

**Church and clandestine marriage among the inhabitants of Clerkenwell from
1550-1753: a family reconstitution study**

**Gill Newton, Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social
Structure**

Abstract

This paper traces the marriage locations of Clerkenwell inhabitants over a century and a half between 1600 and 1754. It is based on a family reconstitution uniquely supplemented by all marriages of Clerkenwell inhabitants traceable in printed London and Middlesex registers, and the Fleet marriage registers. These records were gathered by the late Amanda Copley, a PhD student at the Cambridge Group. This period saw a growth in the phenomenon of private, irregular or clandestine marriage, particularly in rapidly growing suburbs such as Clerkenwell. The paper offers an alternative perspective on these weddings, particularly those within the Fleet, then and now portrayed as ill-considered and sordid affairs conducted by a cast of drunks, prostitutes, troublemakers and shady characters, yet by the 1740s preferred by a majority (at least 54%) of all Londoners. Could most Londoners really have had something to hide, or did they have other reasons for choosing private marriage? Age and prenuptial pregnancy rates of those marrying privately and in their home parish church are compared to address this question.