

# **Marriage among Londoners before Hardwicke's Act of 1753: when, where and why?**

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## **Abstract**

Until Hardwicke's Marriage Act came into force in 1754, Londoners had unprecedented choice in where they might marry. Not constrained to the home parish church of bride or groom, many wed at a centre of clandestine marriage, or elsewhere by licence. Under these extraordinary conditions, how did they behave? Specifically, at what age did they marry for the first time, where did the wedding take place, and why did they choose clandestine or home parish marriage? In addressing these questions, this paper compares the characteristics of those marrying between 1610 and 1753, whether in their home parish, at a centre of clandestine marriage or elsewhere by licence. Analyses are based on new evidence from family reconstitutions of the large suburban parishes of Aldgate and Clerkenwell. These include marriages from other parishes and the clandestine centres of Holy Trinity Minories and the Fleet. Our focus is mainly on marriage behaviour in suburban London, but comparisons are made with the mercantile city centre. Reported ages at marriage from London locations are reconsidered in the light of new information on bachelors' and spinsters' ages from St Katherine by the Tower.