw the beginning of the cycle of housing-led boom and bust as the British economy changed course, driven now by mortgage lenders and the housing market rather than entrepreneurs and exporters. Despite, or perhaps because of, its booming economy, people fled the suburbs of south eastern England in growing numbers in search of their rural, or at least smaller town, arcadia. Many of them arrived in Cornwall, pulled by nostalgic memories of childhood holidays (and by the more materialist factor of much lower house prices). Population growth continued to be strong in rural parishes in east Cornwall, places like St Mellion and Stoke Climsland, St Mabyn and St Tudy, St Merryn and St Eval. It was also high around Truro, particularly in St Erme, location of one of Cornwall's two new villages – Shortlanesend (the other being Threemilestone) - ideally placed to service the shops and offices of Truro. The growth of Truro began to make inroads into Cornwall's traditionally dispersed settlement structure, making the town into a central place similar to any county town and producing a settlement hierarchy more familiar to Cornwall's new residents. Growth was slightly less hectic in the west and there was even a belt of parishes from Gwennap, near Redruth, over Carnmenellis to Cury on the Lizard that lost population. However, this was a most unusual experience in the decade which saw Cornwall's fastest growth of the twentieth century.



1991-2001

Population growth eased back somewhat in the 1990s. In this decade growth remained strongest in parts of rural north Cornwall and in mid-Cornwall, especially in St Columb and St Enoder. To some extent this reflected the attitudes to planning policies adopted by North Cornwall and Restormel District Councils in the 1980s. Most Cornish parishes continued to show substantial growth. However, this growth noticeably fell back in south east Cornwall., where several parishes actually lost people again. Depopulation was also a feature at Wendron and in several parishes on the Roseland. On the other hand growth was strong on the Lizard. By 2001 the population in Cornwall was 46% higher than it had been in 1951, 49% higher than at its lowest twentieth century ebb in 1931 and around 34% higher than its previous peak in the mid-1860s. The problem now, however, is that all these people consume much more land, to which must be added growing numbers of second homes. The number of houses is now nearly three times that of the 1860s and the average size of those houses has more than doubled. People are also now more mobile, driving to work, shop and relax. As a result Cornwall's carbon footprint is high and rising as its growing population (only a handful of English counties have had a higher rate) adds more than its share to the problem of global warming. As a result of this unsustainable rate of growth, Cornwall has now become an overcrowded and congested place with a higher rural population density than most of England, with growing environmental pressures and threats to what remains of its natural habitats. There were some signs in the 1990s that the slowing down of population growth associated with the convergence of house prices on those of south east England was leading to fuller employment and some signs of economic improvement. But after 2001 Objective One spending and the emergence of 'Quality Cornwall' tourism marketing injected further demographic pressures. As a result Cornish house prices have risen fast and are now much higher than the UK norm. While local young people face a housing crisis, unable to step onto the housing ladder, in-migration has picked up since 2001 with decadal growth rates edging up again towards the 10% mark. A massive house building programme projected for the next 40 years is likely to add further pressure on a struggling infrastructure and exacerbate the problems of unsustainable growth from which modern Cornwall suffers. Even a *Western Morning News* editorial was driven in June 2007 to admit that 'Cornwall is now buckling under the pressure of having too many people crammed within her limited borders'.



Bernard Deacon June 2007