

Household & Family Session 4 – For Love or Money

Courtship and opportunities to meet the opposite sex

Up to 80% of marriages in all ranks of the community took place between partners who lived within five miles of each other, though many may have recently moved into the district as live-in servants. In the Essex village of Terling in the early 17th century two thirds of the brides and about 60% of the grooms were born outside the parish where they married.

The majority of the rural population could meet prospective marriage partners at the dances, revels and other traditional village festivities.

When it seemed that a young couple were “getting on well together”, the girl’s parents may invite the boy to their home and the couple would be put into the parents’ bed, wrapped up together in a sack or blanket, and allowed to spend the night engaged in talking or, more likely, what we might call “heavy petting”.

IMAGE – BUNDLING

The practice was known as “bundling”. If they were considered to be well matched, the parents may agree to the next stage of courting, the exchange of promises of marriage. Bundling was, not surprisingly, frowned on by the puritans and had gone out of favour in all but the lowest ranks in society by the end of the 17th century.

For the "better sort" there were few occasions when the sexes could meet socially and the gentry generally married partners from within the same county, selected for them by the family and kin network...

However, from the early 18th century balls, card parties and assemblies were held during the assizes and annual fairs, providing opportunities for the sons and daughters of the elite to meet prospective partners.

IMAGE – ASSEMBLY ROOMS

(Quote 1) Assembly rooms were built in many country towns in the 18th century and regional marriage markets became established. **Lady Mary Wortley Motagu** wrote in 1760:

"The frequency of assemblies has introduced a more enlarged way of thinking: it is a kind of public education, which I have always thought as necessary for girls as for boys".

From the 1740s, the London season from New Year to June, followed by the summer season in Bath, created a national marriage market.

IMAGE – BATH ASSEMBLY

Age of Marriage

The lowest legal age for marriage was 12 years for girls and 14 years for boys, though it was only among the highest ranks of the aristocracy that such young marriages were contracted, and even then sexual relations were not usually expected to begin until the couple reached maturity.

(Quote 2) King Charles II wrote in 1663, on the day of the wedding of his 14 year old son to a 12 year old bride: *"we intend to dance and see them both abed together, but the ceremony shall stop there, for they are both too young to lie all together."*

In fact, as we found earlier in the course, marriages were generally entered into at quite a late age for all but the male heirs and daughters of the landed classes.

Of course, the move towards marriage at a later age in the 18th century affected family sizes and resulted in rapid growth in the population.

TABLE – Family Size by Age at First Marriage

Wife's Age	Under 20	20-24	25-29	20-34	35-39
Live Births	6.6	5.1	3.8	2.7	2.0

(Quote 3) An exceptional example of late age of marriage was reported in the **York Courant** on 15th November 1774:

On Thursday last was married at Brompton, near Northallerton, Mr. Edward Clark, widower, to Mrs. Ann Gibbins, both of the same place, whose ages together are upwards of 160 years."

Selecting a partner

Modern Western notions of marriage being for love and the pursuit of personal happiness did not apply in the 16th century. It was generally only wealthy widows who could afford to choose to marry for love.

Before the Reformation, the Church considered that the primary purpose of marriage was for the procreation of legitimate children and the avoidance of fornication.

(Quote 4) The Protestant view, expressed in **Cranmer's Prayer Book of 1549**, added the motive of *"mutual society, help and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and in adversity."*

(Quote 5) About a hundred years later, for the puritan **John Milton** the prime object of marriage was: *"the apt and cheerful conversation of man with woman, to compare and refresh him against the solitary life"*.

IMAGE – PURITAN MARRIAGE LINEART

While companionship was desirable, during the first half of our period romantic love or physical attraction were considered irrational reasons for marriage.

(Quote 6) The common attitude to marriage for love is illustrated by **Lord Mountgarret's** letter, written in 1658 to his eldest when he fell in love and intended to marry the daughter of an impoverished Catholic gentleman:

"I am informed that you are so miserably blinded as to incline to marry, and with one wretched act to undo both the gentlewoman and yourself, and (as much as in you lies) to dash all my designs which concern my self and house. Son, I charge you by the bond of nature and duty which you owe me, that you presume not to proceed in so desperate a purpose, as a thing which I detest and abhor. And therefore lay these words close to your heart, and read in them as high indignation of mine, as if they were far more sharper Be not you wanting in the obedience of a son in a matter of so great importance as this to me and my family; but let this suffice to keep you from plunging yourself into ruin".

(Quote 7) However, as always, there were exceptions to the general rule. In 1639, the young puritan curate **Ralph Josselin** fell in love at first sight: *"The first Lord's Day, being October 6, my eye fixed with love upon a maid, and her's upon me, who afterwards proved my wife".*

IMAGE – REV'D RALPH JOSSELIN

Marriage – a family matter

Marriage conferred status and enabled the establishment of an independent household. It was an economic and social partnership, and among the propertied classes was a collective decision made by parents and kin, not left to the couple concerned.

IMAGE – MARRIAGE SETTLEMENT

The system gave great power to the head of the family and left little choice in the matter for the prospective bride and groom.

(Quote 8) In 1718, **Mary Delany** was married to a man 40 years her senior:

"Never was woe dressed out in gayer colours, and when I was led to the altar, I wished from my soul I had been led, as Iphigenia was, to be sacrificed Why must women be driven to the necessity of marrying? A state that should always be a matter of choice!"

(Quote 9) Sometimes the reason for marriage was purely financial. Of the arranged marriage of the heir of the **Duke of Richmond**, it was reported:

"The marriage was made to cancel a gambling debt; the young people's consent having been the last thing thought of: the Earl of March was sent for from school, and the young lady is not reported to have uttered a word; the gentleman exclaimed 'They are surely not going to marry me to that dowdy?'"

The daughters of the aristocracy had a little more choice in the selection of a marriage partner. In the 1790s Lord Herbert, the heir to the Earl of Pembroke who was heavily in debt, was urged by his father to find a bride "as beautiful as you please, and as rich as Croesus".

(Quote 10) Herbert proposed to the daughter of the Duke of Marlborough but he was rejected. **Her brother** explained:

"She has not that kind of liking for you, without which she is determined not to marry any man. She likes you very well but not as a lover."

He next made a half-hearted attempt to woo the only daughter of a wealthy banker.

(Quote 11) One **his friends** asked him:

"Have you ever seen her, and do you think you could bring yourself to lay your chaste leg over her for a dirty consideration of two or three hundred thousand pounds?"

The next year, Herbert became engaged to a penniless cousin, Elizabeth Beauclerk, and had to ask his father not only for his blessing but also for an extra £1,000 a year to set up house.

(Quote 12) **The Earl** accepted the situation philosophically, but pointed out:

"How very much the situation of our affairs stands in need of at least 30,000 pounds ... It would have been lucky for us had you found a thirty thousand pounder as agreeable to you as Elizabeth!"

Portions and Annuities

For the sons of aristocrats and the upper gentry, the purposes of marriage were primarily to obtain an heir and to gain a substantial financial portion, or dowry from the bride, which went directly to the father of the groom. .

Heiresses and rich widows were considered particularly valuable catches in the marriage market.

IMAGE – WIDOW’S MARRIAGE

Among the "middling sort", the wife's marriage portion may be in cash or in household goods, usually equal to three years' income for her husband's estate: £3,000 to £8,000 for gentry; £250 to £500 for yeomen; £10 to £50 for husbandmen.

The relatively late age of marriage allowed more time for a father to accumulate dowries for his daughters.

In return for the dowry, the groom's father guaranteed the bride an annuity, or jointure, if she survived her husband.

A joint estate was set up to be left to provide for the spouse who lived longest.

In general, unmarried adults were a social and financial burden on the family and daughters, in particular, were a serious economic drain, but could be useful to cementing political connections.

Women often married for “preferment” and it was possible sometimes for pretty young women from modest backgrounds to rise spectacularly up the social ladder.

IMAGE – ANNE WELLS, DUCHESS OF CHANDOS

(Quote 13) In 1745, the **Earl of Egmont** noted:

"This has been a lucky season for low people's marrying, for I am told that since the Duke of Chandos's marriage with the innkeeper's maid near Slough, the Duke of Ancaster has married his kept mistress and the Duke of Rutland will own his wife his kept mistress, the earl of Salisbury has married his steward's niece - Miss Keate, daughter to a barber and shower of the tombs in Canterbury, and the Earl of Bristol his late wife's maid, and the Duke of Buckingham his tutor's niece."

Strict Settlement

The introduction of the "Strict Settlement" in the mid-17th century meant that a man willed away his property rights to his unborn children in a settlement drawn up before his marriage. Provisions were also made for the settlement of annuities or marriage portions on all the children before they were born.

The owner of an estate could therefore not deprive any of the children of their inheritance and this substantially reduced a father's ability to exercise economic blackmail in matters such as the choice of marriage partner.

Marriage for the "Middling" or "Lower Sort"

Among the "middling" and "lower sort", parental control over the choice of a marriage partner was much weaker, as their children usually left home at the age of 7 to 14 to live in a master's household as servants or apprentices.

Marriage in these classes was delayed until the mid to late 20s to allow the couple to save up to set up a household economically independent from their parents.

(Quote 14) In 1807, **George Crabbe** wrote about the poor saving for marriage:

*"Reuben and Rachel, though as fond as doves,
Were yet discreet and cautious in their loves;
Nor would attend to Cupid's wild commands,
Till cool reflection bade them join their hands.
When both were poor, they thought it argued ill
Of hasty love to make them poorer still;
Year after year, with savings long laid by,
They brought the future dwelling's full supply;
Her frugal fancy cull'd the smaller ware,
The weightier purchase ask'd her Reuben's care;
Together then their last year's gain they threw,
And lo! an auction'd bed, with curtains neat and new.
Thus both, as prudence counsell'd, wisely stay'd
And cheerful then the calls of Love obey'd."*

Marriage for the Poor

During the 16th century, it was common for poorer folk to hold a Church-ale before a marriage to raise money for necessities for the couple's household.

IMAGE – CHURCH ALE

With the amendment of the Poor Law in 1601, community control over marriage entry for the poor increased and parish officers were inclined to object to the marriage of poor persons whom they considered may become burdens on the Parish Rate.

As a result, many poorer people chose to enter into clandestine marriages to avoid pressure from kin or interference from the parish notables.

Influences on Decision to Marry

Marriage plans could be frustrated in response to the availability of employment, as the character of local industry and agriculture changed.

Times of dearth or economic slump could result in marriage plans being abandoned, which led to rising rates of illegitimacy in some periods such as the 1590s.

In rural areas, the actual time of marriage was influenced by the agricultural seasons. A popular time for weddings was when contracts for servants in husbandry expired before the hiring fairs that followed the busy times such as harvest in arable areas or lambing in upland districts.

The Church calendar played a part too, as marriages were forbidden during Advent and Lent.

During the 18th century, the average age of marriage dropped.

TABLE – AVERAGE AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

	1551	1601	1651	1701	1751	1801
Males	29.3	28.0	18.0	27.3	26.7	25.9
Females	26.4	26.0	26.6	25.8	24.7	24.1

By the late 18th century the decline in apprenticeships and the growth in waged employment allowed skilled male workers to earn more and save for marriage over a shorter period. At the same time, wages for unskilled workers dropped, so they were less able to put aside any substantial savings at all.

These factors contributed to undermine the old incentives to postpone marriage until enough savings could be accumulated to provide for an independent household. The age of first marriage dropped as a result.

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO

Getting Married

In the 16th century, marriage was not the relatively straightforward legal arrangement that it is today.

The laws governing marriage were notoriously ambiguous and complex, and Church Law and Common Law were often at odds.

According to the law in medieval England, it was not necessary for the parents to give their consent for their son or daughter to marry. Foreign visitors remarked on this being a peculiarly English custom. However, as we have seen, parents did hold considerable economic and social power over marriage decisions.

IMAGE – EXCHANGING PROMISES

In the Common Law, a man and a woman were married if they followed three simple steps;

1. A financial contract between the parents of the landed classes or, for the children of landless families just an exchange of oral promises in the future tense.
2. The exchange of oral promises, in the present tense, with or without witnesses. These promises came under a variety of names including "espousal," "betrothing," "assuring," "contracting," "affirming," and "troth-plighting." The term "handfasting," which called attention to the ritual of joining hands accompanying the promise, was commonly used in the North East.
3. Sexual consummation.

(Quote 15) In 1632, the anonymous author of “A Compendium of All the Laws Affecting Women” explained:

“Marriage is defined to be a conjunction of man and woman, containing an inseparable connection and union of life. But as there is nothing that is begotten and finished at once, so this contract of coupling man and woman together hath an inception first and then an orderly proceeding.

The first beginning of marriage is when wedlock by words in the future tense [in futuro] is promised and vowed.

The full contract of matrimony is when it is made by words in the present tense, in a lawful consent, and thus two be made man and wife existing without lying together.

Yet matrimony is not accounted consummated until there go with the consent of mind and will the conjunction of body.”

However, some advice books of the time suggested that marriage required a bit of forward thinking.

(Quote 16) In 1582, **George Whetstone** warned, in his “Household Laws to Keep the Married in Love, Peace and Amity”:

“The satisfaction of fancy is the source of joy in marriage. But there be many means to dam up the course of delight between the married, if the match be not made as well by foresight, as free choice.

The office of foresight is to prevent following mischances and (advisedly) to consider if present ability will support a household, and (according to their calling) leave a portion to their posterity.

In this point, the experience of the parents is to be preferred before the rash imaginations of the son. For the aged married by proof know that in time many accidents of mischance will hinder the endeavours of the best husbands.

The office of foresight is likewise to consider of the equality in years, lest the one growing and the other declining in perfection, after a while repent, when remedy comes too late: the rose full blown seemeth fair for a time, but withereth much sooner than the tender bud.

It is the office of foresight to consider of the equality of bringing up, lest a diversity in manners between the married make a division of desires. For spaniels and curs hardly live together without snarling.

And it is the office of foresight to see that there be a consent in religion between the married, for if their love be not grafted in their souls, it is like their marriage will be infirmed with the defects of the body.”

The Church and Marriage

A ceremony in church was not a requirement although, after the Reformation in England, this became a generally accepted feature of a wedding.

From 1563, the Canon Law of the Church required the bride's parish priest to publish the banns publicly in church *"to wit, whether any man can allege a reason wherefore they that are about to be married may not lawfully come together"*. Alternatively, a licence could be purchased, to avoid the need to publish the banns. The service of marriage was then supposed to take place in the church or chapel where either party lived. Marriages that broke these rules were held to be "clandestine" and any member of the clergy found breaking them was liable to a three year suspension.

Non-conformist couples could marry at their meeting houses. Although the ceremony itself was not recognised as valid, the promises made in front of the congregation still constituted a legal marriage.

It was actually quite common for non-conformists to marry at an Anglican church or chapel. However, Baptists were normally excluded, as Anglican clergy would not carry out the ceremony for the un-baptised. Although parental permission was not a legal requirement, some puritan writers argued they should play a stronger role in the arranging of their children's marriages.

(Quote 17) In 1609, **William Perkins** advised in his "Short Survey of the Right Manner of Erecting and Ordering a Family According to the Scriptures":

"Now, touching the consent of parents, that is, of father and mother, I hold it requisite of necessity to marriage. For the authority of parents must not be resisted or violated."

Unless parents give "their full and free consent," Perkins insisted, their children are not married in God's eyes but only in the eyes of men.

The Civil Marriage Act of 1653, during the Commonwealth period, required marriages to be conducted before a justice of the peace and weddings performed in church solely by a clergyman were prohibited

(Quote 18) There was a great deal of resistance and, as **one woman** put it at the time: *"If it had not been more solemnly done afterwards by a minister, I should not have believed it lawfully done."*

Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act

IMAGE – LORD HARDWICKE

Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 meant that oral commitments and spousals were no longer legally binding in English Law. It became a legal requirement for every marriage to take place in an Anglican church or chapel, and to be recorded in the parish register, with the signatures of both partners.

However, Jews and Quakers were exempted from this requirement.

IMAGE – QUAKER MARRIAGE

At the same time, enforcement of marriage law passed from the Church to the secular courts.

The Act made it illegal for persons under 21 to marry without parents' or guardians' consent. However, the Marriage Act did not apply to Scotland, which resulted in runaway couples heading for Gretna and Lamberton, as clandestine marriages were now only possible north of the Border.

IMAGE - ELOPEMENT

The Role of the Parents

Although the legal position did not change until the introduction of Hardwicke's Marriage Act in 1753, the role of parents in the selection of suitable marriage partners for their children did change during our period.

At the beginning of our period, the arrangement of marriages in the landed families was decided by parents, kin and a network of friends, with the couple themselves having very little say in the matter...

By 1660, a shift had taken place. In all but the families of the high nobility, the children were being given at least a limited right of veto which caused occasional conflict between parents.

(Quote 19) In the 1640s, **Lady Anne Clifford** recorded a dispute between herself and her second husband, the Earl of Pembroke:

"About this time, and also some yeares before, happened a great cause of Anger and falling out between my Lord and mee because he desired to have one of his younger sonnes marryed with my daughter Isabella, which I could in no way remedie, my daughter being herself extremely averse to ye match, though he believed it was in my power to have it brought to pass, being so persuaded by some of my Friendes. But at length it pleased God that on the 5th day of July, being Monday, in 1647, this youngest daughter of myne was marryed to James Compton Earl of Northampton, in the Church in Clerkenwell. But I was not present at ye marriage for many reasons."

Between 1660 and 1800, there was a further shift towards the children selecting their preferred partners, while the parents reserved a right to veto.

This change reflected a move from unqualified deference to parents and a new respect for the individual's right to pursue personal happiness.

Changing attitudes to marriage arrangements

The case of John Verney shows how the son of a baronet in the 1670s moved from the traditional view of marriage as a purely social and economic partnership to that of a match based on romantic love and mutual attraction.

In 1674, Verney sought a marriage for financial gain and was approached by Mr. Edwards, a wealthy Londoner, who promised a good estate along with his 19 year old daughter. Before matters were finally concluded, an "accidental" meeting in the street was arranged so that the groom could be assured there was *"nothing disgusting"* about his prospective bride.

(Quote 20) Verney reported to his father that *"though her beauty is not like to prefer her to the title of a duchess, yet she is a very passable woman and well-shaped."*

Emotional feelings played no part on the matter and the girl was not even aware that her future was being discussed. However, the negotiations eventually broke down.

In 1680, Verney fell in love with a 15 year old girl. Despite initial objections by her father, the couple married and remained devoted to each other. **Verney** wrote to his wife when she was expecting their third child, sending her:

"everything that the lovingest of husbands can express to the best of wives, and love to the little ones, not forgetting the kicker in the dark."

The traditional method of parents selecting a suitable marriage partner blending with closer, more affectionate parent-child relationships is illustrated by the case of **Harriet Spencer**.

(Quote 21) Soon after Lord Spencer told **Harriet** he had arranged for her to marry Lord Duncannon, **she** told a friend:

"I had not the least guess about it till the day papa told me... I wish I could have known him a little better first, but my dear papa and mama say that it will make them the happiest of creatures, and what would I not do to see them happy?.... I have a better chance of being reasonably happy with him than with most people I know."

The marriage was not arranged by the parents for political or financial reasons, and the result proved quite successful.

Public attitudes towards parents dictating the choice of a suitable marriage partner were changing in the early 18th century when a Banbury attorney, Mr Aplin, took on Richard Bignell, an articled clerk of humble origins.

Richard fell in love with Aplin's daughter and, when his clerkship ended, he asked for her hand in marriage. Aplin rejected him "with the utmost scorn", but the couple married secretly. When Aplin discovered the truth he turned his daughter out of his house and refused to have anything more to do with her.

(Quote 22) However, **the gentry and middling sort of Banbury** reacted:

"The people in the town and neighbourhood, condemning the father's harshness and, willing to encourage the young man's industry, gradually withdrew their business from Mr. Aplin and transferred it to Mr. Bignell."

The Daughter's View

It was usually more difficult for daughters than it was for sons to go against their parents' wishes.

(Quote 23) The traditional view of the daughter's part in selecting a suitable spouse was expressed in **Lord Halifax's** "Advice to a Daughter", first published in 1688 and reprinted in seventeen editions up to 1791:

"It is one of the disadvantages belonging to your sex, that young women are seldom permitted to make their own choice; their friends' care and experience are thought safer guides to them than their own fancies, and their modesty often forbiddeth them to refuse when their parents recommend, though their inward consent may not entirely go along with it. You must first lay it down for a foundation in general, that there is inequality in the sexes, and that for the better economy of the world, the men, who were to be the law-givers, had the larger share of reason bestowed upon them, by which means your sex is the better prepared for the compliance that is necessary for the better performance of those duties which seem to be most properly assigned to it."

(Quote 24) The early feminist **Mary Astell** was born in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1666. In 1706 she wrote:

"A woman indeed can't properly be said to choose. All that is allowed her is to refuse or accept what is offered."

IMAGE – MARY ASTELL

Freedom of Choice

Hardwicke's Marriage Act removed the fear of children contracting secret but binding engagements. As a result, young people began to be allowed greater freedom of access to the other sex.

Foreign visitors remarked how much freedom the English had in the choice of a marriage partner.

IMAGE – 18TH CENTURY COUPLE

(Quote 25) In 1788 the **Duc de la Rochefoucauld** wrote:

"The English have much more opportunity of getting to know each other before marriage, for young folk are in society from an early age; they go with their parents everywhere. Young girls mix with the company and talk and enjoy themselves with as much freedom as if they were married..... Three marriages out of four are based on affection....I am not sure whether the obligation to live with one's wife does not make it necessary to marry at a later age, but I am inclined to think so. To have a wife who is not agreeable to you must, in England, make life a misery. Accordingly the Englishman makes more effort to get to know his bride before marriage; she has a similar desire, and I suppose it is on this account that marriage before the age of 25 or 28 is rare."

IMAGE – MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

(Quote 26) However, **Mary Wollstonecraft** warned:

"In the choice of a husband, women should not be led astray by the qualities of a lover, for a lover the husband cannot long remain. Women should be contented to love but once in their lives; and after marriage, calmly let passion subside into friendship."

In aristocratic families, most marriages continued to be arranged by the parents and kin network throughout our period, and arranged marriages sometimes developed into loving relationships.

In 1716, the Duke of Newcastle entered an arranged marriage to liquidate his debts and for social prestige on the part of the bride's family. The Duke was soon writing letters addressed "My dearest girl".

(Quote 27) When the couple had a serious quarrel after 44 years of marriage, **Newcastle** wrote: *"Be the same to me as you ever was. For God's sake, my dear, consider the many happy years we have by the mercy of God, had together and how much our mutual happiness depends on each other. You know, you must know, how much, how sincerely I love and esteem you. You must know that if once your affection, your dear warm heart, is altered to me, I shall never have a happy moment afterwards."*

Wedding Celebrations

IMAGE – WEDDING CELEBRATION

By the 18th century, the prospering “middling sort” were vying with the county gentry to provide extravagant weddings for their children.

(Quote 28) The celebration of the wedding of one Northumberland farmer's son and his bride was impressive enough to be reported in the **Northampton Mercury**, on 25th June 1750:

"On the 7th instant was married at Rothbury in Northumberland, Mr. William Donkin, a considerable farmer of Tosson in that County, to Miss Eleanor Shotton, an agreeable young gentlewoman in the same place. The entertainment on this occasion was very grand, there being provided no less than 120 quarters of lamb, 44 quarters of veal, 20 quarters of mutton, a great quantity of beef, 12 hams with a suitable number of chickens etc., which was concluded with 8 half anchors of brandy made into punch, 12 dozen of cider, a great many gallons of wine, and 90 bushels of malt brewed into beer. The Company consisted of 450 Gentlemen and Ladies, who were directed with the music of 25 Fiddlers and Pipers, and the whole was concluded with the utmost order and unanimity."

Evidence of the rise of the companionate marriage

The medieval Church saw procreation and the avoidance of fornication as the main purposes of marriage. To this, the Reformed Church of England added a third reason - the mutual comfort of the partners.

During our period there was a gradual move towards marriage because of romantic attachment rather than for financial reasons or the preferences of family and kin.

IMAGE – 18th CENTURY COURTINH

By the 18th century, enlightened thinkers were supporting the view that young people should be free to choose their own marriage partners.

(Quote 29) Daniel Defoe maintained:

"As marriage is a state of life in which so much of humane felicity is really placed ... it seems to me the most rational thing in the world that the parties concerned, and them alone, should give the last stroke to its conclusion; that they only should be left to determine it, and that with all possible freedom."

(Quote 30) In 1705, Addison wrote in "The Spectator":

"Those marriages generally abound most with love and constancy that are preceded by a long courtship. The passion should take root and gather strength before marriage be grafted on to it."

(Quote 31) In 1740, **Wetenhall Wilkes** published "A Letter of Genteel and moral advice to a Young Lady", which included these remarks about marriage:

"This State, with the affection suitable to it, is the completest image of heaven we can receive in this life; the greatest pleasures we can enjoy on earth are the freedom of conversation with a bosom friend...Where two have chosen each other, out of all the species, with a design to be each other's mutual comfort and entertainment...all the satisfactions of the one must be doubled because the other partakes in them".

The inscription on the gravestone of **Catherine, wife of the Hon. George Mordaunt**, of Yarnton, Oxfordshire, who died in 1714, suggests his marriage was successful in this respect:

*"With unavailing tears he mourns her end,
Losing his double comfort, wife and friend."*

(Quote 32) In the mid-18th century, **Mrs. Hestor Chapone** maintained:
"I believe it absolutely necessary to conjugal happiness that the husband have such an opinion of his wife's understanding, principles and integrity of heart as would induce him to exalt her to the rank of his first and dearest friend".

Changing Modes of Address between Husband and Wife

A move towards more affectionate relationships in marriage is illustrated by changes in the ways a husband and wife might address each other.

In 1622 the Puritan moralist **William Gouge** insisted that wives should avoid using endearments such as "*sweet, sweeting, sweetheart, love, joy, dear, duck, chick or pigsnie*", or the use of the husband's first name. A wife, Gouge insisted, should address her spouse as "*husband*".

In the mid-17th century, Dorothy Osborne's love letters to William Temple were addressed formally "*Sir*".

(Quote 33) In the mid-18th century, **Mrs. Hestor Chapone** maintained:
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Change seems to have been gradual. Immediately on his marriage in 1707, Richard Steele addressed his wife as "*Madam*", but he later moved to "*Dear creature*" or "*My dear*", and later still "*Dear Pru*".

(Quote 34) However, by 1797, **Thomas Gisborne** was able to report:
"The stiffness of the proud and artificial reserve, which in former ages infested even the intercourse of private life, are happily discarded."

The general view that love was an irrational reason for marriage had changed during the 18th century.

(Quote 35) In 1727, **Daniel Defoe** wrote: *"Matrimony without love is the cart before the horse....I don't take the state of matrimony to be designed that the wife is to be used as an upper servant in the house...Love knows no superior or inferior, no imperious command on the one hand, no reluctant subjection on the other.....Persons of lower station are, generally speaking, much more happy in their marriages than Princes or persons of distinction. So I take much of it, if not all, to consist in the advantage they have to choose and refuse"*.

(Quote 36) **The guardian to Mary Hamilton** gave this advice to her 17 year old ward in 1773: *"never to enter into engagements without the consent of her parents or friends, but also never to take the man her friends desire without consulting her own heart"*.

(Quote 37) In 1785, Mary fell in love with and married **John Dickinson**. After 15 years of marriage he wrote: *"I have only time to say that I love you dearly - best of women, best of wives and best of friends"*.

Divorce and Separation

Until the Reformation, marriage annulment or divorce was only possible by obtaining an official dispensation from the Pope.

When Henry VIII famously failed to obtain the Pope's agreement to his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, the result was the break from the Church in Rome.

After the Reformation, Church courts were able to annul a marriage for a limited number of legal reasons such as consanguinity (close relationship to the spouse) or the marriage not being consummated, but divorce was only possible for the very rich, by means of a private Act of Parliament.

Between 1539 and 1857, when the Matrimonial Causes Act made divorce a matter for the local courts, only 317 divorces took place through Parliamentary Acts.

(Quote 38) High-profile divorce cases caused quite a stir, such as when Sir Charles Bunbury divorced his wife, Lady Sarah, because of her adultery with Lord William Gordon. **One of the household servants** gave a statement to support the action:

"Lady Sarah Bunbury, being of a loose and abandoned disposition and being wholly unmindful of her nonjugal vow, etc., did carry on a lewd and adulterous conversation with Lord William Gordon."

Not all Divorce Acts were successful. Sir George Dowling failed to get his marriage dissolved in 1715 on the grounds of non-consumation due to the couple's youth at marriage. But, as both were 15 years of age and therefore above the legal age of consent (14 for boys and 12 for girls), the case was dismissed.

A married couple could obtain a judicial separation through the Church Courts, but remarriage was not allowed while the spouse was still alive.

In a period when it was virtually impossible to track down a person once he left his native parish, the simplest way to be rid of a spouse was for one of the partners to desert and effectively disappear.

Before 1660, it was relatively common for people to be presented before the Church Courts charged with living apart without legal separation.

(Quote 39) There were occasional honest mistakes, such as the case of **Elizabeth Bradbury**, which was dismissed in the archdeacon's court in Oxford in 1584 when she explained:

"Her husband John Bradbury is a man that useth to go of messages for gentlemen, and being a tailor and not a freeman of the town is driven to be most abroad for their living and no other cause."

(Quote 40) By the 18th century, cases of this type rarely appeared in the courts, except where they had the potential of involving poor relief, such as when **Elinor Hussey**:

"upbraided her husband in such opprobrious terms that, not being able to live in peace with her, he left her ... He gave his wife her £100 portion, and she went to Little Drayton, where she kept an alehouse, and William Tyler (with whom she was on terms of some familiarity before her husband left her) went often to visit her and at last had a child by her whom they called Nell Hussey."

Widowhood and Remarriage

As marriages were contracted at a relatively late age and were often broken early by the death of a partner, the maximum likely duration of a marriage was 17 to 20 years.

For most of our period, approximately one third of children had lost one parent by the age of 14, and less than 50% of children reached adulthood while both parents were alive. In Bristol in 1696, one third of children were orphans.

Though the early death of a parent or spouse was a constant possibility, the loss of a loved one was never easy to accept.

(Quote 41) In the 1650s, a **widow** lamented: "When it pleased God to call my husband from me ... I was for a time exceedingly cast down, and troubled, as I think any poor creature could be; in which I was so overwhelmed that I did not know which way to turn myself, nor what to do ... I had lost a good estate, had nobody to look after my business, had many injured me, and had lost (above all the rest) a precious husband, whom I entirely loved."

(Quote 42) Widowhood could last a long time. The inscription on a memorial in a Suffolk church to **Mrs. Anne Butts**, who died in 1609, records: "*The weaker sex's strongest precedent*

Lies here below, seven fair years she spent

In wedlock sage; and since that merry age

Sixty-one years she lived a widow sage."

Despite the high rate of early death, only about 6% of the population at any one time were widows or widowers, as most remarried quite quickly on the death of successive spouses, often more than once.

IMAGE – A SECOND MARRIAGE

Until the early 17th century, funerary memorials often included images of two, three or even four wives who had died during the man's lifetime.

(Quote 43) **The London Evening Post** of 21st October 1768 reported an extreme example of rapid remarriage after the death of a partner:

"A farmer of Harlestone in Wiltshire buried a wife on the 1st of September, on the 8th, he married a second, who dying on the 4th of this month, he took a third partner to his arms on Wednesday last."

Not all remarriages were successful for both partners.

Elizabeth Shackleton's first husband, Robert Parker, had courted her for seven years and he had proved a considerate and loving partner.

After his death, she married a local merchant, John Shackleton, who was 17 years her junior (21 years of age, to her 38). In doing so, she alienated herself from her family and her county connections. Shackleton was a big disappointment. He was frequently drunk and conducted himself very differently from her first, well-bred husband, Robert.

(Quote 44) **Elizabeth** was often disgusted by his behaviour:

"The gentleman came here near 12 at noon, and without ceremony went to a clean bed where he farted and stunk like a pole-cat."

On one occasion, **she** recorded: "*Never saw him so rude, vulgar, nor so drunk. He took his horse-whip to me*".