

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

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Keywords

clandestine marriage, Fleet marriage, age at first marriage, prenuptial pregnancy, early modern

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.

Introduction

Jeremy Boulton drew attention to the unique nature of marriage availability in London in two important papers published in the early 1990s.¹ For more than a century until Hardwicke's Act For the Better Preventing of Clandestine Marriage came into force in 1754, the operation of extra-parochial centres of marriage, coupled with ease of access to marriage licences, gave Londoners unprecedented choice in where they might marry. Rather than give notice and marry in their home parish, many couples chose to marry in another location entirely, displaying a marked fondness for marrying 'privately', without the public announcement of banns in their home churches in the weeks running up to their wedding.

Much of the attention focused on marriage at clandestine centres tend to emphasize its scandals and irregularities, and the ways in which it deviated from what was

¹See Jeremy Boulton, 'Itching after Private Marryings? Marriage Customs in Seventeenth-century London', *The London Journal*, 16 (1991), 15-34 and Jeremy Boulton, 'Clandestine marriages in London: an examination of a neglected urban variable', *Urban History*, 20:2 (1993), 191-210.

prescribed by church authorities.² However, there was no contemporary stigma to marrying clandestinely, and the popularity of this way of marrying was such that in eighteenth century London, a clandestine marriage became not so much the exception as the rule.³ In the seventeenth century too, tens of thousands of Londoners enjoyed both licence and clandestine marriages in locations other than their own parish church.⁴ The growing tendency to marry away from the home parish makes it difficult to trace the behaviour of London residents across the early modern period. This means we know very little about what impact this increased ease in getting married might have had on the subsequent behaviour of couples.

We know from Brodsky-Elliott's work on the Bishop of London marriage licence allegations that while moderate and high status London men in the early seventeenth century married relatively late, they were inclined to marry young women.⁵ Peter Earle's work on the wealthy London middle class has confirmed a very young age of female marriage.⁶ But what of the marriage habits of more ordinary Londoners? Boulton's work on stated ages at marriage from a brief period in the 1650s for Stepney and from the clandestine marriage centre of St James Duke Place in the 1690s suggested that even relatively poor suburban women in London married very young, but that the age at which they entered marriage may have been rising over the second half of the seventeenth century.⁷ The ages of the men these women married received much less attention.

Hitherto, Finlay's family reconstitutions of London parishes have provided little evidence on marriage habits in London, but these were based on small, central London parishes where it is difficult to muster sample sizes large enough for analysis.⁸ In any case, by the seventeenth century the bulk of ordinary Londoners lived not in the city centre but in the rapidly growing suburbs surrounding the densely packed parishes of intramural London. Over the next century these suburbs would each grow so populous as to eclipse entire cities elsewhere in England.⁹ Meanwhile the central city parishes declined slightly in population terms, even as their inhabitants continued to accumulate ever more personal and institutional wealth from mercantile activity.

² See for example R. B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine marriage in England 1500-1850*, Rio Grande, Ohio: Hambledon Press (1995), especially Chapter 3; Roger Lee Brown, 'The Rise and Fall of the Fleet Marriages', in R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, London: Europa Publications Limited (1981), pp. 117-36.

³ Boulton (1993), pp. 197-8.

⁴ Boulton (1991), p. 22.

⁵ Vivian Brodsky Elliott, 'Single Women in the London Marriage Market: Age, Status and Mobility, 1598-1619', in Outhwaite (1981), pp. 83, 87.

⁶ Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press (1989), pp. 181-182.

⁷ Jeremy Boulton, 'London Widowhood Revisited', *Continuity and Change*, 5:3 (1990) pp. 323-355.

⁸ Roger Finlay, *Population and metropolis: the demography of London 1580-1650*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1981), p.137.

⁹ For Aldgate the population cited represents the total persons enumerated in the extant 1695 Marriage Duty Assessment for part of the parish and extrapolation from parish baptisms for the remainder. For Clerkenwell, the lower bound is that testified by its churchwarden to the New Churches committee; the upper bound is derived from parish register baptisms. Estimated population totals for principal English towns in 1700 are given in Peter Clark (ed), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume II 1540-1840*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2000), p.384.

Using family reconstitutions constructed from the baptisms, marriages and burials of two large London suburbs, we shall compare the behaviour of individuals and couples entering marriage, at times contrasting these suburbs with a sample of more prosperous Londoners from Cheapside in the city centre.¹⁰ The suburbs in question are Clerkenwell, in the north-west, and Aldgate, immediately to the east of the city. We will also make reference to some unusually rich late eighteenth century clandestine marriage records at St Katherine by the Tower, neighbouring St Botolph Aldgate. The city centre parishes comprise St Mary le Bow, All Hallows Honey Lane, St Pancras Soper Lane, St Martin Ironmonger Lane and St Mary Colechurch. The difference in scale between city and suburbs can readily be appreciated by considering their estimated populations around the time of the 1695 Marriage Duty Assessment listing of London inhabitants. The five city parishes combined housed around 1,700 inhabitants in 1695. Aldgate in the same year was home to between 15,500 and 17,000 persons, larger than the estimated 1700 population of all English towns other than Norwich, Bristol and perhaps Newcastle. By 1711 Clerkenwell had a population of between 7,200 and 10,300, smaller than Aldgate but still exceeding the numbers that many major settlements could boast, including Canterbury, Hull and Oxford. On the suburban scale, London family reconstitutions yield a robustly large sample of hundreds or thousands of men and women's ages at marriage.

The family reconstitutions of Aldgate and Clerkenwell include marriages from the centres of clandestine marriage that were so important in London's marriage regime. Marriages of those resident in Clerkenwell and Aldgate can therefore be compared to those conducted elsewhere, especially at the clandestine centres of the Fleet, and Holy Trinity Minories. From this we will be able to glimpse how clandestine marriage fitted in with the family formation strategies and subsequent behaviour of London families throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The appeal of clandestine marriage

Where the opportunity exists, a willingness to prefer marriage locations separate from the community in which one lived seems to transcend both place and historical period, especially where ease of marrying is in favour. Londoners may have been among the earliest to have had access to this privilege regardless of their social status, but they were certainly not the last to prefer convenience over community when getting married. Nineteenth century Census enumerators were well-acquainted with the problems in accounting for the marriages of English persons living near the Scottish border, for in Scotland couples could still marry without the need for banns or licence.¹¹ In the United States in the 1930s and 1940s, similar cross-state boundary 'Gretna Green' marriages were strongly preferred in Tennessee, especially once a

¹⁰ The Cheapside sample parishes comprise St Mary le Bow, St Pancras Soper Lane, All Hallows Honey Lane, St Martin Ironmonger Lane and St Mary Colechurch. In 1695 their combined population was about 1700 persons. This figure is derived from extant Marriage Duty Assessment listings and Poll Taxes listings.

¹¹ See *Census of Great Britain, 1831, Abstract of the answers and returns made pursuant to an Act, passed in the eleventh year of the reign of His Majesty King George IV. intituled, "An Act for taking an account of the population of Great Britain, and of the increase or diminution thereof."* Enumeration Abstract. Vol. I. 1831 BPP 1833 XXXVI (149) xxxiii.

waiting period and premarital blood tests were introduced for home state marriages, but not required in neighbouring states.¹²

The factors which fostered a supply of clandestine marriage centres in early modern London are relatively straightforward. Certainly there was a supply of clergy willing and eager to conduct marriages, since marriage fees were an important source of income, especially for those without a benefice.¹³ The complexity of administrative divisions in London afforded them pockets of protection from any legal or ecclesiastical consequences, particularly in its post-Reformation configuration.¹⁴ Institutionally, clandestine marriage centres were thus able to develop in extra-parochial areas exempt from the usual jurisdiction of ecclesiastical authorities, often on land once occupied by the religious houses that had been dissolved in the 1530s.¹⁵

The reasons for Londoners' demand for private marriages are probably more various and sociologically complex than the evidence can be expected to reveal fully. However, some speculative conclusions may be drawn. Evidence of a compelling purely economic motive for clandestine marriage has not been found, for local marriages were not necessarily more expensive, and parishes set their own fees according to the ability of parishioners to pay.¹⁶ As well as convenience, privacy was understood to be an important motivating factor. Outhwaite notes there was a genuine "horror of public participation in the marriage process".¹⁷ Marrying away from the parish meant that one's neighbours (or friends and family, for that matter) were only aware of the celebration if one chose to inform them. However, the distaste for banns marriage on the grounds of unwanted public display, or even fear of public involvement, has proven difficult for historians to empathise with. Instead, the demand for privacy has been interpreted as suggesting that those marrying clandestinely had some authority figure to avoid, or something to hide, such as a pregnancy. But as we shall see below, claims of widespread age differences, child brides or bridal pregnancy among those marrying clandestinely are not borne out by the facts.

The habit of marrying by licence originated in the upper classes. To many, a private marriage could thus have been an aspirational choice. As the cost of a licence relative to average wages fell, the custom was able to progress down the social scale, perhaps stimulated by a desire to emulate the customs of the rich and powerful; to borrow some of their glamour for a momentous occasion. Licence marriages permitted greater liberties than banns marriage, but in some respects compared unfavourably to

¹² Arthur Hopson, 'The Relationship of Migratory Marriages to Divorce in Tennessee', *Social Forces*, 30:4 (1952), 449-455. The effect is apparent from the crude marriage rate (CMR). Despite having a more youthful population, Tennessee's 1949 CMR was only 4.6 per thousand, whereas in neighbouring Mississippi it was 24.2 (p.449).

¹³ Brown (1981), p.122.

¹⁴ These administrative complexities are detailed in Boulton (1991) pp. 29-30.

¹⁵ For example, Holy Trinity Minorities was on the former site of St Clare's Abbey; St James Duke Place fell within the grounds of the former Holy Trinity Priory. St Katherine by the Tower was adjacent to St Katherine's Hospital, which survived the Dissolution but was thereafter lay controlled. The pre-Dissolution locations of religious houses are taken from Mary Lobel (ed): *The British Atlas of Historic Towns: Volume III The City of London*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1989), Map 4. The history of each institution is described in Caroline Barron and Matthew Davies (eds): *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, Centre for Metropolitan History: London (2007).

¹⁶ Boulton (1991), pp.16-18.

¹⁷ Outhwaite (1995), pp. 60.

clandestine marriage. The chief advantage of licence marriages was the free choice of marriage location, which ensured privacy. With a licence marriage, there was also a wider range of non-proscribed dates to choose from. However, like banns marriages, licence marriages had to be arranged in advance, and a certificate had to be procured. For any who were illiterate this could have been an intimidating prospect. In a clandestine marriage centre nothing need be arranged beforehand, but one could still marry on any day of one's choosing, with privacy guaranteed.

By the eighteenth century the availability of other forms of marriages seems to have exerted some pressure on some ministers to be less stringent in enforcing the timing of banns in ways that could perhaps make home parish marriage feel more private, or more convenient. For example, in St John Clerkenwell's marriage register, the 1726 marriage of Christopher Dickenson and Mary Haygurth occurred 11 days after banns were first publicized. Rather than being advertised on three Sundays, banns were announced on two Sundays and the Annunciation of St Mary.¹⁸ Considering that the 1687 edition of the Book of Common Prayer allows that banns may also be published on holy days, so far this is no irregularity. However, all of the banns dates were during Lent, Easter Sunday in 1726 falling on 10th April. A law dictionary published in 1729 underlines the prohibition on banns marriage at this time: "yet persons may marry with Licences in Lent, although the Banns of Marriage may not then be published".¹⁹ Effectively, then, the minister allowed this couple a right normally restricted to those paying for a licence marriage. There are many other examples, some allowing as little as six days between first publication of banns and the marriage itself. Such practices probably contributed to the relative popularity of St John Clerkenwell for marriage ceremonies over the original parish church of St James.

One reason why the Fleet was so extraordinarily successful in attracting clandestine marriage custom may stem from its provision of food, drink and a range of other entertainments. The original location for Fleet marriages, the Fleet prison itself, was a much more comfortable and well-appointed location for celebrations than one might assume. Its amenities included a coffee house, taproom, public kitchen and eating room, and even sports facilities.²⁰ Once tighter restrictions on marriages within the prison chapel forced the marriage trade into the surrounding streets, numerous public houses and parlours began to host marriages. The proximity of suitable premises in which to celebrate a marriage must have been appealing indeed to ordinary suburban Londoners, whose living conditions were growing increasingly cramped and squalid as population growth fast outpaced new building of houses. By 1742 the warden estimated the Fleet itself was still receiving up to 3000 visitors per day, suggesting that it had become a notable visitor attraction, and corroborating its function as an entertainment venue. Indeed, once a marriage centre had set up shop, people might be encouraged to use it specifically through the advertisement of entertainments. Competing with the Fleet, Alexander Keith's Mayfair chapel famously sought to drum up business by providing a spectacle for its customers' amusement in the form of the embalmed corpse supposedly of the parsons's former wife.²¹ While this may

¹⁸ London Metropolitan Archive P76/JNB/8

¹⁹ Giles Jacob, *New Law-Dictionary*, London (1729), n.p.

²⁰ Brown (1981), p.120.

²¹ Norwood, *The Environs of London: volume 3: County of Middlesex* (1795), pp. 320-327. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=45441> Date accessed: 25 May 2012.

seem a strange inducement to marriage, as something akin to a fairground curiosity it is easier to understand its entertainment value and hence its appeal.

Contemporary observers were not blind to the importance of entertainment when celebrating a marriage. In this respect, it is informative to take a closer look at a well-known 1747 engraving satirizing a Fleet wedding. Reproduced in Figure 1, this depicts the tavern wedding breakfast following the Fleet marriage of a sailor. As the verses below it describe, newly enriched by prize money from a naval battle, the sailor has been duped into marriage by a seemingly modest young woman who is in fact a prostitute. She has been aided by her mother, a crafty procuress. A smiling Fleet parson whispers familiarly into the ear of this unconventional mother-of-the-bride. Bailiffs at the door are about to inform the sailor of his new family's debts. Cuckold's horns in the painting of a skimmington on the wall behind, and the cat and dog fighting each other on the right, suggest future misfortunes likely to befall the hapless bridegroom.

Figure 1: The Sailor's Fleet Wedding Entertainment²²



The depiction of a skimmington in the background may serve us as a reminder of one form of intrusive public participation in others' marital lives. Skimmingtons were noisy and ribald public processions intended to express disapproval at unfaithfulness or otherwise transgressive marital behavior by ridiculing the people involved. Although the engraver no doubt intended the skimmington to be a moral judgement on the validity of this marriage, and perhaps to foreshadow the public shame likely in

²²Published by M. Cooper (1747); see also British Museum BM Satires 2875.

this couple's future, nonetheless a clandestine marriage has successfully allowed the couple to avoid public attention on their wedding day.

Overall the tone of the engraving is jovial rather than caustic. Unlike in Hogarth's more famous (but then unpopular) *Marriage à-la-Mode* paintings of 1743-5, which satirize an arranged society marriage involving a London merchant's daughter, the damaging consequences of an unsuitable marriage partner are only implicit here. The focus is on the present exuberance of the wedding celebrations. There is food and plenty to drink, pipe-smoking, music and dancing, and almost everyone seems to be enjoying themselves. In effect, there is fun to be had not only at the expense of the unwitting bridegroom, but in engaging with this convivial atmosphere. This emphasis on the merry-making aspects of the wedding celebration offers a glimpse of an important and often neglected aspect of the appeal of clandestine marriages.

Spatial patterns of marriage outside the home parish

Having considered some of the reasons why Londoners might marry outside their own parish or parishes of residence, we will now turn to the question of which locations they preferred, and how this varied over time. In this study, for both suburban parishes of Aldgate and Clerkenwell, marriages in the parish church have been supplemented with marriage records of inhabitants that took place in other locations. Under normal circumstances, family reconstitutions use only the marriage registers of the parish being reconstituted. Parish registers almost always record only those marriages conducted at the parish church, rather than the marriages of all parishioners, and do not always distinguish between banns and licence marriages. For seventeenth and eighteenth century London, however, this is not a practical way of proceeding because of the extent of marriage outside the home parish.

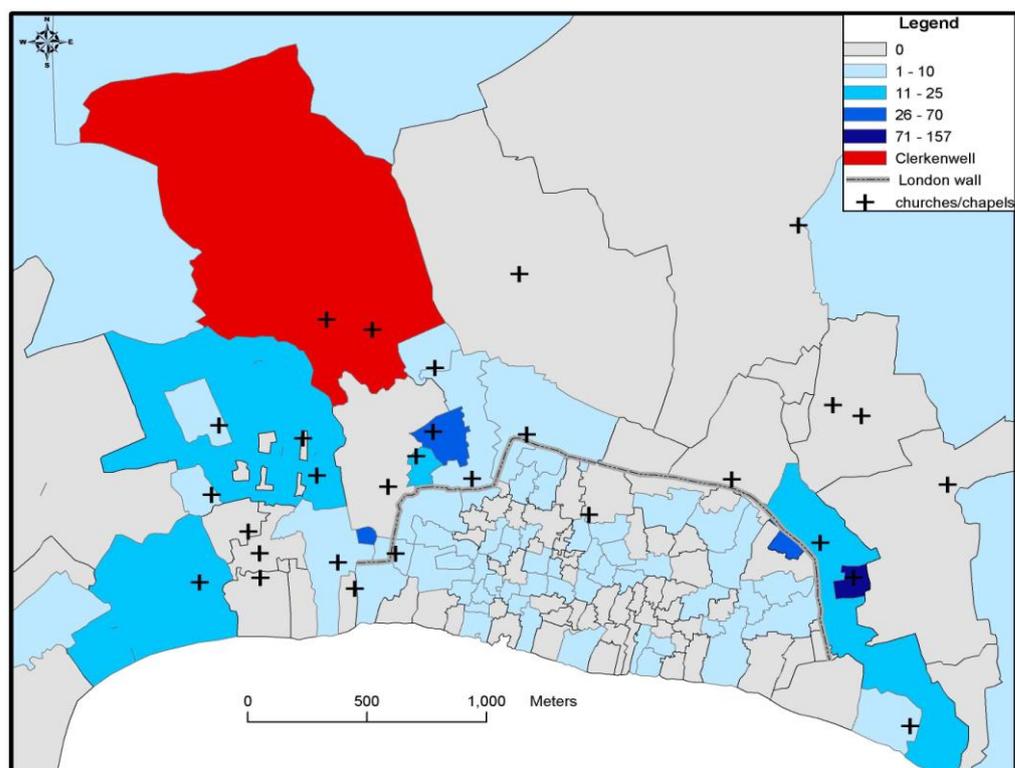
In Aldgate, supplementary marriages were recovered only from the nearest clandestine marriage centre of Holy Trinity Minories. For Clerkenwell, however, an attempt was made to trace marriages of inhabitants that took place outside the parish more widely, both in London and in surrounding counties.²³ At times this more than doubles the total number of marriages in observation, giving some indication of the scale of marriage outside the home parish. Some locations were much more popular than others, and almost all of the additional marriages of Clerkenwell inhabitants outside the parish were recovered from other London parishes and extra-parochial locations. Mapping these places and the extent to which they were used by Clerkenwell residents will make it clear that clandestine marriage centres and parishes near licence issuing authorities received the bulk of non-home parish marriages. There are, however, some limitations on this exercise since not every parish recorded residence in the marriage register.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of marriages of Clerkenwell inhabitants in foreign parishes between 1650 and 1699. For the larger extramural parishes, the location of the parish church is also indicated. In this period the number of traceable Clerkenwell inhabitants marrying elsewhere is small compared to the almost 8000 marriages in

²³ These data were compiled some years ago by the late Amanda Copley, a PhD student at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure.

Clerkenwell itself, with the lowest category of between one and ten persons marrying elsewhere being typical for most locations. Such marriages are usually exogamous ones, where Clerkenwell men or women married in the home parish church of their spouse. However, several locations are considerably more popular than exogamy could reasonably account for. This popularity is not related to proximity to Clerkenwell, since taken overall, the foreign parish marriages are not concentrated in nearby churches. It is worth bearing in mind the short distances involved of 2-3 kilometres from Clerkenwell to the eastern side of the city, meaning that Londoners would have been easily able to reach many other churches on foot.

Figure 2: Map showing the number of Clerkenwell inhabitants marriages in foreign parishes 1650-1699, marking the location of churches in wholly or partially extramural parishes.

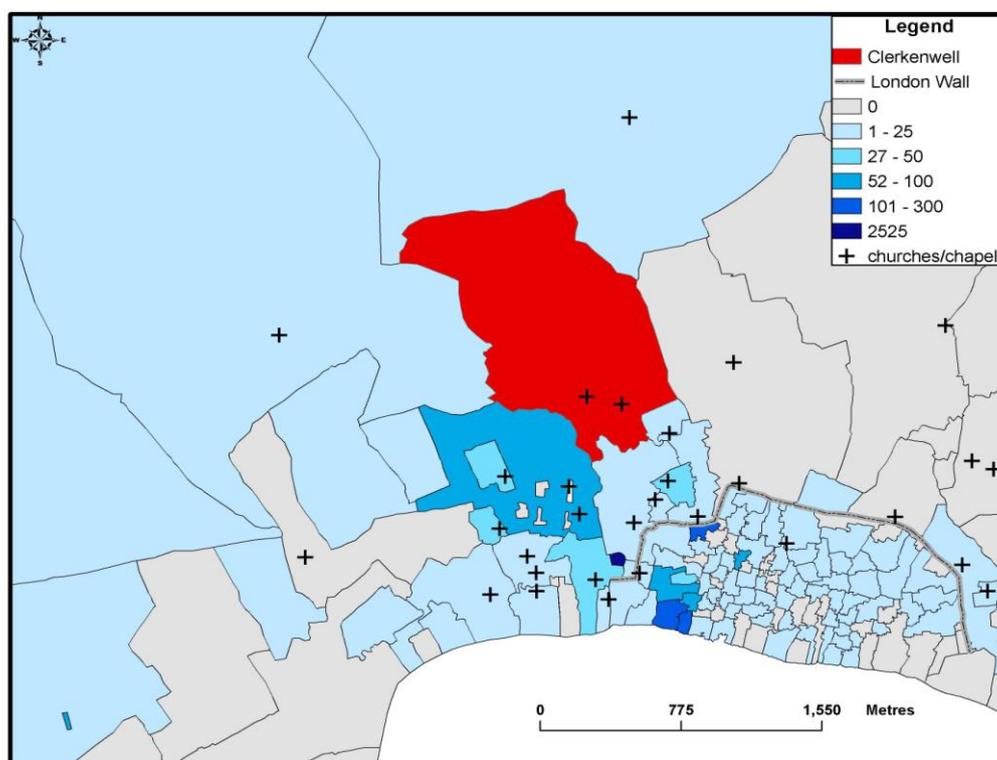


The most popular place for Clerkenwell inhabitants to marry at this time was Holy Trinity Minories, near the eastern wall of the city. This was one of the main locii of clandestine marriage for all Londoners in this period, together with St James Duke Place, which actually conducted many more such marriages. It is unclear why Clerkenwell inhabitants seem to have preferred Holy Trinity Minories to St James Duke Place, especially as it was slightly further away from Clerkenwell. Perhaps it was simply more convenient to reach without traversing the busy city area, being outside the city wall. Between Clerkenwell and the walled city, the small parish of St Bartholomew the Great was popular. It too was probably also operating as a clandestine marriage centre, since as the former location of the Priory of St Bartholomew in Smithfield it could claim exemption from Episcopal scrutiny. A little further south the tiny area of the Fleet prison, which would become the most popular and famous centre of clandestine marriage, had already begun to appeal. Those parishes where no Clerkenwell marriages are indicated are mostly those where the

marriage register does not state residence or is no longer extant, especially outside the city centre.

It may be that some clandestine marriage centres were operating at full capacity, and were turning away business, triggering referral for a hastily issued marriage licence instead. Our sample eastern suburb of St Botolph Aldgate is the larger parish surrounding Holy Trinity Minories and in it large numbers of marriages of inhabitants from other parishes by licence took place at this time, as we shall see. On the map it shows up as a moderately popular place for Clerkenwell inhabitants to marry. Since licences were becoming easy to procure and there were in practice few controls over who could issue them, this may represent an overspill of marriages originally intended to take place at the clandestine centres of St James Duke Place or Holy Trinity Minories. If ministers of clandestine centres had been managing demand for their services by referring any excess of couples intending to marry to local licence issuers and thence to nearby churches where they could marry, it would explain why the bureaucratic requirements that might have daunted the uneducated in fact proved little obstacle. Of course, there were in any case good financial motives for those involved with issuing licences to make it as easy as possible to procure one.

Figure 3: Map showing the number of marriages of Clerkenwell inhabitants in foreign parishes 1700-1749, marking the location of churches in wholly or partially extramural parishes.



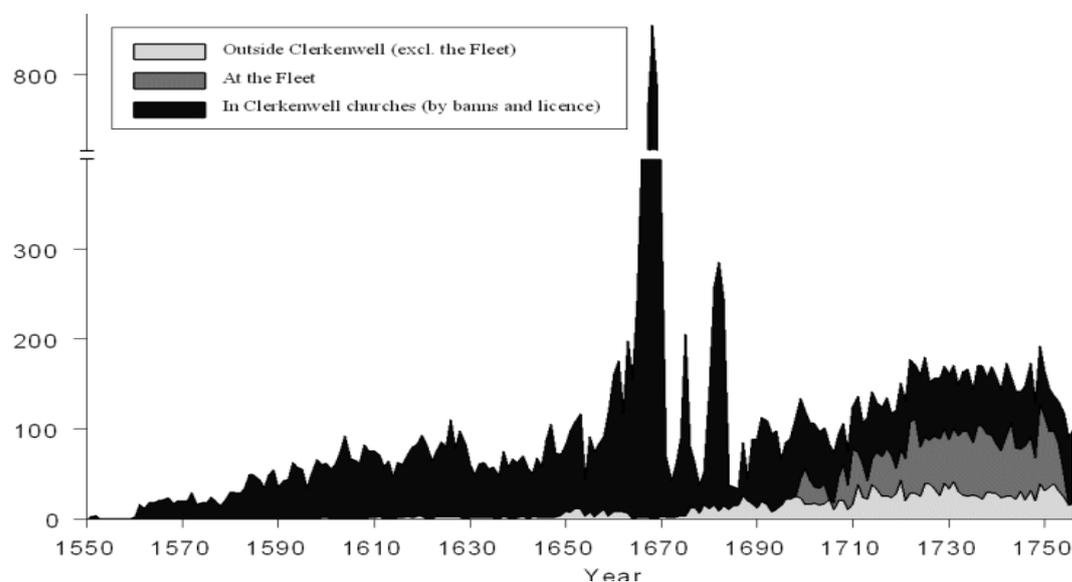
The eastern centres of clandestine marriage in the late seventeenth century declined after the provisions of the 1695 Marriage Duty Act curtailed their activities, but the effect was local rather than London-wide, allowing new centres to arise elsewhere. In the next half-century, Clerkenwell consumers of the marriage trade moved westwards (see Figure 3). They now went overwhelmingly to the Fleet and its environs, where

over two and a half thousand marriages of Clerkenwell inhabitants were conducted. This is almost as many as were conducted within Clerkenwell itself during the same period. In fact, Fleet marriages represented the majority of all Clerkenwell inhabitants' weddings for at least the two decades after 1730, and possibly for the whole fifty year period if we take licence marriages of incomers to Clerkenwell into account. In smaller numbers, Clerkenwell inhabitants went to the riverside parishes of St Benet and St Peter Paul's wharf near the lax licence-issuing authority of Doctor's commons. As many Clerkenwell inhabitants as married in the adjacent parish of St Andrew Holborn went much further west to a new clandestine marriage centre, the Mayfair Chapel in fashionable Westminster.

The effect of different forms of marriage on suburban parish registers

It is clear that London parishioners were marrying at many locations other than their home parish and that their propensity to do so varied over time. We shall now consider how the popularity of different forms of marriage in Clerkenwell, Aldgate and Cheapside affected the annual total of marriages between 1550 and 1750. Figure 4 below shows the combined annual total of Clerkenwell marriages by category, for all those who married at the parish churches supplemented with all traceable marriages of Clerkenwell inhabitants marrying elsewhere. Those marrying outside Clerkenwell are divided into two groups: those who married at the phenomenally popular Fleet, and those whose marriage could be traced in locations outside Clerkenwell.

Figure 4: Combined annual totals of marriages undertaken in Clerkenwell or by Clerkenwell inhabitants, 1550-1753

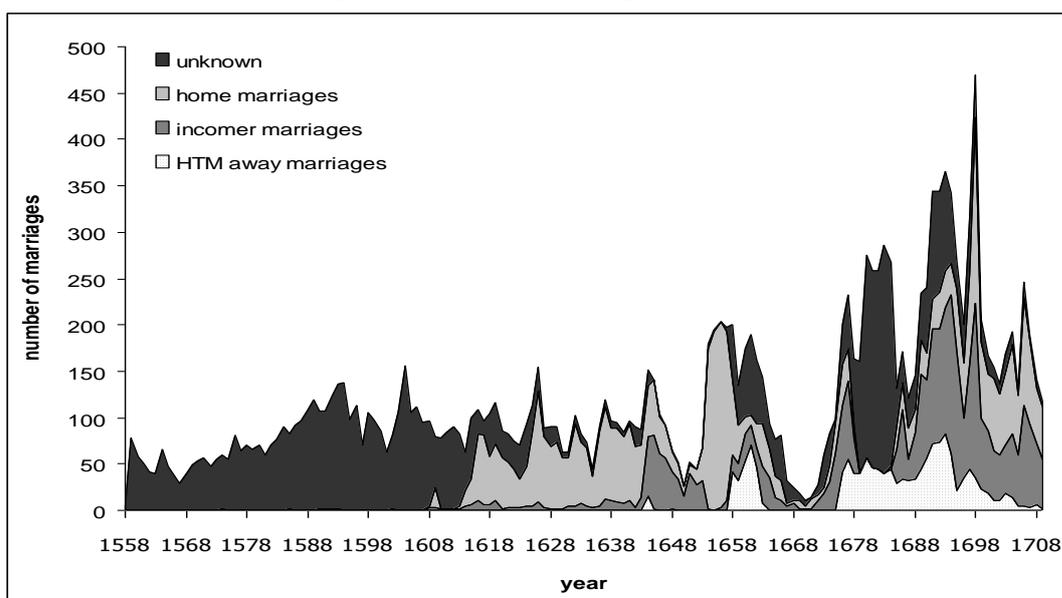


The impact of extra-parochial marriage is negligible before 1650, but by 1710, the majority of Clerkenwell inhabitants were not marrying in their own parish. In fact, as mentioned previously, the true extent of the preference for marriage outside the parish is probably even more striking, since some portion of the marriages in Clerkenwell churches will be licence marriages where neither party is from Clerkenwell. Unfortunately in Clerkenwell the parish of residence is not usually stated in the

marriage registers so it is difficult to ascertain precisely how many marriages did not involve at least one Clerkenwell resident and could be termed 'non-parishioner' marriages. However, the proportion of marriages in Clerkenwell by licence and therefore potentially liable to be of couples not from Clerkenwell was high. After 1730 when the registers reliably distinguish between these and banns marriages, almost half, or 1072 of 2504 marriages before 1753, were by licence.

In Aldgate, residence information in the marriage register allows for a more detailed examination of the extent to which marriages conducted in the parish church were of persons not resident in the parish. Figure 5 shows the contribution marriages such 'non-parishioner' marriages made each year to the total number of marriages either in Aldgate, or of Aldgate residents who married at the clandestine marriage centre of Holy Trinity Minories (marriages of Aldgate residents in other locations were not recovered). The Civil War period (1643-47) marks the first of several precipitous declines in the observable total number of marriages, and the number of non-parishioner marriages, presumably by licence, rises dramatically at the same time. This is the earlier of two periods in which non-parishioner marriages clearly dominate the Aldgate marriage register, the other being from 1687 to 1695. Especially striking is the proportion of marriages in each category in 1698, when a sharp increase in home parish marriage, presumably caused by the reinforcement of Marriage Duty Act legislation that curtailed clandestine marriages at Holy Trinity Minories, is actually exceeded by the number of licence marriages of incomers. Non-parishioner marriages may well have been common in other periods, but we cannot know for sure since it is not always possible to distinguish between those and the marriages of parishioners.

Figure 5: Combined annual totals of marriages undertaken in Aldgate or by Aldgate inhabitants marrying at Holy Trinity Minories (HTM), differentiating between Aldgate residents (home and HTM away marriages), non residents (incomers) and marriages where bride and groom residence is unknown

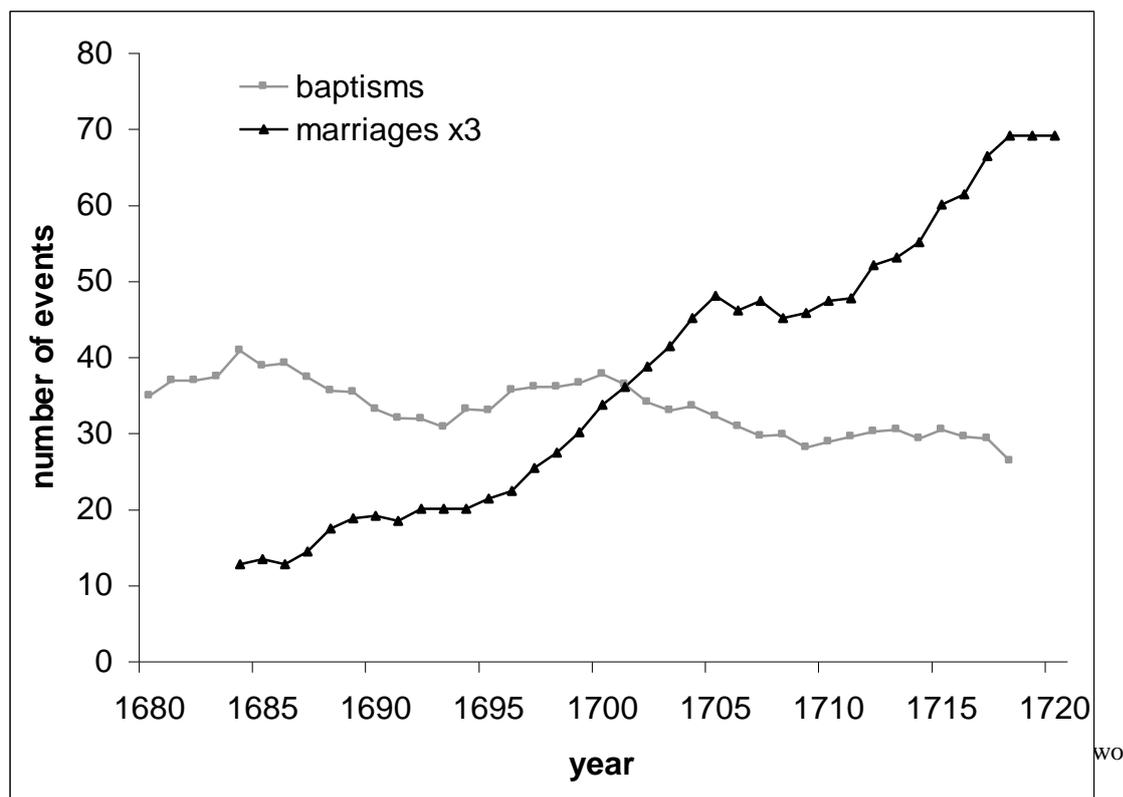


During the brief period of civil registration (1653-1660) when all inhabitants' marriages should theoretically have been recorded, home parish marriages in Aldgate at first surge, but then abruptly lose out to clandestine marriages at Holy Trinity

Minorities. At times Holy Trinity Minorities evidently took a major share of the marriages of Aldgate residents. However, although marriage records for Holy Trinity Minorities begin in 1644, there are many gaps in the registers now extant for the years before 1676, making it difficult to be sure of the numbers of Aldgate inhabitants marrying there each year before that date. The situation is further complicated by the likelihood that other clandestine marriage centres such as St James Place performed marriages of Aldgate residents, but are not represented here.

Aldgate was not unique in attracting large numbers of licence marriages. We have already noted that a number of Clerkenwell marriages after 1730 were by licence. The wealthy city parishes in Cheapside provide further evidence of this behaviour. Figure 6 illustrates the number of marriages celebrated each year in the St Mary le Bow, which by this time was united with the parishes of St Pancras Soper Lane and All Hallows Honey Lane, compared to the number of baptisms, using baptisms as a proxy for the size of the population.²⁴ While the population was stable or falling, the number of marriages taking place at St Mary le Bow rose, particularly after 1695 and 1698 when the activities of some clandestine marriage centres were curtailed by legislation. Had couples who might previously have married in these centres returned to home parish marriage, or did they instead find other ways to marry where they chose? The repeal of the legislation in 1706 results in a temporary levelling off in the number of marriages, but after 1712 the marriages totals continue to rise. These seem most unlikely to be home marriages of the parishes' own inhabitants, given the decline in the population implied by the fall in baptisms.

Figure 6: St Mary le Bow (united with All Hallows Honey Lane and St Pancras Soper Lane) baptisms and marriages per year 1680-1720, 9 year moving averages



Closer scrutiny of the registers reveals that the greater part of this rise in marriages around the time of the Marriage Duty Act of 1695 and its reiteration in 1698 is indeed caused by an increase in marriages of parties where both bride and groom are foreign to the parish. Presumably these couples had purchased a licence, enabling them to marry at whichever church they preferred. Between 1695 and 1706 when the Marriage Duty Act was in force, only 31 of 173 marriages have at least one partner resident in the parish. Other city parish churches may well have experienced similar phenomena.

These examples caution against simple interpretations of the response of home parish church marriages to changes in legislation based on counts of the number of marriages alone. Many London parishes, whether rich or poor, will not have experienced the sustained recovery in home parish marriage in the late 1690s that Boulton interpreted from the frequency of marriages in St Botolph Bishopsgate.²⁵ Where any apparent recovery exists in the total number of marriages per year, we must suspect that large numbers of couples from outside the parish marrying by licence were a substantial part of the increase, if not all of it.

Returning to the Aldgate marriages, it is clear that we must at times be missing substantial numbers of parishioner marriages that took place elsewhere but not at Holy Trinity Minories. Some indication of the expected level of home parish marriages if all Aldgate residents had married in the parish can be taken from the brief period after Civil Registration already mentioned. From 1654 until 1657, between 173 and 200 home marriages per year were recorded. Similarly, in 1698 there is a brief recovery of home parish marriage probably impelled by the reiteration of Marriage Duty Act legislation, and 199 home parish marriages are recorded, together with 46 marriages where residence is unknown, giving a potential maximum number of 245 home marriages per year. These figures suggests we might expect Aldgate's inhabitants to produce between 170 and 250 marriages per year after 1650. Some increase over time is expected since the population was growing rapidly. However, there are many years in which the numbers actually observed fall far short of this, even including marriages where residence is unknown, and augmenting the total with marriages of Aldgate residents recovered from Holy Trinity Minories. This deficit in marriages is either because of missing registers from Holy Trinity Minories, or because other locations were drawing Aldgate parishioners in substantial numbers.

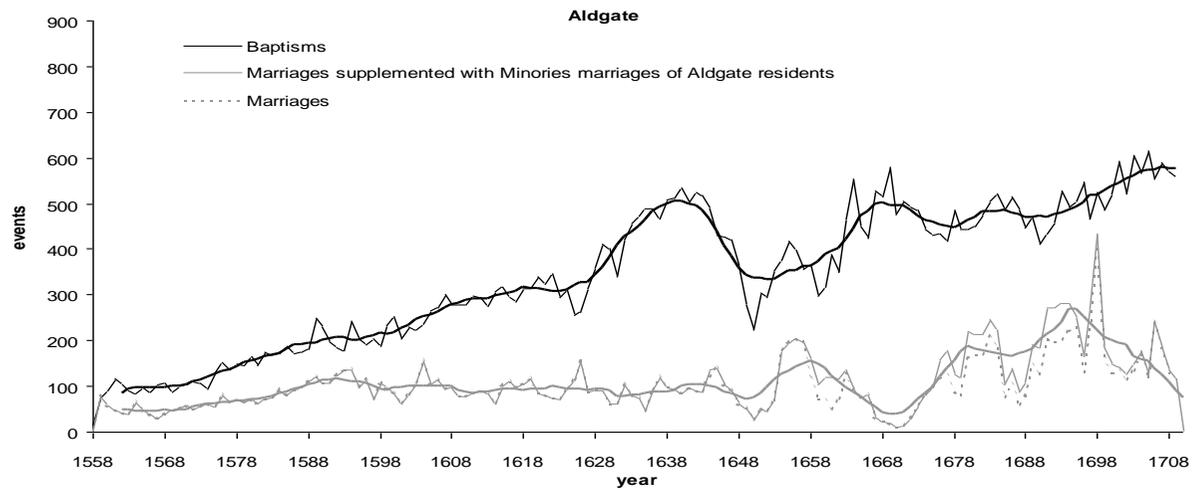
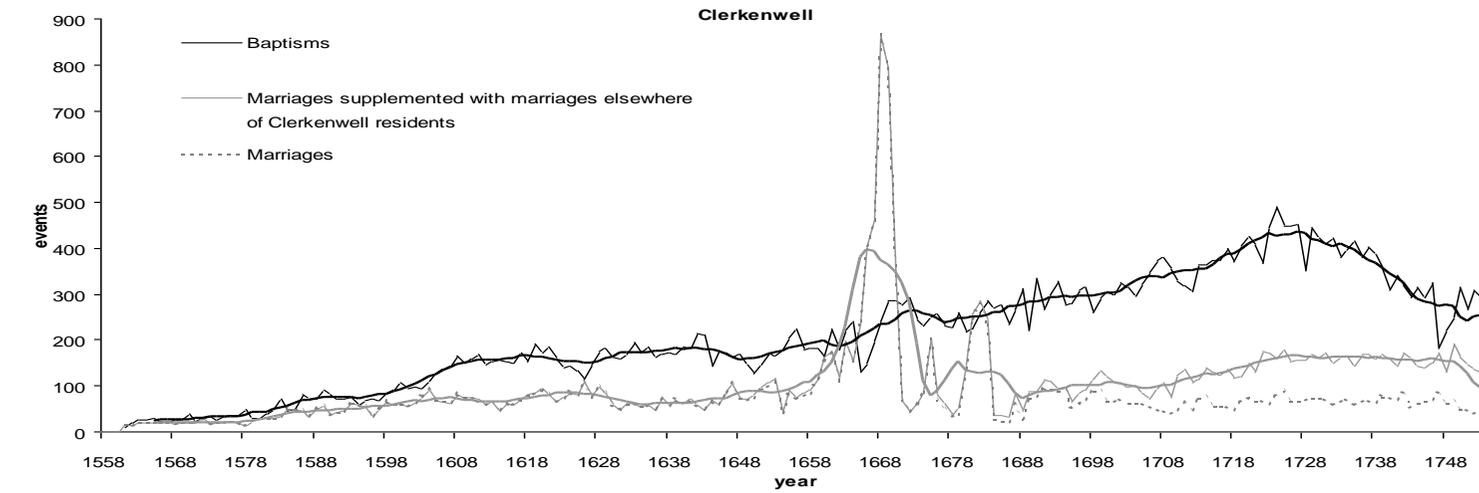
The contribution of observable Holy Trinity Minories clandestine marriages to all marriages of Aldgate inhabitants was far smaller than that of Fleet marriages to all marriages of Clerkenwell inhabitants in the following half century, as Figure 7 illustrates. The annual totals of baptisms are given in the figure, as an indication of population growth. One way of ascertaining whether the expected number of marriages generated by a parish's population has been obtained is to consider whether the trend in annual frequencies of marriages follows that of baptisms. Such a correspondence can be observed between 1550 and 1750 for a nationwide sample of

²⁵ Jeremy Boulton, 'The Marriage Duty Act and Parochial Registration in London, 1695-1706', in Kevin Schurer and Tom Arkell (eds), *Surveying the People: the interpretation and use of document sources for the study of population in the later seventeenth century*, Leopard's Head Press: Oxford (1992), pp. 233-234.

404 English parishes.²⁶ In both Clerkenwell and Aldgate, marriages and baptisms closely follow the same trend as each other until around 1600, and thereafter diverge to differing extents. Clerkenwell marriages continue to follow the same trend as baptisms within the parish but more loosely, whereas there is little correspondence after 1600 in the Aldgate series except during the Civil Registration period already mentioned.

²⁶ E A Wrigley and R S Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1989), pp. 780-81.

Figure 7: Marriages and baptisms per year in Clerkenwell and Aldgate (number of events and nine year moving average)



Boulton has suggested that the ratio between baptisms and marriage should stay fairly constant, so changes in it can be used to gauge in which periods a parish is likely to have been losing marriages to some other location, or conversely gaining more marriages than its population can be expected to have generated.²⁷ This may allow us to draw some conclusions about the coverage of marriage registers, but only if losses of home parishioners and gains of non-parishioners were not counterbalancing each other. Besides, some fluctuations in annual totals of marriages are to be expected, partly as a reflection of changes in mortality, which varied greatly from one year to the next in London because of periodic severe outbreaks of epidemic disease. This is most obviously the case for remarriage, since it follows the death of a spouse. However, the break up of households and increased housing availability resulting from the death toll during epidemics probably also resulted in a boom in first marriages. Peaks in Aldgate annual marriages evident in 1593-4, 1604, 1626 and 1637 and less prominently in Clerkenwell in 1604, 1626 and 1647 immediately follow plague years. There is an enormous peak in marriages in 1666-8 following the 1665 plague in Clerkenwell, although some portion of these may have been marriages of central city dwellers whose churches were being repaired or rebuilt after the Fire of 1666. The 1665 plague was also severe in Aldgate and its church also survived the Fire, but there is no observable peak in marriages in the years following, probably because Aldgate inhabitants were choosing to marry elsewhere at this time. Frustratingly, Holy Trinity Minories marriages for the late 1660s are no longer extant, but it is reasonable to suppose that it was taking at least a similar share of London marriages as it had hitherto.²⁸ Indeed, the sudden loss of so many churches after the Great Fire in 1666 may well have propelled clandestine marriages centres to greater prominence.

Period measures of the baptism to marriage ratio help to neutralize the effect of short term fluctuations in mortality, and the results of decadal calculations are presented in Table 1. Before 1610 in Clerkenwell and 1600 in Aldgate, the ratios fluctuate around a low 1.6 to 2.0 and 2.1 to 2.3 respectively. During the period of comprehensive Civil Registration the ratio in Aldgate was 2.0. By the 1630s, 40s, 60s and 70s in Aldgate the ratio is triple the sixteenth century figure, strongly suggesting deficits in the number of marriages of Aldgate inhabitants. The rising trend in the ratios from 1600 to 1640 echoes that found by Boulton for the neighbouring parish of St Botolph Bishopsgate, but is more pronounced.²⁹ In Clerkenwell, the ratios are more stable and do not ever rise so high as in Aldgate, probably because the additional marriages of Clerkenwell residents marrying elsewhere succeeded in capturing a greater proportion of inhabitants' marriages throughout the period. A tentative 'plausible range' for the baptism to marriage ratio in suburban London between 1560 and 1749 drawn from these and Boulton's calculations might be between 1.5 and 3.5. By this criterion, in seven of the fifteen decades for which we have Aldgate marriages the ratio of baptisms to marriage exceeds the plausible level, but only does so in three out of eighteen decades of Clerkenwell (and Clerkenwell inhabitant's) marriages.

²⁷ Boulton (1991), p.24.

²⁸ Boulton estimates the annual marriages at Holy Trinity Minories in 1666-70 as 397 per year, based on simple linear interpolation between the known totals for 1662 and 1676. Boulton (1993), p.198.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Table 1: Decadal ratios of baptisms to marriages in Aldgate and Clerkenwell

Decade	Aldgate	Clerkenwell	Decade	Aldgate	Clerkenwell
1560-69	2.14				
1570-79	2.21	1.84	1660-69	6.73	0.68
1580-89	2.28	1.63	1670-79	6.33	2.95
1590-99	2.06	1.61	1680-89	3.30	2.44
1600-09	2.86	1.95	1690-99	2.25	3.58
1610-19	3.56	2.61	1700-09	4.40	4.13
1620-29	3.76	2.00	1710-19		3.46
1630-39	6.05	3.18	1720-29		3.20
1640-49	5.70	3.01	1730-39		2.94
1650-59	3.32	2.33	1740-49		2.19

These London baptism to marriage ratios are lower than the birth to marriage ratios obtained for a England as a whole, which ranged from 3.2 to 4.4 in the same nineteen decades.³⁰ The reasons for this are difficult to determine precisely, but will derive at least in part from differences in the age structure of London parishes and other communities, and the fact that Wrigley and Schofield inflated their baptism totals to encompass all births, whereas our baptisms will form a proportionately smaller numerator. Additionally, the greater likelihood of remarriage in London will have enlarged our denominator. The divergence between baptisms and marriages that seems to have taken place in London after 1600 or 1610 is not apparent in the figures for England as a whole, and is an entirely metropolitan phenomenon that appears to have been driven by parishioners marrying outside their home parish.

Age at first marriage

Calculating ages at first marriage through family reconstitution based on London parish records provides perhaps the only possible means of studying how change occurred over a long period of time. Reported ages are rare, and where they are more universally recorded it is typically for only a handful of years, and only for brides. We shall consider what can be pieced together from stated ages of marriage in London registers in more detail below, but first we will consider what the Aldgate, Clerkenwell and Cheapside family reconstitutions can tell us about long-term trends.

Marriage ages calculated from family reconstitutions of London parishes need to be interpreted with caution, especially in the light of the tendency of Londoners to marry outside their home parish and potentially escape observation. The first issue to bear in mind is that we are restricted to studying the London-born, and only the minority among them who resided in the same parish until they married. This is because age is calculated

³⁰ Wrigley and Schofield (1989), pp. 189.

from dates of marriage and baptism once a link has been made between the same-named individual in each. Secondly, the earliest decades of marriages cannot be used because baptisms that might be linked to them would have occurred before records were kept. Since baptism records do not begin continuously until the mid 1560s in Clerkenwell, age at first marriage can only be measured from 1610 onwards. The periods in Aldgate have been calculated so as to be comparable. For this study the bride or groom's baptism and first marriage were allowed to be up to 45 years distant rather than the more usual 50 years because the large volume of same-named individuals in London produces many more false positive record links than a smaller parish community might, and there is a trade-off between allowing all possible matches for the sake of completeness, or restricting the period in which matches may be made more stringently in order to prevent very unlikely matches. Thirdly, if too many marriages are missing, there is a risk that baptisms will be incorrectly linked to a marriage of some other person of the same name, even if records for which competing possible links exist are excluded. The reverse problem, where too many marriages are present because of residents from elsewhere marrying in the parish, is less of an issue provided records featuring in more than one possible link are ignored, and will simply result in fewer firm observations being made. This third and final issue is particularly relevant to the Aldgate reconstitution, given the highly variable coverage of the Aldgate marriage register.

Table 2 sets out the ages at first marriage for Aldgate and Clerkenwell inhabitants of both sexes that have been obtained from the family reconstitutions, in three periods. As the Aldgate records were gathered up to 1711 only, the third period can only be studied in Clerkenwell. The figures for Clerkenwell include marriages of Clerkenwell inhabitants taking place outside the parish at the Fleet and elsewhere, and those for Aldgate include marriages at Holy Trinity Minories. As we have seen, these supplementary marriages do not make an equal contribution in the two locations, with Holy Trinity Minories marriages augmenting Aldgate marriages less than the more comprehensively recovered extra-parochial marriages of Clerkenwell parishioners.

Table 2: Age at first marriage for suburban-born bachelor to spinster/widow marriages and suburban-born spinster to bachelor/widower marriages

Year married	Clerkenwell				Aldgate			
	mean	median	std dev	n	mean	median	std dev	n
bachelors								
1610-1659	27.6	25.4	7.5	151	28.5	26.2	8.1	294
1660-1709	29.3	28.1	7.8	289	30.0	28.5	8.3	488
1710-1749	27.7	26.0	7.4	378				
spinsters								
1610-1659	24.7	22.5	7.0	248	25.6	23.4	7.6	397
1660-1709	27.5	26.4	8.0	373	29.1	28.2	8.7	642
1710-1749	25.9	23.5	8.1	416				

Between 1660 and 1709 these results indicate there was a peak in bachelor and spinster marriage ages in both these suburban populations, at least among those who continued to marry in their parish of residence. The very late mean age of Aldgate spinsters marrying in this period appears to have been driven by marriages in the 1660s and 1670s. By the early eighteenth century, Aldgate women were marrying at younger ages similar to those of Clerkenwell women: for the 173 Aldgate women marrying between 1700 and 1711 the mean age at marriage had fallen to 27.8 years. In the latest period of 1710 to 1749, male and female marriages ages in Clerkenwell fell, but remained higher than in the earliest period.

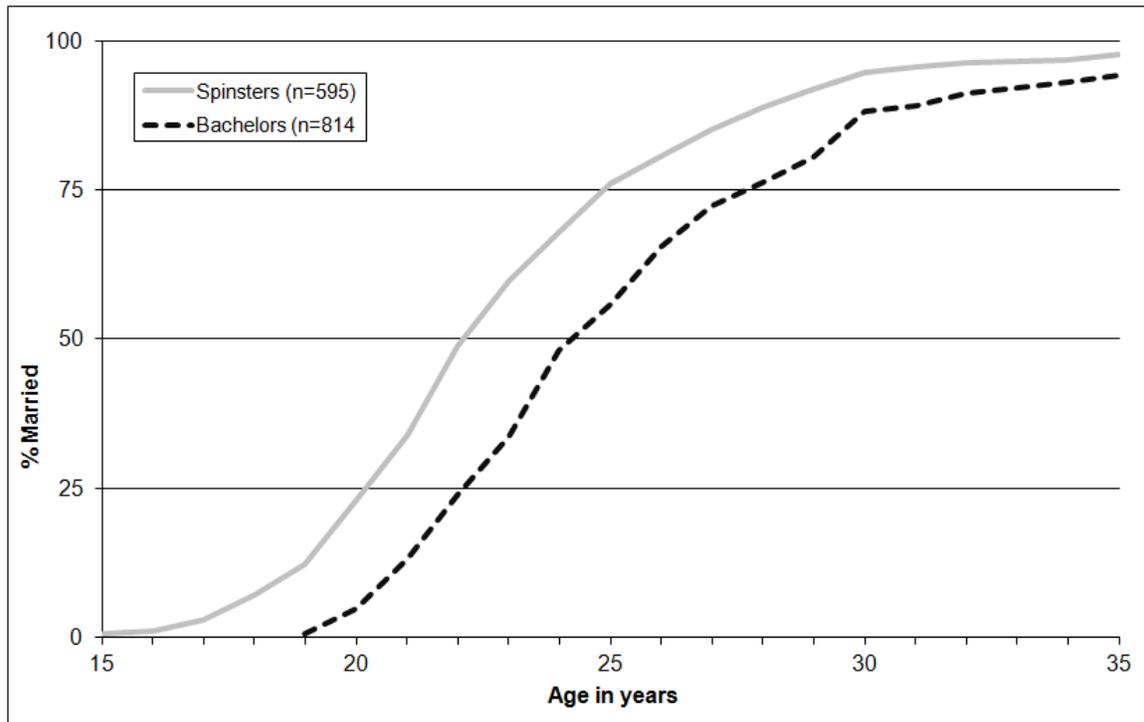
On average, women married younger than men in every period, usually by about two to three years, and the age at which they married fluctuated more over time than did male age at first marriage. With a median age upwards of 22.5 years, these suburban women were older than 77 higher status women of central London traceable in our Cheapside family reconstitutions, half of whom were married by their twentieth birthday. The delay was probably a reflection of the need, among less privileged women, to work and save up earnings before contemplating marriage.

Bachelors who marry widows and spinsters who marry widowers typically marry later than those couples where both parties were marrying for the first time. Since the figures above include both types of marriage for each sex, changes in age over time could simply reflect changes in the extent of remarriage. However, Boulton's evidence on remarriage of widows in Stepney, London suggests that if anything there was a decline in female remarriage over this period, so this is unlikely to have affected bachelors' ages at least.³¹ Clearly the increasing availability of other marriage locations did not lead to universally younger ages at first marriage in London. However, it may have affected the ages observed for brides and grooms marrying in their home parish, especially if younger couples were more likely to marry by licence or at clandestine centres.

Reported ages from clandestine marriage centres reveals some reason to suspect that they may indeed have been especially popular with younger couples. St Katherine by the Tower, neighbouring the riverside portion of St Botolph Aldgate and the Tower of London, was an extra-parochial area that seems to have operated as a modest centre of clandestine marriage. In its registers, ages were consistently stated between 1687 and 1712, and late marriage was extremely unusual. Among 595 spinsters married there in this period, almost all (92%) were married before their 30th birthday, and the mean age at first marriage was just 23.5 years. There was less variation among women in this dataset, with a low standard deviation of 4.19. In other words, a young age at marriage was almost universal among this group of women, as the frequency distribution curve in Figure 8 illustrates.

³¹ Boulton (1990) p. 327.

Figure 8: Cumulative frequency distribution of ages at first marriage for bachelors and spinsters marrying at St Katherine by the Tower between 1687 and 1712



Bachelors who married at St Katherine by the Tower were also young, typically only two years older than spinsters, although there were fewer very young grooms than brides: less than 5% of grooms married before their 21st birthday, the age after which parental consent was not needed, whereas almost a quarter (23%) of the brides had married before reaching 21 years. Equally, there were very few ‘child’ brides, with less than 3% marrying before their 18th birthday. It is possible that clandestine marriage centres allowed young women to enter the marriage market earlier than they might have otherwise have been permitted to do so, but men evidently were seldom in a position to contemplate marriage until reaching their majority, wherever they chose to marry. The watershed ages of 18 for females and 21 for males may not have fallen far beyond the completion of growth following puberty.³² This is not to say that earlier marriage was not

³²Puberty is easier to measure in girls than boys, through mean age at menarche. In Tanner’s clinically derived stagings of physical development, menarche predated the end of puberty and attainment of full stature by just under 2 years on average, but with considerable individual variation (W. A. Marshall and J. M. Tanner: *Variations in pattern of pubertal changes in girls*. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 44:235 (1969), 291-303). Laslett argued that in the eighteenth century female menarche (the simplest measure of the timing of the onset of puberty) was below 15 years, or ranged from 12 to 16 years, but derived this indirectly from the ages of 77 married women and their co-resident children from a 1733 Belgrade inhabitants listing that is rendered problematic by age-heaping. (Peter Laslett, ‘Age at menarche in Europe since the eighteenth century’. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 16 (1985), pp. 221-236). Mean age at menarche was almost certainly higher than this in nineteenth century England. In Birmingham for a cohort of 623 girls born before 1845 the range was 10 to 21 years with an average of 15 to 16 years, and this is

possible, and earlier child-bearing too, but perhaps only at the expense of the mother's development in particular.

Male entry into marriage may have been constrained by apprenticeship, since apprentices were not usually free to marry. The average age on beginning apprenticeship in London fell from about 18 years to 16 years between 1600 and 1750, although it varied by geographical origin of the apprentice.³³ This gives an average age on completion of 23 to 25 years, if apprenticeship lasted a full seven years. Apprenticeship was the traditional route to citizenship in London, and citizenship was not available to those under 24 years. After attaining citizenship one could set up shop and legitimately trade in one's own right, starting to train one's own apprentices. Defoe's advice to tradesman suggests that he saw some time after this as the best time for marriage, although we might suspect that many actually married sooner from the fact that he devotes an entire chapter of *The Complete Tradesman* (1729) to the ills of marrying too soon!³⁴ However, neither citizenship nor a business of one's own was a realistic prospect for many poorer Londoners. In a fast-growing city with a high proportion of new migrants and many labouring opportunities, there must have been numerous suburbanites who had never had an apprenticeship, left it early, or attained journeyman status without ever becoming a master. Citizenship was in any case much less important in the suburbs since they were outside guild jurisdiction, and even in central London there were areas exempt from guild authority. Alien craftsmen and merchants in London were well aware of these loopholes, and settled disproportionately in these parts of the metropolis.³⁵

Returning to the St Katherine by the Tower marriages, what of the reliability of this source? We cannot know for sure how accurately the ages in St Katherine by the Tower were reported or recorded, but little evidence of age heaping was detected.³⁶ The accuracy of age reporting can be spot-checked for a handful of instances where the bride or groom was resident in Aldgate and was found to have been baptized there. In the three cases so identified between 1686 and 1699, the calculated age concurred with that reported.³⁷ The low number of such traceable individuals hints at another important

corroborated by other early nineteenth century English data reported by Brown, whereas Norwegian and Danish cohorts in the same period had means of around 17 years. (P E Brown, 'The Age at Menarche', *British Journal of Preventative Social Medicine*, 20 (1966), 9-14; P Helm and S Helm, 'Uncertainties in designation of age at menarche in the nineteenth century, revised mean for Denmark, 1835' *Annals of Human Biology*, 14 (1987), pp. 371-37; K Liestøl, 'Social conditions and menarcheal age: the importance of early years of life', *Annals of Human Biology* 9 (1982) pp. 521-537.)

³³ Patrick Wallis, Cliff Webb and Chris Minns, 'Leaving home and entering service: the age of apprenticeship in early modern London', *Continuity and Change*, 25 (2010), pp. 377-404. See p. 386, 388.

³⁴ Daniel Defoe, *The Complete Tradesman*, London (1729) Chapter XI.

³⁵ Lien Bich Luu, *Immigrants and the industries of London 1500-1700*, Aldershot: Ashgate (2005) pp. 124-126.

³⁶ Whipple's Index values were calculated as 107 for spinsters and 109 for bachelors.

³⁷ 20 spinsters and 50 bachelors marrying at St Katherine by the Tower were stated to be from Aldgate, although 33 of the men were mariners and therefore unlikely to be traceable in earlier baptism records. The three individuals traceable without ambiguity in the Aldgate baptism register were: Sarah Rivitt, born 22 July 1675 and married on 21 November 1697 aged 22 years; Jeremiah Mallory, born 29 April 1672 and married on 16 February 1695/6 aged 23 years, and George Wright, born 6 October 1672 and married on 25 April 1687 aged 24 years.

reason for variation between these stated ages and those calculated from family reconstitution. About four-fifths of those marrying in St Katherine by the Tower were resident in London, but the majority of them were almost certainly not London born, unlike those traceable through family reconstitution. Some may only have been passing through the metropolis: mariners, a more transient occupational group than most, formed a large proportion of the men. However, excluding marriages where the groom was a mariner makes no statistically significant difference to female age at first marriage.

Compared to other London sources of stated ages at marriage, St Katherine's by the Tower brides were unusually concentrated in particular age groups, as can be seen in Table 3. These compare St Katherine's with brides (or intended brides) from the Bishop of London marriage licence allegations, Stepney residents during the period of comprehensive Civil Registration, and the clandestine marriage centre of St James Duke Place. The two clandestine marriage centres have similar age distributions, and much less variance than the Stepney parish population or those marrying by licence. Four fifths of marriages in St James' and St Katherine's are concentrated into the 20-24 years and 25-29 years age groups, compared to two thirds of Stepney residents, or those marrying by licence. Records with ages from the two clandestine centres are from overlapping time periods whereas the other sources are earlier, so whether this is truly a difference between those marrying in different locations, or change over time, remains to be seen.

Table 3: Age distribution of spinsters marrying bachelors or widowers 1598-1712

Age range	London licences 1598-1619	Stepney 1653-9	St James Duke Place 1698-1700	St Katherine by the Tower 1696-1712
15-19	20.7	23.3	9.2	12.1
20-24	43.0	49.8	47.0	55.8
25-29	20.3	16.4	30.5	24.0
30-34	12.1	6.3	9.5	4.9
35-39	1.9	2.5	1.5	2.2
over 40	2.0	1.8	2.3	1.0
Total brides	1302	1416	not stated	595

Source for other London figures: Boulton (1990) pp. 334, 339. Although the St James Duke Place total number of brides is not stated, according to Boulton (1993) p. 198 the total number of marriages in this location between 1696 and 1700 was 578, so it is presumably less than this figure.

Using the family reconstitution data, we can test the hypothesis that clandestine marriage centres were popular among couples of different ages to those who stayed in their home parish to marry for a specific parish population, by comparing the mean age at first marriage in Clerkenwell churches and of Clerkenwell inhabitants marrying at the Fleet. The first Fleet marriage that can be matched to the baptism of bride or groom in Clerkenwell took place in 1699. Taking the 391 Clerkenwell resident women who married between 1700 and 1749 either in the parish churches or at the Fleet, the mean age of home marriers was 27.5 years, whereas the mean age of those marrying in the clandestine centre was almost two full years younger, at 25.6 years. The difference

between the mean ages was *t*-tested for statistical significance and found to be significant ($P < 0.05$). If we repeat the exercise, extending the comparison to all women marrying in the parish or away from it between 1660 and 1749, whether in a clandestine centre or by licence, a similar difference of almost two years is again evident, with the mean age of home marriers being 27.2 years compared to 25.4 years for those who married elsewhere. The increased sample size of 789 women allows for greater confidence that this is significant and no chance finding ($P < 0.01$). Considering the 667 men who married in the same period, again there is a highly significant ($P < 0.01$) age difference between those who married in their home parish and those who married elsewhere, with the difference between mean ages also about two years, at 29.1 and 27.4 years respectively.

Clearly there is an association between marriage location and age at marriage, but this was not because the clandestine marriage centres were crowded with underage couples desperate to marry with or without parental permission. Rather, clandestine marriage centres simply attracted more of those in the 'prime' years for marriage. Where marriage did begin at very young ages, it was most likely to involve higher status men and women fulfilling their parents' wishes and marrying by licence.

Prenuptial pregnancy

We have now seen that clandestine marriage was not a widespread means of marrying for the first time at extremely young ages, nor with large age differences between bride and groom, so couples seem to have had little to hide in this respect. But what of bridal pregnancy? Did the knowledge that marriage could be procured so quickly and easily even induce more Londoners to relax their attitudes towards premarital sex? These are questions that can be addressed directly through the family reconstitutions of Aldgate and Clerkenwell. For those couples where we observe a subsequent child baptism in the parish register, it is possible to determine what proportion of women were already pregnant at the time of their marriage. The results of this exercise are presented in Table 4, dividing the women into those who married in their home parish and those who married at a centre of clandestine marriage over two successive periods, the first when Holy Trinity Minories was conducting clandestine marriages and the second when the Fleet was in operation. The late prenuptially pregnant (pnp) group in each case consists of those women who married during the first two trimesters of their pregnancy, whereas the early prenuptially pregnant group consists of those who were in the third trimester and probably visibly pregnant. Since gestation period varies between different women and many of the intervals are calculated using date of baptism rather than date of birth, assignment to these groupings cannot be regarded as definite, but is nonetheless a useful indicator of how far pregnancy had progressed before marriage took place.

Table 4: Prenuptial pregnancy (pnp) by marriage location of parents, indicating the difference in days between marriage date and first baptism date for each category

	1695-1753		1644-1694*	
	Clerkenwell	Fleet	Aldgate	Minories
Early pnp (>=180 and <272 days)	19 (2.8%)	57 (9.8%)	16 (6.2%)	11 (6.5%)
Late pnp (<180 days)	29 (4.3%)	34 (5.9%)	4 (1.6%)	4 (2.4%)
Not pnp (>= 272 days)	632 (92.9%)	491 (84.3%)	238 (92.2%)	153 (91.1%)
Total prenuptial pregnancies	48 (7.1%)	91 (15.7%)	20 (7.8%)	15 (8.9%)

* Selected years where Holy Trinity Minories records are extant only, comprising the 25 years 1644-7, 1659-61 and 1676-94.

Considering firstly the total number of prenuptial pregnancies, it is immediately clear that the great majority of London brides were not pregnant, wherever they chose to marry. At the most, among Fleet brides, less than 1 in 6 women were pregnant at the time of their marriage. In London for the earlier period of 1600 to 1650, Finlay observed an almost identical average prenuptial pregnancy rate of 16% among his home parish marrying brides.³⁸ London does not seem to have been precocious in this respect. Rates of prenuptial pregnancy in England as a whole were higher over the period 1650 to 1750, with a fifth to a quarter of women prenuptially pregnant, and nationally there was a rising trend then and thereafter, except in the final quarter of the eighteenth century.³⁹ Other towns were more similar to London: by 1700-49, the English market towns of Banbury and Gainsborough had total prenuptial pregnancy rates of 17.1% and 15.0% respectively.⁴⁰

Choice of marriage location does affect the prenuptial pregnancy rates of Clerkenwell inhabitants in the later period, with almost twice as many pregnant brides marrying at the clandestine marriage centre of the Fleet as in their own parish churches. A two-way chi-square test confirmed that there was a strongly significant association between marriage location and whether the bride was pregnant for Clerkenwell ($P < 0.001$). Most of the difference is in early pnp, where the bride would probably have been noticeably pregnant. Concealment of pregnancy thus seems to have been, or to have become, a motive for clandestine marriage, although it could hardly have been a widespread reason for it. Among Aldgate inhabitants there was surprisingly little difference overall between those marrying clandestinely or at the parish church, and no statistically significant association between marriage location and bridal pregnancy.

The difference between the two clandestine centres of Holy Trinity Minories and the Fleet requires further consideration. Whereas 11.0% of all Clerkenwell resident brides were pregnant, only 8.2% of all Aldgate resident brides were. Is the Aldgate figure too

³⁸ Finlay (1981), pp. 149-50.

³⁹ E. A. Wrigley, R S Davies, J E Oeppen and R S Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution 1580-1837*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. 421.

⁴⁰ Peter Kitson, *Family formation, Male Occupation and the Nature of Parochial Registration in England c.1538-1837*, unpublished Cambridge PhD thesis, 2004, pp. 201-203.

low to be plausible, especially for those who married clandestinely at Holy Trinity Minories? There could have been some real change in the proportion of women who were pregnant at marriage over time, as there are fluctuations in the national data, but it seems unlikely that such change would only have affected clandestine marriages and not home parish marriages. At 7.1% and 7.8% respectively, the proportions of those marrying in Clerkenwell churches and Aldgate's parish church who were prenuptially pregnant are very similar. The observation period for Minories marriages was fragmented owing to gaps in the registers, and this may have affected the calculations in some way, despite attempts to control for it by only using those periods where both St Botolph Aldgate church and Holy Trinity Minories registers were extant. There is, however, a possible behavioural explanation, deriving from the fact that the comparison between the behaviour of Clerkenwell residents and Aldgate inhabitants is not exactly equal in other respects than chronological period. The two clandestine centres differ in their relative importance and location.

While the Fleet dominated the clandestine marriage market in London in the first half of the eighteenth century and was overwhelmingly the most popular clandestine marriage centre for Clerkenwell inhabitants, Holy Trinity Minories was only one of several clandestine centres available to Aldgate inhabitants. It was initially supposed that Holy Trinity Minories would prove a popular place to marry among those Aldgate residents choosing a clandestine marriage because this extra parochial area forms an enclave within the parish of St Botolph Aldgate, and was therefore conveniently close at hand; indeed, it is more centrally located than Aldgate's own parish church. By contrast, the Fleet and its environs are close to Clerkenwell but not immediately adjacent to the parish. It may well be that the extreme proximity of Holy Trinity Minories was actually a deterrent to those seeking privacy, especially to those Aldgate women who found themselves in the embarrassing situation of being visibly pregnant before marriage. Aldgate inhabitants might instead have preferred to marry at other convenient but not quite so close at hand clandestine centres, such as St James Duke Place or St Katherine by the Tower.

In London, greater ease of marrying seems to have been accompanied by less premarital sex rather than more, although for the minority of couples who did have sex before marriage and experienced a pregnancy, a clandestine marriage was more likely than home parish marriage. Importantly, the rates of prenuptial pregnancy we can obtain from marriage and baptism registers are a far cry from those supposed to exist by contemporary commentators, and picked up on by later historians. For the Savoy Chapel, Outhwaite repeats the eighteenth century commentator Horace Walpole's assertion that 900 in 1400 brides were pregnant, implying a rate of 65%, nearly four times as great a proportion as that actually observed among Clerkenwell inhabitants marrying at the Fleet.⁴¹ Nor did those women who married clandestinely display any greater tendency to be pregnant at marriage than other English populations; rather, at the population level, those couples marrying in their home parish seem to have been abnormally reticent in commencing a sexual relationship.

⁴¹ Reported in Outhwaite (1995), pp. 61.

Conclusion

Marrying privately, in a location other than the parish church of either bride or groom by licence, or at a centre of clandestine marriage, was the default choice for suburban Londoners by the mid eighteenth century, and had been a major factor affecting London marriages since the early seventeenth century. Londoners could marry when and where they pleased and took full advantage of this freedom, but this did not mean behavioural constraints dissolved, nor did economic considerations cease to restrict entry into marriage.

Banns marriage was disliked, and there were many perceived advantages to marrying privately. Clandestine centres provided the quickest means of marrying, while licence marriage provided a wider choice of location. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the extraordinarily popular Fleet combined the attractions of an entertainment venue with a quick, convenient and cheap marriage ceremony in a way that had mass appeal. Mapping the spatial distribution of marriages of suburban inhabitants taking place elsewhere reveals its shifting topography, which depended largely on the availability of other forms of marriage. When clandestine centres were suppressed or unavailable, licence marriage could meet the demand for private marriage instead, with the consequence that a substantial proportion of marriages registered in many London parishes will not be of the parish's own inhabitants, particularly after the Marriage Duty Act legislation of 1695. This has important implications for any study that makes use of London parish marriage records, and is often a hidden problem because registers do not routinely distinguish between banns or licence marriage, or state the parish of residence of those marrying.

The age at which sixteenth and seventeenth century suburban Londoners entered marriage for the first time was younger on average than in other English communities. Few married at very young ages except the daughters of wealthy merchants, as observed in city centre parishes and among early licence allegations. At clandestine marriage centres in late seventeenth century London, bachelors very seldom married before their 21st birthday or after their 35th birthday and spinsters rarely married until they were at least 18 years old or after reaching 30. Most spinsters were married before their 23rd birthday and most bachelors before their 25th birthday. These were egalitarian partnerships in term of the age difference between couples, with bachelors most likely to marry spinsters the same age as themselves, or just one or two years younger. Among London-born suburbanites whose age at marriage can be calculated because they were baptized and married in the same parish, the median age of marriage between 1610 and 1660 was virtually the same as for those marrying clandestinely at the turn of the eighteenth century. However, there are reasons to question the long-term stability this seems to suggest. The calculated marriage ages of both Clerkenwell and Aldgate inhabitants exhibit a rise for both sexes in the intervening years 1660 to 1710. The situation is complicated by differences in the age structure of marriage depending on where the ceremony took place. Those marrying in clandestine centres were particularly

likely to be drawn from the 'prime' ages for marriage, leaving a residual of older brides and grooms who married at their home parish churches.

The incidence of pregnancy before marriage in London was low and could not have come close to being responsible for the popularity of clandestine marriage overall. There may have been a slight increase over time, but rates of prenuptial pregnancy remained lower than elsewhere in England, and there is little evidence that availability of quick options. Prenuptial pregnancy did vary by marriage location, and among eighteenth century Clerkenwell inhabitants the minority of brides who were pregnant were more likely to have a Fleet wedding than a banns marriage. Prior to this, the smaller minority of late seventeenth century Aldgate inhabitants who were pregnant before marriage displayed no significant preference for a clandestine marriage at Holy Trinity Minories. This may be because its location close to the centre of the parish rendered marriage there insufficiently private for those hoping to conceal a pregnancy.

By now it will be clear that the negative connotations of 'clandestine' are misleading, and furtive or transgressive behaviour was not a significant motive for clandestine marriage in seventeenth and eighteenth century London. We are now in a position to assess how far couples marrying at clandestine marriage centres or by licence were typical, and thus to consolidate our knowledge of trends in marriage age over time, for understanding the way choice of marriage location really did interact with the decision to marry is an essential prerequisite to understanding Londoners' demographic behavior.