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**Marriage Strategies of Midlands ‘Lesser
Gentry’, c.1660-1820**

by

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of Master of Philosophy
in History

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The West Midlands Counties showing approximate geographical locations of the main families and other families based on an outline map from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/34/English_counties_1851_with_ridings.svg/515px-English_counties_1851_with_ridings.svg.png	

Acknowledgement

When I approached retirement my 'A level' Sociology students repeatedly asked what I would do afterwards. I used to joke that I intended to go back to university and return to my first love history - but never believed it would be possible, until by a mental 'accident' I discovered Leicester University's MA in the 'Development of the Country House' and was persuaded to apply. Enjoying this, I decided to continue my studies and pursue work I had started thirty years earlier, when working in Northamptonshire.

Professor Mark Knights generously and willingly took me on when my first supervisor departed. Mark opened my eyes in so many ways, encouraged me to broaden my view of my theme, and throughout showed exemplary patience and kindness as I struggled to come to terms with the demands of advanced study. Regular meetings with him were instructive and constructive – even if sometimes uncomfortable for me. His comments were incisive and his questions pertinent. He read and re-read countless drafts of chapters and always gave helpful and constructive advice. Mark showed belief in me when I doubted and gradually coaxed me to a point where I could complete and submit. I value the time spent with him and the support he gave to me.

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Declaration

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Note about transcripts

For clarity, all dates have been modernised to show the year starting in January rather than March. Capitalisation, punctuation and spelling in transcriptions of original materials have been modernised.

Abstract

Secondary writers describing lesser gentry marital practices have usually relied on extrapolation from the procedures of the wealthy gentry but there is no consensus about whether squirearchy practices were a diluted form of metropolitan procedures or diverged from them because of different aims and limited resources. This study examines the marriage-making strategies of Midlands squires. The Midlands is an area far enough from London to escape many metropolitan influences and its rapid economic and industrial expansion may have influenced gentry strategies and relationships.

'Lesser gentry' is a term used to describe landowners with relatively small estates and limited resources who were usually inactive in county or national governance. It is an imprecise term because social boundaries were blurred, making them a fluid and porous social group in which status could change. Lesser gentry saw themselves as an integral sub-stratum of the gentry despite differences in wealth and influence. I argue that their marital practices were closer to those of the greater gentry than the wealthier urban merchants and professionals with whom they are often compared and that they experienced similar procedural changes and influences as the greater gentry.

This study uses family archives, supplemented with primary material available in published form and contemporary literary material, to provide a different dimension. Literary authors reflected and represented marriage-making practices to challenge traditional behaviours and attitudes.

Chapters 1-3 discuss secondary writers' views about gentry marriage-making, the families sampled and literary materials used. Five chapters consider strategies affecting heirs, provision for younger children, younger sons, daughters and widows. Parental aims differed for different children but included: strengthening estate finances; reducing costs by 'disposing' of daughters and 'setting up' younger sons; and preventing widows from alienating wealth through remarriage. This thesis shows that the dominant influences in marriage-making were finance and financial provision, although affection and personal choice played an increasingly important role.

Abbreviations

BRO	The Birmingham Library: Archives and Collections
BRO (Sc)	Sutton Coldfield Reference Library
LRO	Leicester and Leicestershire Record Office
NRO	Northamptonshire Record Office
PRO/TNA	Public Record Office/National Archives
SRO	Staffordshire Record Office (Stafford)
SRO (Lc)	Staffordshire Record Office (Lichfield)*
WRO	Warwickshire County Record Office

* Closed December 2017 and archives transferred to the Stafford Record Office

Introduction

This study is about the marriage strategies of the Midlands lesser gentry in the long eighteenth century. It will refer to urban 'pseudo-gentry' and the 'middling sort' but primarily concerns the rural squirearchy.¹ Historians who have written about gentry marriage strategies have usually concentrated on the well-documented practices of the London based elite. Writers have constructed a detailed picture of their marriage-making practices and of changes that took place in the process. Comments about lesser gentry marriage-making aims have usually been extrapolations based on the assumption of a commonality of practices with wealthier metropolitan groups. The lesser gentry have often left fewer and more incomplete archives than the elite, especially if a family followed a downward social trajectory. Surviving archives are usually very patchy, have possibly been absorbed into the archives of more successful families, or represent families which moved relatively recently out of the lesser gentry ranks into those of the upper gentry or aristocracy.

Lesser gentry numbers increased rapidly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, thanks largely to increased prosperity and surplus wealth. Gregory King's estimate in 1696 claimed there were 15,000 minor gentry families. A century later Patrick Colquhoun said the number had risen to 20,000.² Peter Borsay showed a rapid increase in the late seventeenth century in the number of urban gentry.³ Many were younger sons, like Andrew Hacket I (d. 1733) or William Congreve of Highgate (d.1746), who moved from the country into towns to find employment. Earle argued that rural and urban gentry shared considerable common ground, including familial links, education, sociable and cultural pursuits and membership of the same clubs. Borsay suggested that shared interests influenced marriage strategies and encouraged intermarriage.⁴ Some squires settled in neighbouring towns for part of the year to take advantage of urban social

¹ Technical terms are explained in the glossary in Appendix 2.

² Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in Provincial Towns 1660-1670* (Oxford, 1989), p. 201. G.E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1963), p. 6.

³ Peter Borsay, 'Politeness and Elegance; the Cultural Refashioning of Eighteenth Century York', in M. Hallet and J. Rendall (eds.), *Eighteenth Century York: Culture, Space and Society* (York, 2003), p. 3.

⁴ Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (London, 1989), p. 13. Borsay, *Urban Renaissance*, pp.123, 230-231, 244-245, 251, 278. Borsay 'Politeness and Elegance', pp. 7-8.

facilities.⁵ William and Richard Congreve, for example, both settled in Shrewsbury and the Hackets built and occupied two town houses in Sutton Coldfield.

Much published research is preoccupied with the highest status groups, rather than the lesser gentry, but often contain comments about interactions with minor 'client' gentry and inter-status marriages.⁶ Seeking to recover the attitudes of a rather neglected social group, I shall consider Mingay's view that 'the lesser gentry ... have always looked to the nobles for leadership' with its implication that their marriage-making strategies were simply a diluted version of those pursued by higher status social groups.⁷ Pursuing suggestions about the lesser gentry, inherent in existing literature, I shall consider the development of personal choice and affectionate relationships.

My initial hypothesis was that lesser gentry marriage-making strategies were not as constrained as those of richer and more powerful groups in restricting children's involvement in partner selection. However, as my study progressed, it became clear that their aims and methods were like those of the greater gentry and experienced comparable changes. I argue that the major differences were of scale, timing, and the pace of change. Key issues concern the marital aims of the lesser gentry and the causes of continuity and change. Seeking to recover and understand the personal and financial calculations underpinning marriage strategies I have considered the squirearchy's concerns about finance and property, patrilineal transmission and the impact of provision on the matrimonial decisions of dependents. I shall argue that other important influences were inter-family and intra-family relationships, the desire for advantageous 'connections', the influence of religious and political affiliations and attitudes to second marriages. This study examines how these objectives were met, how they were affected by new and developing social behaviours, and the growing significance of personal choice in the selection of marriage partners.

⁵ J. R. Rosenheim, *The Emergence of a Ruling Order: English Landed Society 1650-1750* (London and New York, 1998), p. 17. Borsay, 'Politeness and Elegance', pp. 8-9.

⁶ A sample includes: C.A. Knott, *George Vernon 1636-1702: 'Who Built This House' Sudbury Hall Derbyshire* (Stroud, 2010). Vivienne Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture: The Seventeenth Century Newdigates of Arbury and Their World* (Woodbridge, 1995). Peter Marshall and Geoffrey Scott (eds.), *Catholic Gentry in English Society: The Throckmortons of Coughton* (Farnham, 2009). S. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late Stuart England: The Cultural World of the Verneys, 1660-1720* (Oxford, 1999).

⁷ G.E. Mingay, *The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (London and New York, 1976), pp. 28-36.

The term 'the lesser gentry' is imprecise but is used to describe the lowest strand of that section of the population, known and accepted by their contemporaries as 'gentlemen'. The principal criterion for inclusion was the possession of unearned income drawn mainly from rents and investments. The families in this study possessed sufficient unearned income to 'live without manual labour' but rarely aspired to significant county or national activity.⁸ Indeed, some writers identify these as 'parish gentry' to distinguish them from those gentry who did exercise such influence. Many might supplement their income with some form of employment, often in one of the professions, the services or trade. At the lower end of the scale they were barely distinguishable from yeoman farmers but at the top they might occasionally exercise influence beyond their own parish, own more than one estate and sometimes play an active if minor role in county affairs as Grand Jurors, JPs or Land Tax Commissioners. They formed a numerous and important social group.⁹ Thus, although not totally homogeneous, the group had sufficient in common to be classed by contemporaries as a separate category: 'squires'.¹⁰ The 'squirearchy' is thus one of my terms of analysis. In chapter 2 I will discuss the squirearchy and my selection of sample families in greater detail.

Of broadly comparable status with the lesser gentry were the urban gentry and wealthier 'middling sort'. Consisting of professional people such as lawyers, doctors and public servants, as well as urban merchants and traders. They were distinguished by 'surplus wealth' which allowed them to enjoy a leisured life-style like that of the lesser gentry.¹¹ Social distinctions which had formerly existed between landed and urban gentry broke down in the eighteenth century. Many

⁸ Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* (London, 1994), pp. 7-10. Lawrence Stone and Jeanne Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (abridged version, Oxford, 1986), pp. 6-8.

⁹ Using the 1801 census, Patrick Colquhoun, in *A Treatise on the Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire* (London, 1814), Table 4 'An Attempt to Exhibit a General View of Society', estimated that 'gentlemen and ladies living on incomes', numbered about 28, 000; Gregory King calculated similar proportions for 1688. Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1982), pp. 382, 386-389.

¹⁰ The Ansons of Shugborough and the Bridgemans of Castle Bromwich were relatively minor families in the seventeenth century but catapulted to national importance through successful marriages. In contrast, the Ludfords of Ansley and the Clerkes of Watford (Northamptonshire) had comparable gentry status in the seventeenth century but failed to survive either economically or demographically so that their estates were absorbed by more prominent families.

¹¹ Margaret Hunt claimed the urban gentry formed about 20% of the urban population, (about 170,000 in 1700 and 475,000 by 1800). Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and Family in England 1680-1780* (California, 1996), p. 17.

squirearchy younger sons became urban gentry and some intermarriage between the two groups occurred, helping change to take place.

Although centred on rural landowners, I shall consider whether common strategies existed between the urban middling sort, the 'pseudo-gentry and their rural counterparts and question whether, like the landed gentry, they promoted patrimony and primogeniture at the expense of younger children. A related issue is whether they allowed their children to select their own partners or expected them to accept parental choice.

Historians have debated the extent to which urban gentry wanted to be landed gentry and how far marriage was used to facilitate this. Margaret Hunt argued that 'middling' marriage strategies focused on capital accumulation rather than social advancement, so that relatively few 'sacrificed' their daughters to further their family's social interests.¹² She argues that the lesser gentry were more likely to appropriate middling attitudes towards marriage than that the urban gentry pursued a policy of emulation.¹³ Nick Rogers claims that since the London bourgeoisie already possessed elite status they felt little pressure to acquire landed status as a replacement for their mercantile commitments.¹⁴ Pelling thinks that urban gentry bought houses in the country rather than landed estates and retained their business interests.¹⁵ Wrightson claims that because of strong familial links the two groups shared the same values and, especially in the eighteenth century, participated in the same leisure pursuits. He suggests that urban and rural gentry generally shared the same marriage selection criteria of parity of age, status, wealth and religion.¹⁶ I support the view that the two groups, having similar social interests and shared cultural activities, were often inter-connected through marriage and shared similar attitudes to marriage.

My area of interest covers the historic counties of Leicestershire (including Rutland), Northamptonshire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire. There is over-spill

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 213.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-5, 75-76.

¹⁴ Nick Rogers, 'Money, Marriage, Mobility: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London', in *Journal of Family History*, 24:1 (January, 1999), pp. 25-26, 28-30.

¹⁵ M. Pelling, 'Skirting the City? Disease, Social Change and Divided Households in the 17th century', in P. Griffiths and M. Jenner (eds.), *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London* (Manchester, 2002), pp. 162-164.

¹⁶ Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (Routledge, 1982), pp. 28-30, 80, 82, 87.

into neighbouring counties because of familial cross-border links through marriage, property ownership or residence. The area was chosen because of its regional coherence and the distance from London which reduced direct metropolitan influence. The families were selected because they were regionally based and were not generally prominent in regional or national political life. From the mid eighteenth century, the north-west part of the region experienced rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, causing a significant change in the social and economic landscape. Previously insignificant families rapidly accumulated wealth and influence, sometimes through trade and industry and sometimes through successful marriages.¹⁷

The period 1660-1820 embraces approximately six generations and allows meaningful study of change and continuity. An extended period allows the investigation of developments in social attitudes, marriage strategies and social mobility and of how these interacted with changing religious, moral, social, cultural and economic values. 1660 is a logical starting point since 'old' families wanted to restore their fortunes and position after the civil wars and Interregnum, while 'new' families wished to retain their status and authority. These became, often through marriage, a united county elite able to dominate society and politics for the next three centuries. An end date of 1820 incorporates the impact on the gentry marriage strategies of the Napoleonic Wars and the associated social, economic and ideological changes taking place.

Another criterion used to select families was that they had preserved sufficient documentary evidence to cover substantial sections of the period. For much of the period they were lesser gentry although some individuals escaped through upward or downward social mobility. It became apparent that some of the families were interlinked either directly or indirectly through marriage, showing that there was an extended family nexus stretching across the four counties and helping to create the sense of a lesser gentry community. Some individuals and single generation families are included to broaden the evidence base. The chosen families included: long-established families (the Congreves); newly emergent families (the Barkers,

¹⁷ The Leveson-Gowers of Trentham (later Dukes of Sutherland), were originally minor gentry but acquired vast mineral reserves through successful marriage. The Colmores, Birmingham merchants in the early seventeenth century, became wealthy in the eighteenth century through the sale of their New Hall estate in Birmingham for housing and industrial development.

Hackets and Mortimers); socially declining families (the Congreves and early eighteenth century Barkers, Hackets and Mortimers); rural families linked to urban gentry (the Greaves, Barkers and Congreves); and families having an urban rather than rural background (the Witherings and Lowes). Individuals and families whose status changed through marriage are included.

The study is based mainly on manuscript sources available in Midland record offices but use has also been made of published copies of primary material, which includes diaries, correspondence and autobiographical writing from other families and individuals. Some are Midland families but others represent different regions. Since the study concerns subjective aspects of marriage-making it is based on qualitative evidence presenting the views and thoughts of individuals, families, relatives and friends. Marriage contracts, wills and other legal documents are used to supplement the personal documentation.

Eighteenth century courtship fiction, then a popular genre, offers useful illustrative material which can complement empirical evidence to illuminate processes and practices of courtship and marriage-making. Imaginative and advice literature give different representations of marriage-making, showing how individual authors perceived bride-selection and marriage-making. These personal views of 'reality' offer insights into contemporary debates. Different literary genres can suggest how attitudes, behaviours and expectations changed over time. Many novels encapsulate a perceived conflict between prudence and affection and between parental influence and personal choice. Details are usually accurate and reliable because they were needed to carry weight and conviction with an experienced and knowledgeable readership expecting to encounter a recognisable reality. Writers often wanted to teach as well as entertain and so framed their work to challenge or reinforce traditional views.¹⁸

Such literary material disseminated new ideas about courtship and marriage-making while encouraging readers to think about and challenge received patterns of behaviour. Despite its London perspective and its focus on the attitudes, social life and behaviour of the wealthy gentry, this literature had much to say to the

¹⁸ Paul Goring, *Eighteenth Century Literature and Culture* (London and New York, 2008), pp. 4, 29. H. J. Shroff, *The Eighteenth Century Novel: The Idea of the Gentleman* (New Delhi, 1978), pp. 96-97, 108.

provincial lesser gentry. It considered important issues of relevance to young people of all social classes. Courtship literature explored different viewpoints and offered guidance to those seeking advice. I argue that such literature is relevant to a study of the marriage-making attitudes and practices of the lesser gentry, even if it is difficult to demonstrate a direct link between publications and behaviour.

Thesis outline

Chapter 1 examines the secondary literature about lesser gentry marriage-making strategies in the long eighteenth century. Scholars have generally treated the gentry as a single coherent group, extrapolating from the attitudes and behaviour of the aristocracy and greater gentry those of the squirearchy. They have usually viewed developments on a national rather than a regional scale. Writers have rarely questioned whether there were significant regional variations in marriage-making practices or whether there were variations in purposes and approach between the different strands of the gentry social strata. I shall argue that, although the squirearchy often experienced different pressures and sometimes had different aims to the greater gentry, there were real similarities in their approach to marriage-making. Despite growing relationships and social interaction between the lesser gentry and the urban gentry their approach and marriage-making strategies were different. The urban gentry were not usually committed to primogeniture, were inclined to treat their children equally and tended to leave provision for children until their own deaths. As a result, the marriages of urban gentry sons tended to have a later mean age than the sons of the rural gentry. This chapter will set out debates about the changing balance between arranged marriages and personal choice, between prudent and imprudent marriage, between patrimony and provision for younger children, between material and emotional factors, the importance of contract negotiations and the emergence of affectionate and companionate marriages.

Chapter 2 outlines the criteria used to select the sample families and describes the contribution each makes to the study. The sample includes emergent families from both rural and urban backgrounds and long-established county families and will demonstrate the diversity of this squirearchy group.

Chapter 3 discusses different forms of eighteenth century literary material, including fiction, drama and advice literature. The visual arts offer a different dimension but are omitted because of the constraints of time and space. Literature presents useful background material which supplements and contextualises the evidence of family correspondence. More importantly it provides a variety of representations of marriage-making. This chapter identifies the different guidance selected writers offered to readers. Each text was chosen because it discussed courtship and marriage-making. Taken together, as a random sample, they represent different views and perspectives on common themes.

My argument is that, even though their content is mainly London-centric and deals with the highest social ranks, the writers' messages have transferability and were relevant to the provincial lesser gentry. The circumstances described and the questions examined are of significance to all social groups even if the scope and context appear to make them exclusive. Of note is the frequency with which marriage is shown as a route to upward social mobility. The stress placed on love and affection as a counterbalance to finance and material considerations is significant. Much of the literature, especially fiction, seems to be targeted on the hopes and aspirations of impressionable young women. I argue that such sources are a valuable historical resource in a study of the matrimonial practices of the eighteenth century squirearchy.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the marriage-making practices of fathers for their heirs, showing that greater emphasis was placed on these marriages than on those of other children. I shall argue that primogeniture and patrilineal inheritance drove marriage-making strategies for lesser gentry heirs because their marriages were central to estate integrity and the preservation of a family's name. I discuss the tensions this might create between fathers, eldest sons and other children. I consider the effects of declining nuptiality at the end of the seventeenth century and the differences in mean age at first marriage between eldest sons and younger brothers. My argument is that the experience of the sample families broadly matched the national patterns identified by historians.

Heirs, more than other children, were required to make a prudent marriage. Their marriages were of much greater importance to a family's fortunes than those of other children and their expectations usually made them more appealing prospects

as husbands. The sources usually give more detailed descriptions about bride-selection and contract negotiation for heirs than for other children and show that the marriages of some heirs were imprudent because they married someone of lower status or with a small fortune. The sample families illustrate problems faced by the lesser gentry when there was no heir or if an heir failed to marry.

The urban gentry did not often have the same commitment to primogeniture as the rural gentry. Many wanted their wealth to be divided equally between their children without showing preference for eldest sons. This meant that eldest sons were no more likely to marry earlier than their brothers. Marriage for urban gentry sons was usually delayed until they were established in a trade or profession and could support a family.

Chapter 5 highlights the importance of finance and argues that an individual's fortune largely determined their choice of partner and the success of any proposal. I shall examine the provision squirearchy parents made for their children showing that they treated heirs differently to other offspring. I will discuss how provision changed, as did the timing of when it was given. Some early marriage contracts confirmed the contribution of each family, defined the succession and sometimes determined the financial arrangements made for widowhood, but rarely included provision for children. This was usually left to paternal discretion and goodwill. Uncertainty about future inheritance helped to buttress parental expectations of filial obedience. The adoption of the strict settlement altered this relationship between parents and younger children by including financial provision for them in marriage contracts. Guaranteeing younger children an assured portion may have weakened rather than strengthened their position by formalising and limiting their expectations.

Changes in how provision was made emphasised the importance of family size. Prescribed portions, expressed as a fixed equal share of a lump sum, meant that limiting the number of children made good financial sense. I suggest that this helps to explain the decline in nuptiality in the sample families during the early eighteenth century. The nature of this provision highlighted the expectations of daughters in families without sons. According to primogeniture the settled estates of a sonless father passed to a cadet branch of his family, but his personal and unsettled wealth could be used to enhance his daughters' financial standing,

enabling them to attract 'better' matrimonial offers. This chapter's central argument is that financial provision for children determined their value in the marriage-market and influenced the marriage-strategies pursued.

Chapter 6 is about marriage-making strategies as they affected younger sons. Such marriages were rarely given the same priority or significance as the marriages of heirs or daughters. It was more important to enable younger sons to be self-supporting by being prepared for a trade or profession than to arrange a marriage for them. The cost of educating and training was usually treated as a charge against their portion which left them with less to use in attracting a bride. Limited resources often meant that lesser gentry younger sons could only afford entry into the lower levels of a chosen trade or profession. Almost invariably marriage was deferred until later in life. This is reflected in the age at first marriage of younger sons in the sample which tended to be later than for heirs or daughters.

The number of sons born to some sample families fell in the early eighteenth century so that the problem of providing for younger sons often did not materialise. The proportion of younger sons who remained single increased. Younger sons often wished to use marriage to improve their status but were sometimes seen as fortune hunters by parents of wealthy daughters. Several younger sons and heirs in cadet branches of the sample married well but were not described in the correspondence as fortune hunters. Some gained small estates through marriage enabling them to retain or even enhance their social standing.

Younger sons of the urban gentry were expected to make their own way in the world before thinking of marriage but were rarely treated differently to older brothers. I will show that, although sons usually received an equal share of parental wealth, it usually did not become payable until after their father's death. Unless this occurred at a relatively early stage in a son's life such financial expectations would have had little influence on his marriage prospects.

Chapter 7 is about marriage-making strategies for daughters, the second highest priority for many lesser-gentry parents. An heir's marriage was intended to add to family wealth and status but daughters drained estate resources and their marriages were often meant to reduce expense. Few respectable occupations were available for unmarried daughters as an alternative to marriage. Unmarried

gentry women usually depended on the charity of family and friends or existed in increasing penury while eking out a relatively small portion. A major problem for squirearchy parents with several daughters was that the portion that each child could receive was limited by the need to provide for all. This was made worse when the strict settlement, by changing the nature of provision, effectively reduced parental freedom to exercise good will. Courtship fiction often dealt with the difficulties created by this type of situation. It was much less likely in real life than in a novel that a girl from a relatively humble gentry background would make a highly lucrative marriage. However, fiction frequently held this out as an enticing prospect. Only two daughters in the sample families made highly advantageous marriages and most married within their own social strata.

Urban gentry daughters usually enjoyed the same access to urban sociability as those of the landed gentry and had the same opportunity to meet a wide range of potential suitors. Some, thanks to parental wealth, married into landed families. Interchanges between the squirearchy and urban gentry were a feature regularly explored in fiction and conduct literature and can be seen in the practical experience of some of the sample families.

The focus of chapter 8 is on widows and widowers. These were a significant element throughout the period thanks to high adult mortality. Widowhood did not alter the status of men but significantly changed that of women and gave them a financial and legal independence denied to most other women. Many marriages in the sample were second marriages for at least one partner. Quite often remarriage contributed significantly to family fortunes. Occasionally marriage to childless widows raised the social status of relatively socially insignificant husbands, turning them into substantial landowners. If a wife died before her husband he might inherit her property and so transfer ownership of an estate from one kinship group to another. This was the antithesis of patrilineage and I shall argue, based on evidence from the sample families, that remarriage could result in disparate provision for children of first and second marriages. Conflict often resulted from jealousy engendered by the difficulties of making comparable provision for children of two separate families.

Widowers often married rapidly following the death of a spouse but widows were advised to remain unmarried for at least twelve months. There were many different

reasons for remarriage, ranging from the purely practical to the deeply emotional. Widows faced tensions created by changing public attitudes to remarriage. It was expected and accepted as normal in the early part of the period, but hostility grew over time. Conduct literature and fiction encouraged this hardening of attitudes, regularly representing remarrying widows in a harsh and negative light. Marriage settlements and wills often threatened loss of jointure and sometimes forbade access to children for those widows who remarried. In addition to prohibitive clauses widows might suffer moral pressure from family members hostile to remarriage. The corollary, shown in the sample, was that a lengthy widowhood was an unnecessarily expensive drain on estate and family resources which could be avoided through remarriage.

Overall, I argue that although individual circumstances varied, marriage-making among the Midlands lesser gentry was like that of the aristocracy and greater gentry, as described by secondary writers and represented in contemporary literary material. Both groups had similar aims for their eldest sons and differentiated between them and their younger sons and daughters. My argument is that the squirearchy expected their heirs to marry well but that it was important to give other sons sufficient support to achieve a good start in life, provided it was not too costly, did not threaten estate integrity or create too heavy a long-term financial burden.

A regionally based study raises the question of whether there was a distinctive regional dimension separate from metropolitan influence. This study will show that regional issues made very little difference to marriage-making practices but that a strong regional identity was reflected in many geographically endogamous marriages and highly developed Midland inter-family relationships. However, the provincial and metropolitan worlds had many similarities. The context and environment in which the squirearchy pursued their marital strategies were localised but they behaved in a similar manner, had comparable aims and expectations and used the same procedures to meet their aims as the greater gentry. Any variations are essentially those of scale, scope and resources rather than of philosophy, practice or procedure. The practices of the two groups showed similar continuities and comparable change over time, even though the pace of change may have differed.

There was clearly a shift from parentally arranged marriages to personal choice of marriage partners. This came about primarily through the development of new social attitudes and altered circumstances. New facilities offered new opportunities and encouraged more ambitious expectations. Expanded economic opportunities and changes in the political structure of families encouraged greater individualism and foregrounded personal interests at the expense of those of family. Continuity was ensured by the pre-eminent role of finance in marriage-making which gave parents a controlling interest. Literature was important in questioning received attitudes, challenging accepted behaviours and encouraging the pursuit of personal happiness and fulfilment.

My thesis has resonance with modern debates about 'forced' and 'arranged' marriages, 'romantic love' and the continuing relevance of marriage. I aim to recover a gendered perspective of marital strategies, fleshing out the role of mothers and daughters as well as fathers and brothers and recognising the active role of female relatives in the identification of partners and the negotiation of settlements. Much of the surviving correspondence about marriage in the sample was written by wives to husbands or exchanged with sisters and female friends.

Chapter 1 considers some secondary literature, examines key debates as they affected the marriage-making strategies of the Midland lesser gentry, explains terms used in the discussions developed in subsequent chapters and identifies key questions addressed by this thesis.

Chapter 1: Debates

This chapter considers conflicting interpretations of the nature and purpose of gentry marriage-making strategies in the long eighteenth century. It discusses possible differences between the squirearchy and greater gentry and between the lesser gentry and the urban, or pseudo-gentry. Influential factors include the strict settlement (a new form of property transfer popularised after 1660), primogeniture and patrimony, new forms of provincial sociability and the impact of second marriages. Underlying themes include familial partner selection and personal choice, the growth of affectionate and companionate marriages, and relationships between different social strata. Religious affiliation, vastly more significant in the eighteenth than the twenty-first century, is significant since most gentry families were Anglican although a small number were Catholics and a few were Dissenters. Religious belief and practice had an influence in partner-selection and marriage negotiations. M. Henry, J. Cooper and N. Cooper each examined wealth, gentility and elite culture, characteristics which distinguished the gentry from their social inferiors.¹

There is no generally agreed definition of 'the gentry', although there is a consensus that the term includes those having sufficient independent income to 'live without manual labour' and enjoy a leisured life-style.² As a social group, though internally differentiated the gentry were united by shared interests.³ Concepts of gentility changed as did the criteria for inclusion in a group which was, to use Gauci's description of the middle class, 'pluralistic, competitive and multi-layered'.⁴

¹ J. Cooper, 'Ideas of Gentility in Early Modern England', in G. Aylmer and J. Morrill (eds.), *Land, Men and Beliefs: Studies in Early Modern History* (London, 1983), pp. 43-77. N. Cooper, 'Rank, Manners and Display in a Gentlemanly House, 1500-1750', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series vol. 12 (2002), pp. 291-310. M. Henry, 'The Making of Elite Culture', in H. T. Dickinson (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 311-328.

² Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (London, 1989), pp. 5-7. Henry French, *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England 1600-1750* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 20-21. Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* (London, 1994), pp. 7-9. Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (London, 1982), pp. 24-27. Keith Wrightson, 'Estates, Degrees and Sorts: Changing Perceptions of Society in Tudor and Stuart England', in P. Corfield (ed.), *Language, History and Class* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 39-40.

³ Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 25-26.

⁴ Paul Gauci, 'Finding the Middle Ground: The Middling Sort in the Eighteenth Century', *History Compass*, 4:2 (2006), pp. 228-234.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, gentry status was associated with wealth, land ownership and 'birth'. By the early eighteenth century, surplus wealth, education, consumption, dress and 'civility' were regarded as equally significant. The expansion of trade and the professions in the late seventeenth century generated substantial numbers of wealthy urban families who drew surplus wealth from sources other than land, so that land-ownership was no longer an essential qualification.⁵ Consequently, the proportion of the population counted as, or considering themselves to be, 'gentry' had expanded.

G. E. Mingay, Lawrence Stone and H. J. Habakkuk each recognised that the gentry were a separate entity, but identified different sub-groups, distinguishing between 'county gentry' and 'parish gentry'. In addition to the size of their land-holdings and wealth, the main requirement for inclusion as 'county' or upper gentry included political and social influence, a significant role in county governance and involvement in national affairs. Lesser gentry status was ascribed because of a small estate, limited wealth and restricted involvement in county affairs. These are characteristics of the sample families used in this study. Keith Wrightson, Lawrence and Jeanne Stone, and Anthony Fletcher have each suggested the inclusion of a third division of 'intermediate gentry'.⁶ This category could usefully be applied to some of the sample families during times of prosperity when they became more actively involved in county affairs, especially the Hackets in the late seventeenth and later eighteenth centuries, the Congreves in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century and the Barkers in the mid seventeenth century. Social status was rarely static and the standing of families could fluctuate.

Even though contemporaries recognised different social gradations of 'gentleman' there was a continuum rather than rigid, impenetrable sub-divisions.⁷ Shared culture, lifestyle and expectations and social fluidity gave cohesion to gentry status, helping to differentiate it from other social groups. There is always a blurring of edges between social categories as one group merges, often

⁵ P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in Provincial Towns 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 226-227. R. Grassby, 'The Personal Wealth of the Business Community in Seventeenth Century England', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 23:2 (1970), p. 228.

⁶ Anthony Fletcher, *A Country Community in Peace and War: Sussex 1600-1660* (Harlow, 1975), p. 22. Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* abridged edition (Oxford, 1984), pp. 6-8. Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 13-15.

⁷ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, pp. 15-17. Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?* p. 7.

imperceptibly, into another. The difference between parish gentry and wealthy yeoman, or between urban bourgeoisie and wealthy artisan, was almost indistinguishable as was the distinction between the wealthier parish gentry and the lower levels of the county gentry. Boundaries were uncertain and ill-defined and often based on perception rather than reality. The only absolute division was between the titled peerage and simple gentlemen. Even so, some prominent bourgeoisie, such as the seventeenth century Colmores or eighteenth century Smallbrookes of Birmingham, possessed wealth and influence comparable to the greater gentry. The wealth and landholdings of some upper gentry families, like William Blathwayt of Dyrham or Joseph Banks II of Revesby, were comparable with the aristocracy.⁸ The blurring of boundaries became more noticeable after the mid eighteenth century as the wealthier gentry withdrew from county governance, their place being taken by the lesser gentry. Similarly, external distinctions were less marked as distinguishing features of gentility as leisure activities, dress, education and public 'sociability' became increasingly available to a broader social spectrum from town and country.

The collections of family documents in Midland record offices illustrate this clouding of categories. Families whose earlier generations were upper gentry, like the Congreves, declined in status, while others like the Greenes, Mortimers or Barkers, who were yeomen in the early seventeenth century, rose.⁹ Some urban gentry like the Botfields, especially in the eighteenth century, acquired landed estates and joined the rural landowning class. Some rural landowners, like the Congreves or Browns of Horbling chose, or were forced, to leave their estates and settle in towns. Social and geographical mobility were driven by various social and economic factors, including marriage.

⁸ R. Grassby, 'English Merchant Capitalism in the Late Seventeenth Century: The Composition of Business Fortunes', *Past and Present*, 46:1 (1970), p. 106. *Idem.*, 'The Personal Wealth of the Business Community in Seventeenth Century England', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series 23:2 (1970), pp. 227-229. Nick Rogers, 'Money Land and Lineage: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London', in Paul Borsay (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1688-1820* (Harlow, 1990), pp. 268-290.

⁹ The nature of available family collections means that many are of upper gentry or noble families. Many of these were, in the mid seventeenth century, of lesser gentry, urban gentry or of even lower social status. The collections often contain materials relating to lesser gentry families absorbed into greater gentry families either through purchase, marriage or inheritance. Archives of families which continued as minor gentry, or whose status declined in the period, have often not survived.

I use the terms 'lesser gentry', 'minor gentry' or 'squirearchy' to describe families which, at a given time, had comparatively small estates, limited surplus-wealth, relatively little influence outside their own estates or parishes and were largely disengaged from county governance. These terms are imprecise and though applicable to specific generations of a family, may not always be appropriate for individuals at different times. I shall investigate how marriage affected the social status of gentry families, and the extent to which marriage was a mechanism for change. Most 'family' studies offer a comprehensive view of all social groups within society, although many focus on either the plebeian majority or the elite. There are many studies of gentry landownership and marriage but they usually focus on the county elite rather than the parish gentry. Many refer to local lesser gentry families to illustrate interactions between different sub-groups. They often discuss the purpose of marriage and marriage-making, kinship relationships, the economics of marriage, and provision made for younger children. For example, Larminie described the importance of late seventeenth century gentry affinity links in terms of their social, economic and political significance. Descriptions of the lesser gentry included in these studies are usually based on extrapolation and show them as following a diluted version of elite practices.¹⁰

Were lesser gentry marriage strategies significantly different from those of the elite? Squirearchy fathers used their control of family finances to influence decisions. Early marriage settlements usually fixed future provision for eldest sons and determined lines of succession, leaving provision for other children to the father's discretion. Such provision might come into force when the father died, when a child married, or when the father wished. Discretion allowed fathers to vary provision according to their feelings for individual children. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the squirearchy adopted the strict settlement and

¹⁰ A. Fairfax-Lucy, *Charlecote and the Lucys: The Chronicle of an English Family* (Oxford, 1958). Vivienne Larminie, 'Settlement and Sentiment: Inheritance and Personal Relationships Among Two Midland Gentry Families in the Seventeenth Century', *Midlands History*, 12 (1987), pp. 27-47. *Idem.*, 'Marriage and the Family: The Example of the Seventeenth Century Newdigates', *Midland History*, 9 (1984), pp. 1-22. *Idem.*, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture: The Seventeenth Century Newdigates of Arbury* (London, 1995), pp. 1-3. E. Gooder, *The Squire of Arbury: Sir Richard Newdigate 1644-1710, Second Baronet and His Family* (Coventry, 1990). R. Wilkinson, *Chronicles of the Newdigates and the Three Manors* (London, 2006). Geoffrey Scott, 'The Throckmortons at Home and Abroad 1680-1800', in Peter Marshall and Geoffrey Scott (eds.), *Catholic Gentry in English Society: The Throckmorton's of Coughton from the Reformation to Emancipation* (Ashgate, 2009), pp. 171-211. Malcolm Wanklyn, 'Strategies for Survival', in Marshall and Scott (eds.), *Catholic Gentry in English Society* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 145-170.

used it to prescribe the help each child should receive and when it should be given. However, as increasing amounts of land were settled the resources available to 'top up' previously agreed portions for daughters and younger sons became restricted. This reinforced the social and financial gulf between heirs and their siblings and disadvantaged the matrimonial prospects of younger children.

Parental discretion over the payment of portions allowed parents to demand obedience from their children if they wished to enjoy future reward. Tensions existed when young people who wanted to choose their own partners challenged parental authority. There was a gradual shift in the balance of power in the family structure. In the late seventeenth century, parents who made proposals and arrangements might allow children a limited veto of their selection, but by the mid eighteenth century these roles were reversed, and many parents could only attempt to veto a child's choice of partner. A major debate concerned the relationship between filial obedience and the right to choose. Parents, for whom a projected marriage was undesirable or 'imprudent', sometimes used their financial influence to try to prevent it by imposing sanctions. Such attempts, as the sources show, were rarely successful if the couple were determined to marry. Penalties, like those imposed on William Congreve of Woolwich or Betsy Morris of Wells were often ineffectual and ignored.¹¹ Squires' employed similar marriage-making strategies to those used by the wealthy elite, even though they had more limited resources.

Historiography

Mingay, writing about the eighteenth century gentry, in the aftermath of the 'storm over the gentry, offered a broad, if now dated, survey of who they were, their rise and decline, their marriage strategies and the economic basis for their status.¹²

¹¹ SRO, D1057/M/H/13/1, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve to Captain William Congreve, 16 January, 1776. William Congreve of Shrewsbury and Ralph Congreve of Aldermaston rewrote their wills to exclude the offspring of William Congreve of Woolwich from inheriting their estates. The former later rescinded his decision. Edmund Hobhouse (ed.), *The Diary of a West Country Physician 1684-1726* (Rochester, 1934), pp. 65-72, 1 December, 1718 to 23 October, 1719. Claver Morris refused to see his daughter for twelve months after her clandestine marriage but was forced by his wife to relent.

¹² G. E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1963), pp. 28-29, 80-81. G. E. Mingay, *The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (London and New York, 1976), pp. 108-111. R. H. Tawney, 'The Rise of the Gentry 1558-1640', *Economic History Review*, old series, 11 (1941), pp. 1-38. Tawney, 'The Rise of the Gentry: A Postscript', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 7:1 (1954), pp. 91-97. H.

Concerned mainly with the elite, Mingay briefly discussed 'lesser landowners', arguing that their marriage-making strategies were a diluted version of those of the elite. The aim of this study is to examine this claim and establish its accuracy according to evidence based on the correspondence and personal papers of a selected group of Midland's lesser gentry.

Heal and Holmes in *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500-1700* argued that the squirearchy were more likely than the greater gentry to marry within their own locality. They showed that the lesser gentry lacked the resources to provide adequately for their younger sons while marrying their heirs well. The greater gentry could benefit from the London marriage-market but the lesser gentry's choice of marriage partners was often restricted geographically and socially to their own locality.¹³ This was true in the sample families during the seventeenth century but less so in the eighteenth. Changing sociability, improved transport and greater leisure provision widened their choice as they benefitted from provincial spas and leisure towns.

Other important studies considered specific aspects of gentry life and culture. Many cover the relevant period but were primarily concerned with aristocratic and upper gentry society rather than parish gentry culture. The Stones concluded that it was relatively easy for new-comers to join the squirearchy but that the elite was virtually self-perpetuating with carefully restricted entry.¹⁴ Rosenheim, describing the emergence of the gentry as a ruling class in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was mainly concerned with the landed elite. He showed that inter-relationships created through marriage were significant factors in enabling the elite to develop strong county roots. However, he said little specifically about the lesser gentry.¹⁵

Trevor-Roper, 'The Gentry 1540-1640', *Economic History Review Supplement*, 2nd series, 1 (1953), pp. 1-55. D. C. Coleman, 'The Gentry Controversy and the Aristocracy in Crisis', *History*, 51:172 (1966), pp. 165-178. J. H. Hexter, 'Storm Over the Gentry', in *Reappraisals in History* (London, 1961), pp. 117ff. (Originally, *Encounter* (1958), pp. 22-34.)

¹³ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, pp. 17, 61, 316-317.

¹⁴ Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?* p. 283.

¹⁵ J. M. Rosenheim, *The Emergence of a Ruling Order: English Landed Society 1650-1750* (London, 1998), pp. 21-33. *Idem.*, 'County Governance and Elite Withdrawal in Norfolk, 1600-1720', in A. L. Beier, D Cannadine and J. M. Rosenheim (eds.), *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone*, (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 95-125.

Phillip Jenkins, in *The Making of a Ruling Class*, argued that the economic and political driving force in Glamorgan gentry marriages was the creation and consolidation of 'interests'.¹⁶ His work is relevant because it traced the emergence of a new lesser gentry group in South Wales through successful marriages. Langford's study of the role and influence of the gentry in county and parish affairs outlined the broad range of their activities and discussed their social and political links with the county elite. Examining the social importance of mid eighteenth century marriage, he argued that it offered a means to acquire and consolidate social position. Langford recognised that marriage as a social mechanism diminished the role of women and, because the gentry were often reluctant to marry their daughters to social inferiors, caused many gentry women to remain single.¹⁷

Some studies of gentry marriages, including general surveys, studies of families and accounts of individual marriages, illustrate squirearchy marriage strategies. Habakkuk's *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System* is an important starting point. He argued that marriage for the aristocracy and greater gentry was concerned with decisions about estate integrity and lineal succession.¹⁸ In *An Open Elite?* the Stones argued that although the gentry were concerned with patrilineal transmission, they were also interested in using marriage to clear estate debts and provide adequately for dependents.¹⁹ MacFarlane's study, *Marriage and Love in England*, showed that in a highly stratified hierarchical society it is impossible to extrapolate the attitudes of one group from those of another.²⁰

Marriage was important to the gentry because of the close kinship networks it created and strengthened. Both Flandrin and Trumbach emphasised the importance of gentry marriage as a mechanism for building useful kinship relationships.²¹ Francis showed that kin often acted as mediators, helped identify

¹⁶ Phillip Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class: the Glamorgan Gentry, 1640-1790* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 257.

¹⁷ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 109-116.

¹⁸ H. J. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System 1650-1950* (Oxford, 1994), p. 146.

¹⁹ Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?* pp. 45-46.

²⁰ A. MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love: Modes of Reproduction, 1300-1840* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 45-46.

²¹ J. L. Flandrin, *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality* (Cambridge, 1979). Naomi Tadmor, 'The Concept of the Household Family in Eighteenth Century England', *Past and Present*, 151 (1996), pp. 111-140. *Idem.*, *Family and Friends in*

potential marriage partners and sometimes conducted contract negotiations.²² My findings confirm that some marriages brought considerable advantage and opportunity and could lead to increased status, but also show that others were a drain on resources, brought additional responsibilities and could generate undesirable social connections.²³

Studies of regional gentry often describe their rise, outline relationships developed through marriage, and illustrate strategies used to build useful inter-familial connections. These studies show that different strategies were adopted for eldest sons and for their siblings. Studies of gentry families from comparable areas, like South Wales, East Lancashire and West Yorkshire offer points of comparison with the Midlands. These areas, more isolated from London influence, lacked a large influential resident aristocracy and experienced the same social and economic impact of late eighteenth century industrialisation.²⁴ Roebuck's study of Yorkshire baronets deals with county gentry and describes and analyses relationships and affinities created through marriage.²⁵ Studies of comparable Midlands gentry families with similar social background confirm that close links and relationships existed between the different gentry strata and with professional and urban middling families.²⁶ The close interrelationship between families is illustrated in the family trees in Appendix 1

Eighteenth Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage (Cambridge, 2001).
Ralph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth Century England* (New York, 1978).

²² Catherine Frances, 'Making Marriages in Early Modern England: Rethinking the Role of Family and Friends', in M. Agren and A. Erickson (eds.), *The Marital Economy in Scandinavia and Britain: Women and Gender in the Early Modern World* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 39-56.

²³ *Continuity and Change* 25 (2010) was devoted to 'Kinship in Britain and Beyond, From Early Modern to the Present', (eds.), R. M. Smith and Naomi Tadmor. It included: Lloyd Bonfield, 'Seeking Connections Between Kinship and the Law in Early Modern England', pp. 49-82; M. Murphy, 'Changes in Family and Kinship Networks Consequent on the Demographic Transition in England and Wales', pp. 109-136; R. Wall, 'Economic Collaboration of Family Members Within and Beyond Households in English Society, 1600-2000', pp. 83-108.

²⁴ Other writers about the Welsh gentry include: D. Howell, *Patriarchs and Parasites: The Gentry of South-West Wales in the Eighteenth Century* (Cardiff, 1986). L. B. Jones, *Princelings, Privilege and Power: The Tivyside Gentry in their Community* (Llandysul, 1999). H.A. Lloyd, *The Gentry of South-West Wales* (Cardiff, 1978). P. R. Roberts, 'The Gentry and the Land in Eighteenth Century Merioneth', *Journal of the Merioneth History and Record Society*, 4:4 (1964), pp. 324-339.

²⁵ Peter Roebuck, *Yorkshire Baronets 1640-1760* (Oxford, 1980).

²⁶ Examples of Midlands and other family studies: J. Bedells, 'The Gentry of Huntingdon', *Local Population Studies*, 44 (1990), pp. 30-40. J. R. Betts, *The Poultons of Desborough: Lords of the Manor and Recusants* (Raunds, 2006). G. G. Hutchinson, *Fuller of Sussex: a Georgian Squire* (Brede, 1993). Rose Longden, 'The Fowlers of St. Thomas Near

A key debate concerns the relationship between landed and urban gentry. The urban gentry grew numerically in the period and enjoyed increased interaction with the rural gentry.²⁷ My project is focused mainly on the landed gentry, but I recognise the importance of developments affecting urban groups. Various writers have argued that the bourgeoisie often 'purchased' gentry status using wealth made in trade to buy estates or attract landed suitors for their daughters.²⁸ Land purchase might be of only short-term benefit, but marriage offered the most effective route to permanent gentry status.²⁹

Rogers argued that late seventeenth century gentry, needing to restore or rebuild their fortunes were increasingly prepared to marry their heirs to the daughters of wealthy merchants. He claimed that by the mid eighteenth century attitudes to social differences between rural and urban gentry had changed. His study was based on the London bourgeoisie, but he extended his conclusions, by extrapolation, to the gentry in general.³⁰ Donna Andrews, disputing Rogers claims, argued that his focal group was untypical and that many of the 'big bourgeoisie' chose not to adopt gentry values.³¹ Thomas showed that marriage to a business

Stafford 1543-1738', *Staffordshire Studies*, vol. 16 (2005), pp. 91-111. R. G. Milward, 'The Clarkes of Somersall Near Chesterfield', *Derbyshire Miscellany*, 7:5 (Derbyshire Archaeological Society, 1976), pp. 214-226. A. Ruscoe, *Landed Estates and the Gentry: A Historical Study* [Shropshire], 5 volumes (Ormskirk, 1999-2001). J. Senior, *The Markenfields of Markenfield Hall: The Rise and Fall of a Yorkshire Family*, (Bradford, 2009). M. R. Sneyd, *Never Oppressed, Never Oppressor: the Sneyds of Staffordshire a Gentry Family, 1600-1900* (Huddersfield, 2003). E. Wright, *Forgotten Families of Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire 1500-1800* (Dunstable, 2003).

²⁷ Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England 1680-1880* (Los Angeles, 1996), p. 17.

²⁸ Henry French, 'Accumulation and Aspiration Among the Parish Gentry: Economic Strategies and Social Identity in a Pennine family, 1650-1780', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. 149 (Liverpool University, 1999), pp. 19-49. Nick Rogers, 'Money, Marriage and Mobility: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London', *Journal of Family History*, 24:1 (January, 1999), pp. 19-34. *Idem.*, 'Money, Land and Lineage: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London', in Paul Borsay (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Town: a Reader*, pp. 269, 283, 287. (Originally in *Social History* vol. 4 no. 3 (October, 1979), pp. 437-454.) E. Wasson, 'The Penetration of New Wealth into the English Governing Class from the Middle Ages to the First World War', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 51 (1998), pp. 25-48.

²⁹ Such purchases or leases could be of relatively short duration. James Watt, son of the inventor leased Aston Hall between 1817 and 1848; Abraham Spooner, a Birmingham iron-master, bought Elmdon Hall and estate in 1760 and rebuilt the house, but it was sold out of the family in 1840. See below p. 24.

³⁰ Rogers, 'Money, Land and Lineage', pp. 278-279, 286-289. Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?* p. 20.

³¹ Donna Andrews, 'Aldermen and the Big Bourgeoisie of London Reconsidered', *Social History*, 6 (1981), pp. 359-364. H. Horwitz, 'The Mess of the Middle Class Revisited: The Case of the Big Bourgeoisie of Augustan London', *Continuity and Change*, 2:2 (1987), pp. 263-296.

heiress was important in the descent of certain Glamorganshire estates in the eighteenth century.³² In spite of disagreements these studies show that social mobility was possible for merchants' daughters.³³

Social stability rather than social mobility was common in the sample families, encouraged by a preference for marital endogamy, although there are a few examples of marriages which encouraged social and financial progress. Limited finance usually encouraged economic endogamy, since small portions and limited expectations rarely attracted wealthy partners. In the sample, the factor which most often resulted in upward social mobility was successful marriage or the fortuitous inheritance of a relative's estates. Younger sons in the sample seem to have experienced status change more frequently than did heirs or daughters.

Financial constraints affected the marriages and social mobility of the wealthy Isham family of Northampton. In the mid seventeenth century they married into other elite families, but Royalist sympathies and the dissipated lives of two successive baronets reduced them to near bankruptcy, a situation not dissimilar to that of the Staffordshire Congreves. The Ishams solved their problems through marriage whereas the Congreves did so by delaying, or avoiding, marriage. Sir Justinian, the fourth baronet married his heir to a stranger in return for a portion of £12,000. To pay for this marriage, and to 'buy' status for his daughter, Lisle Hacket financially burdened his own estate.

Sir Justinian's five daughters were only allocated comparatively small portions of £2,000 each and only one married. Her marriage, for love rather than status, was to a local squire. Edmund, Sir Justinian's second son, married into a 'new' gentry family with wealth from trade rather than land. The third son married, against his family's wishes, the daughter of a Northampton merchant 'whose fortune is quite uncertain at present'. He lived in relative poverty, reliant on his brother's charity

³² H. M. Thomas, "With this Ring": The Importance of the Heiress in the Descent of Three Glamorgan Estates', *Morgannwg*, 49 (2005), pp. 67-78.

³³ B. G. Blackwood, 'The Marriages of the Lancashire Gentry on the Eve of the Civil War', *The Genealogist Magazine*, 16:7 (Society of Genealogists, 1970), pp. 321-328. T. Hollingsworth, 'The Demography of the British Peerage', *Supplement to Population Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (November, 1964), pp 1-103. D. Thomas, 'The Social Origin of the Partners of the British Peerage in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Population Studies*, 26:1 (1972), pp. 99-111.

and experienced downward socially mobile. The fourth son remained unmarried, while the youngest son married the daughter of a poor cleric.

Did the urban gentry really wish to join landed society as some have suggested? Rogers claimed that in the mid eighteenth century only a third of London's 'big bourgeoisie' exchanged business for large country estates. Many of these already had familial links with landed families. Rogers argued that this was a common practice up to 1720 but had declined by 1750. He said that the 'big bourgeoisie' enjoyed similar wealth, life-style and influence to the landed gentry but did not need the trappings of landed gentility.³⁴

Margaret Hunt, rejecting the 'theory of emulation', argued that most urban gentry wanted to retain links with business and their urban life-style. Some, as they prospered, purchased houses in the country near to their business interests, but did not need to buy large estates.³⁵ In 1760, the iron manufacturer Abraham Spooner, bought the small Elmdon estate just six miles from his Birmingham factories. It was insufficient to generate self-sufficient income, but large enough to establish gentry status and close enough to his factory to allow him to continue his business interests. In contrast, Beriah Botfield, a Shropshire industrialist, abandoned direct involvement with his iron and coal works and, around 1800, purchased a large Northamptonshire estate.³⁶

The Ashleys of Ashby St Ledgers, Northamptonshire, illustrate the process of gentrification, the importance of demographic accident and the role of marriage in estate transmission.³⁷ Joseph Ashley, a wealthy London draper, purchased the estate in 1703 from the heiress of a London merchant family which had owned the estate since the late sixteenth century. After Joseph's son inherited, failure of

³⁴ Rogers, 'Money Land and Lineage', pp. 269, 283, 287. Rogers, 'Money, Marriage, Mobility', p. 20.

³⁵ Borsay, *Urban Renaissance*, pp. 203-205. Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, pp. 3-5.

³⁶ W. P. Courtney, revised A. S. G. Edwards, 'Beriah Botfield', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 2004). [http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/search?btog=chap&f_0=fulltext&q_0=Botfield%2C+Beriah+%281807%E2%80%931863%29%2C+antiquary+and+industrialist, accessed 06.02.2018] University of Manchester Library, Bot, Catalogue description for the *Records of the Botfield Family*.

³⁷ NRO, ASL, ACC1978/333 and M(F) 1-185, *Ashley of Ashby St. Legers*.

legitimate heirs saw the estate pass to a cadet branch. In the eighteenth century they became poorer and the estate passed through marriage to another family.³⁸

Grassby argued that in the late seventeenth century many London merchants were rich enough to enjoy a life-style comparable to that of the landed gentry, but few had the necessary wealth to purchase and maintain a large country estate. This was even more the case for provincial bourgeoisie. He argued that merchants usually accumulated wealth later in life and usually purchased small scattered urban pockets rather than large estates.³⁹ This is illustrated in the sample families. James Thompson of Birmingham and Jeffrey Lowe of Ettington both became wealthy later in life, having accumulated wealth and property as traders and urban rentiers. Gauci claimed that the merchant community was fluid, and just as likely to be downwardly mobile through failure as upwardly mobile through success. He argued that this urban group was emulative in consumption and social behaviour rather than in land purchase.⁴⁰

Habakkuk described fluctuations in the social and economic fortunes of landed families while Cooper discussed inter-generational mobility.⁴¹ These and other writers showed that changing circumstances could reduce upper-gentry families to the rank of squires but could also raise or restore squires to the ranks of the elite.⁴²

³⁸ For further details see below p. 26.

³⁹ R. Grassby, 'Personal Wealth', pp. 220-234. *Idem.*, 'English Merchant Capitalism', pp. 87-107. *Idem.*, 'Social Mobility and Business Enterprise in Seventeenth Century England', in D. H. Pennington and K. V. Thomas (eds.), *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth Century History Presented to Christopher Hill* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 355-358.

⁴⁰ Perry Gauci, 'Finding the Middle Ground', pp. 228-234.

⁴¹ Cooper, 'Ideas of Gentility', pp. 43-77. H. J. Habakkuk, Presidential Addresses: 'The Rise and Fall of English Landed Families 1600-1800', I, II, III, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, vols. 29-31 (1979, 1980 and 1981), pp. 187-207, 199-221, and 195-217. D. Rapp, 'Social Mobility in the Eighteenth Century: The Whitbreads of Bedfordshire 1720-1815', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series 27:3 (1974), pp. 380-394. Lawrence Stone, 'Social Mobility in England, 1500-1800', *Past and Present*, 33 (April, 1966), pp. 16-55.

⁴² H. Masterson, 'The Origins of a Yorkshire Dynasty: the Wilsons of Eshton Hall', *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 74 (2002), pp. 191-204. R. Wilson and A. Mackley, 'Founding a Landed Dynasty, Building a Country House: The Rolles of Heacham in the Eighteenth Century', in C. Rawcliffe, R. Virgo and R. Wilson (eds.), *Counties and Communities: Essays in East Anglian History Presented to Hassell Smith* (Norwich, 1996), pp. 307-329. Joan Thirsk, 'The Fashioning of the Tudor-Stuart Gentry', *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 72 (1946), pp. 69-85. S. Halliday, 'Social Mobility, Demographic Change and the Landed Elite of County Durham, 1610-1689: An Open or Shut Case?', *Northern History*, 30 (1994), pp. 49-63. *Idem.*, 'The Lorraines of Kirkharle: The Decline and Resurgence of a Northumbrian Upper Gentry Family', *Northern History*, 36:1 (2000), pp. 73-82. R. Olney, 'The Youngs at Kingerby: The Making, Unmaking and

I shall consider how far social strata were permeable and whether attitudes to partner selection were transferred by stratified diffusion from the social elite to the squirearchy, and from the squirearchy to their social inferiors. The importance of social mobility is shown in studies of emerging gentry families.

Many Midland families were upwardly mobile, developing either from merchants and professionals to become landowners, or moving from yeomen or lesser gentry into higher status groups. Some, like the Hackets, Mortimers and Bracebridges improved their status through marriage while others, like the Witherings, Williamsons and Spooners did so by purchasing estates. The Hanburys of Norton Canes in Staffordshire were colliery owners who became minor gentry when they purchased a small landed estate.⁴³ The Bracebridges of Atherstone and the Ashleys of Ashby St Leger were originally urban merchants who became minor landowners before moving into the greater gentry through marriage. In contrast, the L'ansons, who had themselves risen from urban gentry to become landowners, sold Ashby St Leger to the Ashleys because of debt, declined in status and by the mid eighteenth century had reverted to yeoman status.⁴⁴ The rise of the Edwards of Welham was even more dramatic. In 1717, Francis Edwards, a fourth son, purchased the Welham estate. His illegitimate grandson inherited the estate in 1741 and married the Earl of Gainsborough's daughter in 1754. In 1798 their son Gerard inherited the Noel estates at Exton while a great-grandson married Penelope Hacket in 1820 and acquired Moxhull. In 1841, another of Francis' great-grandsons became earl of Gainsborough.⁴⁵ The rapid rise of the Edwards was the result of successful marriages and the failure of male heirs. The rise of these families shows that it was often easier to gain permanent entry to the landed gentry through the marriage of daughters than by the purchase of an estate. Marriage offered more lasting long-term social advance than estate purchase and so, unlike primogeniture, privileged daughters rather than sons.

In the seventeenth century, gentry sociability was mainly centred on country houses and their immediate neighbourhood, but after 1660 new forms of public

Remaking of a Lincolnshire Estate', in C. Sturman (ed.), *Lincolnshire People and Places: Essays in Memory of T. R. Leach* (Lincoln, 1996), pp. 117-120.

⁴³ David Brown, 'Business Enterprise and Social Mobility: A Study of the Hanburys of Norton Canes', *Staffordshire Studies*, 6 (1994), pp. 45-71.

⁴⁴ For the Ashleys see above, p. 24; for the rise and decline of the Bracebridge family see below, p. 28.

⁴⁵ LRO, DE3214, *The Noel Family Papers* and DE2615, *The Bracebridge Family Papers*.

urban sociability developed linked to changing attitudes to urban life and culture. In the early eighteenth century some rural gentry moved permanently to urban areas to enjoy the benefits of this 'urban renaissance', while others made extended visits to towns for important social occasions. As has been shown, the Hackets built town houses in Sutton Coldfield, William Congreve settled in Shrewsbury and the Browns of Horbling settled permanently in Stamford.⁴⁶ Patterns of behaviour first developed in London spread rapidly to provincial towns, many of which developed their own 'season' to become important regional social centres.⁴⁷ This enabled the gentry to meet their neighbours, make social contacts with a wider society and enjoy London-style fashion and culture.⁴⁸ Urban leisure facilities of assemblies, concerts, shops and promenades encouraged display and conspicuous consumption and formed an ideal base for the gentry to re-establish control over their local urban communities.⁴⁹ These facilities expanded rapidly to meet demand. Borsay claimed that leisure towns acted as provincial marriage-markets which enabled young people to meet a wide selection of potential partners.⁵⁰ While the elite visited London, Tunbridge Wells or Bath for the season, the parish gentry enjoyed, social life in local towns.⁵¹ Lesser gentry from South Staffordshire, West Leicestershire and North Warwickshire used the facilities of Lichfield, Tamworth or

⁴⁶ Borsay, *Urban Renaissance*, p. 203. S. Counce, 'Not Sprung from Princes: Middling Society in Eighteenth Century West Yorkshire', in Alan Kidd and David Nichols (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class: Studies of Regional and Cultural Diversity Since the Eighteenth Century* (Stroud, 1998), pp. 19-41. Peter Clark, 'Introduction', in Peter Clark (ed.), *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns* (London, 1984), pp. 32-33. P. R. Ditton, 'Leeds Calling: The Influence of London on the Gentrification of Regional Cities', *Urban Studies*, 40:12 (2003), pp. 2,557-2,572. Margaret Pelling, 'Skirting the city? Disease, Social Change and Divided Households in the Seventeenth Century', in Paul Griffiths and Mark Jenner (eds.), *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London* (Manchester, 2002), pp. 162-164. F. J. Ruggiu, 'The Urban Gentry in England: A French Approach', *Historical Research*, 74:185 (2001), pp. 249-271. F. M. L. Thompson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture: Britain 1780-1980* (Oxford, 2001).

⁴⁷ Peter Borsay, 'The London Connection: Cultural Diffusion and Eighteenth Century Provincial Towns', *London Journal*, 19:1 (1994), pp. 21-35. Ian Warren, 'London's Cultural Impact on the English Gentry: The Case of Worcestershire, 1580-1680', *Midland History*, 33:2 (2008), pp. 156-178. *Idem.*, 'The English Landed Elite and the Social Environment of London, 1580-1700', *English Historical Review*, 76 (2011), pp. 44-74.

⁴⁸ Peter Borsay, 'The Rise of the Promenade: The Social and Cultural Use of Space in English Provincial Towns', *British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 9:2 (1986), pp. 125-140. Peter Clark, *English Provincial Society from Reformation to Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent 1500-1640* (Rutherford, New Jersey, 1977). Mark Girouard, *The English Town* (Yale, 1990). S. Margetson, *Leisure and Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1969).

⁴⁹ Peter Clark, *Country Towns in Pre-Industrial England 1500-1800* (Leicester, 1981), pp. 2, 8-9, 17, 20.

⁵⁰ Borsay, *Urban Renaissance*, p. 244.

⁵¹ Anne Tarver, 'Marriage, Morals and Money', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 82 (2008), pp. 189-204.

Stourbridge as well as Birmingham. Urban sociability eased the change from parental to personal choice of partner, helped to empower young people and increased the social and geographical range for potential partners.

This change is illustrated by the social and marital history of the Bracebridges of Atherstone. In the early seventeenth century Thomas Bracebridge, a 'haberdasher of haberdashers', purchased a Warwickshire estate and attempted to combine life as a merchant with landed gentry status. Heavy debts forced him to sell land in the mid seventeenth century. His children married into neighbouring minor squire or merchant families, living within ten miles of Atherstone. The family prospered and acquired new estates. In the later eighteenth century daughters began to find husbands further afield and one younger son married into the wealthy and politically influential Newdigate family of Arbury. Abraham Bracebridge married Mary Holte of Aston Hall.⁵² The increased status and geographical range of these marriages resulted from increased wealth, rising status and the new sociability.

In contrast, the Quaker Galton family, who moved to Birmingham from Bristol in the early eighteenth century, would not participate in gentry social life but kept themselves separate. As wealthy industrialists, they were urban gentry but became landed gentry in the later eighteenth century through purchase and marriage.⁵³ They would only marry within a narrow, closely interrelated group who were all Quakers, until Samuel Tertius Galton converted to the Anglican Church and married Erasmus Darwin's grand-daughter. After this, family members began to marry out of their communion and became socially integrated with the rest of the gentry. The Lowes of Essington and William Stout of Lancaster were Quakers. They adopted an exclusive attitude to marriage. They kept themselves separate socially, would only marry within their own community and were disparaging of those who 'married out'.⁵⁴

⁵² BRO, MS3887/B/24-30, *The Digby Papers*, letters about Abraham Bracebridge's bankruptcy; MS3444/2-3, papers concerning sale of the Holte estates. BRO, MS3889, *Bracebridge Papers*. LRO, DE2615/28-88, *The Bracebridge Family Papers*.

⁵³ BRO, MS3101, *The Galton Papers*.

⁵⁴ WRO, CR2926/3, *The Lowe Correspondence*. Hagger Lowe to his brother J.B.L., 15th second month, 1804. CR2926/4, Hagger Lowe to J.B.L., 25th, second month, 1807. CR2926/11, Hagger Lowe to J.B.L., informing him of his marriage to a Leicestershire Quaker, 8th of 5th month, 1811. J. D. Marshall (ed.), *The Autobiography of William Stout of Lancaster* (Manchester, 1967), pp. 141-142, 1702.

Similarly, the Staffordshire Whitgreaves, a minor Catholic gentry family who played a part in Charles II's escape, married exclusively into their own community. They held two separate marriage services, observing legal requirements with a formal Anglican service followed by a private Catholic one.⁵⁵ Like other Catholic gentry they were excluded from political activity, but did join in normal gentry social life. Eventually, in the late eighteenth century, a cadet branch converted to Anglicanism and began to marry into other communions. Religiously endogamous marriages often had to be geographically exogamous to find appropriate brides.

Rosen argued that the main beneficiaries of the new urban sociability were young gentry women who benefitted from a less constrained and less tightly supervised environment, having previously been restricted to their country homes and the small circle of friends chosen by their parents.⁵⁶ Daughters formed a distinct and often disadvantaged gentry group whose marriages were an essential mechanism for the development of social, political and economic connections.⁵⁷ A patriarchal society understood and accepted the domestic role and subordinate position of women. Rosemary Sweet argued that some gentry parents 'invested' in a single season in London or a provincial marriage-market in the hope that a daughter might find a husband.⁵⁸ Contemporary attitudes to females influenced marriage strategies, even if these were modified to match individual family needs.

There were many single gentry women in the eighteenth century, consisting of those who had failed to marry or chose not to do so, widows, and single girls who were hoping to marry. Dunster and Froide both argued that society disadvantaged unmarried women, while Sharpe considered the ambiguous nature of their status.⁵⁹ Dependent single women drained family resources but a suitable portion

⁵⁵ SRO, D718, *The Whitgreave Papers*.

⁵⁶ Adrienne Rosen, 'Winchester in Transition 1580-1700', in Peter Clark (ed.), *Country Towns in Pre-Industrial England 1500-1800* (Leicester, 1981), pp. 179-180.

⁵⁷ Joanna Martin, *Wives and Daughters: Women and Children in the Georgian Country House* (London, 2004). H. Mead, 'Wyving and Thryving': *The Making of the English Gentlewoman* (Oxford, 1992). Mary Prior, *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1985). *Idem.*, 'Wives and Wills 1580 – 1700', in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds.), *English Rural History 1500-1800: Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 201-225. Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (Yale, 1998), pp. 39-86.

⁵⁸ Rosemary Sweet, *The English Town 1680-1840* (Harlow, 1999), p. 234.

⁵⁹ S. Dunster, 'Useless and Insignificant Creatures? Spinster in the Nottinghamshire Upper Classes, 1720-1820', *Transactions of The Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, 102 (Nottingham, 1998), pp. 103-112. Amy Froide, 'Marital Status as a Category of Difference: Single Women and Widows in Early Modern England', in Judith Bennett and

was the key to marital success. Larsen showed that portion size and the number of daughters in a family affected the marriage strategies pursued.⁶⁰ Portions, fixed long before a child was born, could lose purchasing power and failure to match 'the going rate' could limit hopes of marriage.⁶¹ Girls with small portions might feel driven to accept a socially inferior groom, simply to achieve security.

Attitudes towards second marriages varied. It was generally accepted that a widower, especially one with young children, ought to remarry, but some felt that widows should remain single, even if remarriage offered security. However, young widows with a jointure, provided it did not cease on re-marriage, might prove attractive in the marriage-market, even though competing with single women.

Spring argued that jointures, which replaced dower rights, seriously reduced the financial benefits of widowhood.⁶² Even so, widows could present serious problems for estate finances and some landowners tried to marry-off dependent widows. One Isham widow survived her husband for thirty years, drawing her jointure from the estate throughout the period. Mary Isham's jointure of £800 p.a. cost the Lamport estate over £5,500, in seven years.⁶³ Long-lived widows proved to be a serious problem for the Barkers in the early eighteenth century during which the estate supported three separate jointures including Thomasin, who drew her jointure for almost sixty years. The bankrupt Congreves had to support Abigail Congreve for over twenty years, which delayed the payment of portions to younger children because they were chargeable against her jointure. Each widow drew far more from the estate than their portions had contributed.⁶⁴

Amy Froide, (eds.), *Single Women in the European Past 1250-1800* (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 236-269. Pamela Sharpe, 'Dealing with Love: The Ambiguous Independence of a Single Woman in Early Modern England', *Gender and History*, 11:2 (1999), pp. 209-232.

⁶⁰ Ruth Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune: Elite Single Women's Experience in Yorkshire, 1730-1860', *Women's History Review*, 16:3 (2007), pp. 387-401.

⁶¹ See above pp. 23-24 for Isham marriage strategies. The situation is illustrated in contemporary fiction. Jane Austen's *Emma* described the impoverished status of Mrs and Miss Bates, of Harriet Smith and of Jane Fairfax. This status is also a significant factor in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

⁶² Eileen Spring, *Law, Land and Family: Aristocratic Inheritance in England 1300-1800* (Chapel Hill and London, 1993), pp. 49-55.

⁶³ NRO, IL1412, *Isham Papers*. Marriage settlement of Justinian Isham and Mary Hacket, 3 June 1725. IL1414, Deed of settlement between Justinian Isham and Mary Hacket, 3 June, 1725. PRO/TNA, Prob11/683/55, Justinian Isham's will (d. 5 March, 1737), 6 May, 1737. Prob11/736/245, Mary Isham's will (d. 10 October, 1744), 26 November 1744.

⁶⁴ For the Barker and Congreve widows' jointures see below, Chapter 8, pp. 219-220, 223-224.

Relations between first and second families were important.⁶⁵ When a husband married a widow he might, like Samuel Barker, have step-children to support. This could threaten the financial interests of his own children and lead to family conflict. When Thomas Bracebridge disinherited the children of his first marriage in favour of those of his second it resulted in long-running and ruinous litigation.⁶⁶ Usually, children and wives of second marriages were disadvantaged, especially if there was a surviving heir from a first marriage. Rushton showed that family networks might become involved in disputes over second marriages and inheritance.⁶⁷

A wife's death ended her jointure but did not otherwise alter her marriage settlement. Guaranteed portions, land settlements and property reversion clauses remained in force and were payable to her children. Even a childless first marriage often left little room for a generous settlement for a second wife. Such financial issues may explain why the proportion of remarriages to widows decreased during the eighteenth century.⁶⁸

Questions of interest concerning the Midland gentry's re-marriage strategies include the frequency of remarriage, the social and geographical origins of remarrying widows, the nature of provision for widows and their children, family relationships with step-children, restrictions placed on the remarriage of widows, and the extent of remarriage among widows and widowers. A key issue is whether widowers adopted different strategies when marrying a single woman than when marrying a widow.

⁶⁵ Paula Crawford, 'Sibling Relationships', in Paula Crawford (ed.), *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England (Men and Women in History)* (Harlow, 2004), pp. 209-238.

⁶⁶ BRO, MS3444 and MS3889, *The Holte and Bracebridge Papers*. LRO, DE2615/28-88. *The Bracebridge Papers*.

⁶⁷ Peter Rushton, 'Property, Power and Family Networks: The Problem of Disputed Marriage in Early Modern England', *Journal of Family History*, 11:3 (1986), pp. 205-219.

⁶⁸ Jeremy Boulton, 'London Widowhood Revisited: The Decline of Female Remarriage in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries', *Continuity and Change*, 5:3 (1990), pp. 323-355. E. Foyster, 'Marrying the Experienced Widow in Early Modern England: The Male Perspective', in Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner (eds.), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London 1999), pp. 108-124. J. Panek, 'Why Did Widows Remarry? Remarriage, Male Authority and Female Criticism', in D. Callaghan (ed.), *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 261-298. Barbara Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow: A Stereotype Reconsidered', in Mary Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society* (London, 1985), pp. 54-92. *Idem.*, 'Demographic Determinism and Female Agency: The Remarrying Widow Reconsidered ... Again', *Continuity and Change*, 9:3 (1994), pp. 421-450.

Marriage contracts played a key role in squirearchy marriage-making and resulted from extended negotiations. Young people, especially females, had no direct involvement in these negotiations, which concentrated on financial terms and property settlements. This complex and time-consuming process effectively determined when and if a marriage took place. Several descriptions of the negotiating process are found in the sample sources and show the relative negotiating strengths and weaknesses of the two sides. The different archives contain marriage contracts and agreements covering the entire period. The increasing length and intricacy of marriage contracts shows how the process changed from the mid sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, illustrates the different expectations of the families and demonstrates the tension between estate transmission and the financial security of wives and their unborn children.

Finance was always a major element in gentry marriage-making. Squirearchy marriage involved the redistribution of limited family and estate resources. A bride whose parents were wealthier than the groom's might make a larger financial contribution to the new alliance and would expect a more generous settlement. A groom marrying into a lower status family could demand a larger than normal portion and offer a less generous jointure. I argue that, despite the change from arranged marriages to ones based on mutual affection, financial arrangements continued to dominate discussions and determine the success of negotiations.

Historians writing about marriage contracts have usually concentrated on the elite, rather than the squirearchy. Different interpretations created a major debate in the 1980s and 1990s. The traditional view was that the dominant gentry philosophy was patriarchal and patrilineal but Okin and Howell both challenged this conclusion, arguing that for the lesser gentry providing for younger children and widows was as important for eldest sons and estate transmission.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Henry French and Mark Rothery, "Upon Your Entry into the World": Masculine Values and the Threshold of Adulthood Among Landed Elites in England 1680-1800", in *Social History*, 33:4, (2008), pp. 402-422. *Idem.*, *Man's Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities* (Oxford, 2011). Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Sex, Honour and Marriage* (Longman, 1999). David Howell, *Patriarchs and Parasites: The Gentry of South West Wales in the Eighteenth Century* (Cardiff, 1986). Susan Okin, 'Patriarchy and Married Women's Property in England: Questions on Some Current Views', in *Eighteenth Century Studies*, vol. 17:2 (Winter, 1983-1984), pp. 121-136. Linda Pollock, 'Teach Her to Live Under Obedience: The Making of Women in the Upper Ranks of Early Modern England', in *Continuity and Change*, 4:2, (1989), pp. 121-136.

Habakkuk argued that great landowners adopted the strict settlement earlier and more wholeheartedly than the squirearchy.⁷⁰ He claimed that cheap credit and mortgages encouraged the rapid growth of the financial settlements which led to the demise of lesser gentry families unable to compete with the 'going rate' of portions and jointures. This increased the social and economic gap between squires and the elite. Parents of daughters who attempted to provide larger portions might cripple their estate. Stone claimed that the strict settlement was used less frequently by the squirearchy than the greater gentry, especially in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. He argued that, even though its main function was to protect property transmission, it also protected the interests of dependents.⁷¹ These views were challenged by Clay, Holderness and Beckett.⁷²

Evidence from the sample shows that some lesser gentry adopted the strict settlement at the same time as the elite, rather than later as some historians have claimed. This device was developed during the Civil War, allegedly by Orlando Bridgeman the great-grandfather of Mary Hacket and Geoffrey Palmer, Mary Barker's uncle. It was designed to protect Royalist property from sequestration but was gradually adopted in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to become the norm for gentry intergenerational property transfer. The principal debate, led by Habakkuk, Stone and Bonfield, concerned different interpretations of the purpose of the device. Habakkuk said it was about patrilineal succession whereas Stone and Bonfield stressed its importance in providing for children.⁷³

⁷⁰ H. J. Habakkuk, 'English Landownership 1680-1740', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 10 (1940), pp. 2-17. *Idem.*, 'Marriage Settlements in the Eighteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series, 32 (1950), pp. 15-30. *Idem.*, 'The Rise and Fall of English Landed Families', pp. 187-207, 199-221, 195-221. *Idem.*, 'Marriage and the Ownership of Land' in R. R. Davies, R. A. Griffiths, I. G. Jones, and K. O Morgan (eds.), *Welsh Society and Nationhood: Historical Essays Presented to Glanmor Williams* (Cardiff, 1984), pp. 176-198. *Idem.*, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*.

⁷¹ Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?* p. 50. Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (abridged edition, London, 1979), p. 167.

⁷² C. G. Clay, 'Marriage, Inheritance and the Rise of Large Estates in England, 1660-1815', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 21:3 (1968), pp. 503-518. *Idem.*, 'Property Settlements: Financial Provision for the Family and the Sale of Land by Great Landowners', *Journal of British Studies*, 21:1 (1981), pp. 18-38. B.A. Holderness 'The English Land Market in the Eighteenth Century: The Case of Lincolnshire', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 27:4 (1974), pp. 557-576. J. V. Beckett, 'English Landownership in the Later Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries: The Debate and the Problem', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 30:4 (1977), pp. 567-581.

⁷³ H. J. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*. Lloyd Bonfield, *Marriage Settlements 1601-1740: The Adoption of the Strict Settlement* (Cambridge, 1983).

David and Eileen Spring argued that the strict settlement was designed to weaken the traditional rights of gentry widows and their children because jointures were less generous than the widows 'third for life' dowry.⁷⁴ Bonfield criticised the conclusions of both Habakkuk and Stone and claimed, on the basis of his study of Kent and Northamptonshire, that lesser gentry as well as the elite adopted the strict settlement rapidly, so that by the 1680s it was the most frequently employed form of marriage settlement used by almost all landed society.⁷⁵ He argued that strict settlement satisfied the short-term goals of estate transmission and provision of jointures.⁷⁶

This debate raises important questions about the squirearchy and the elite. Were the squirearchy more concerned with provision for dependents than with primogeniture and property transmission? Did their limited resources restrict

⁷⁴ Eileen Spring and David Spring, 'The English Landed Elite, 1540-1889' [review of Stone], *Albion*, 17: 2 (1985), pp. 149-166. Lawrence Stone, 'Spring Back' [reply to the Springs article], *Albion*, 17:2 (1985), 166-180. Eileen Spring, 'The Settlement of Land in Nineteenth Century England', *The American Journal of Legal History*, 8:3 (1964), pp. 203-223. *Idem.*, 'The Family, Strict Settlement and the Historians', *Canadian Journal of History* 18:3 (1983), pp. 379-398. *Idem.*, 'Law and the Theory of the Affective Family', *Albion*, 16:1 (1984), pp. 1-20. *Idem.*, 'The Strict Settlement: Its Role in Family History' *Economic History Review*, new series, vol. 41 no 3 (August, 1988), pp. 454-460. *Idem.*, 'The Heiress at Law: English Real Property Law from a New Point of View', *Law and History Review*, 8:2 (1990), pp. 273-296. *Idem.*, 'Child Custody and the Decline of Women's Rights', *Law and History Review*, 17:2 (1999), pp. 315-318. Barbara English and John Saville, 'Family Settlement and "the Rise of Great Estates"', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 33:4 (1980), pp. 556-558. Barbara English, 'Strict Settlements and their Use for Genealogists', *English Genealogists Congress* (1986), pp. 167-182. *Idem.*, 'Inheritance and Succession in Landed Families, 1650-1925', *The Genealogist Magazine*, 24 (1994), pp. 433-438. *Idem.*, 'The Family Settlements of the Sykes of Sledmere, 1792-1900', in Gerry Rubin and David Sugarman (eds.), *Law, Economy and Society, 1750-1914: Essays in the History of English Law* (Abingdon, 1984), pp. 209-240. MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, p. 282.

⁷⁵ Bonfield claimed that Orlando Bridgeman did not use the strict settlement on his own estates or those of his descendants until 1670 when he used the device for his youngest son's marriage. Lloyd Bonfield *Marriage Settlements 1601-1740*, p. 62.

⁷⁶ Lloyd Bonfield, *Marriage Settlements*. *Idem.*, 'Marriage Settlements and "The Rise of Great Estates": The Demographic Aspect', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 32:4 (1979), pp. 483-493. *Idem.*, 'Marriage Settlements and the Rise of Great Estates: A Rejoinder', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 33:4 (1980), pp. 559-563. *Idem.*, 'Affective Families, Open Elites and Strict Family Settlements in England', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 39:3 (1986), pp. 341-354. *Idem.*, 'Strict Settlement and the Family, a Differing View', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 41:3 (1988), pp. 461-466. *Idem.*, 'Marriage Settlements 1660-1740: The Adoption of the Strict Settlement in Kent and Northamptonshire', in R.B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London, 1981), pp. 101-116. *Idem.*, 'Property Settlements on Marriage in England from the Anglo Saxons to the Mid Eighteenth Century', in Lloyd Bonfield (ed.), *Marriage, Property and succession: Comparative Studies in Continental and Anglo-American Legal History* (Berlin, 1992), pp. 287-308. Barbara English and John Saville 'Family Settlements and "The Rise of Great Estates"', pp. 556-558. Eileen Spring, 'The Strict Settlement: Its Role in Family History', pp. 454-460.

choice of partners or drive them to borrow to 'purchase' socially acceptable marriages? Were they influenced by the practices of the urban gentry which seemed to be more equitable than those of the elite? Sandra Macpherson showed that the debate about the operation of the strict settlement was of concern to contemporary writers. In a study of the role of entail (settlement) in Jane Austen's novels she demonstrated that imaginative representations of early nineteenth century fictional families closely resembled contemporary perceptions of real-life lesser gentry marriage strategies.⁷⁷ Many writers have examined the experiences of different gentry families.⁷⁸

I shall argue that squirearchy expectations of marriage for heirs, and sometimes second sons, were different to those for daughters and younger sons. An heir's marriage was important for estate integrity and encouraged early marriage on the most advantageous terms possible; a daughter's marriage alienated family wealth through her portion; a younger son's share of family wealth might 'set him up' in employment so that he was self-supporting, and no longer a burden on family resources. Squirearchy parents usually wanted to minimise costs and maximise benefits accruing to the estate.

Parents were usually more interested in finding suitable employment for their younger sons than in arranging their marriages. This could affect the long-term marriage prospects of younger sons. Few squirearchy younger sons had large enough portions to compete effectively in the marriage-market while they were young. Those who prospered in employment could often make good marriages later in life. The search for employment usually led them to settle in urban areas where they could meet appropriate females drawn from different social backgrounds. Some younger sons in the sample married daughters of merchants but a few married into higher social groups. However, my small random sample is

⁷⁷ S. Macpherson, 'Rent to Own: Or What's entailed in *Pride and Prejudice*', *Representations*, 82 (2003), pp. 1-23.

⁷⁸ Vivienne Larmine, 'Settlement and Sentiment', pp. 27-47. C. G. Clay, 'Property Settlements', pp. 18-38. A. Erickson, 'Common Law Versus Common Practice: The Use of Marriage Settlements in Early Modern England', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series 43:1 (1990), pp. 21-39. M. R. Chesterman, 'Family Settlements on Trust: Landowners and the Rising Bourgeoisie', in Gerry Rubin and David Sugarman (eds.), *Law, Economy and Society 1750-1914: Essays in the History of English Law* (Abingdon, 1984), pp. 124-167. J. P. Cooper, 'Patterns of Inheritance and Settlement by Great Landowners from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries' in J. Goody, E. P. Thompson and J. Thirsk (eds.), *Family and Inheritance*, pp. 192-327. R. Olney, 'The Youngs at Kingerby' pp. 117-120.

not representative and cannot produce meaningful statistical data about social mobility through marriage.

Few studies of gentry families specifically examine the economics of marriage settlements or of marriage itself, but general works often include brief surveys. Outhwaite surveyed the economics of gentry marriage as did Beckett in his study of the Lowthers.⁷⁹ Those studies which consider gentry finance are usually concerned with the wealthier gentry or aristocracy.⁸⁰ Attention has been paid to dowry payments and to how lack of fortune could restrict marital prospects. Some writers have argued that parents of large families sometimes accepted that not all of their daughters would marry and so gave more financial support to those who might.⁸¹

Later seventeenth century settlements formalised provision for daughters, but rarely included younger sons, since it was assumed that once educated they would take responsibility for their own lives. Provision might be included in wills but was often left to the discretion and generosity of the testator's heir. This pattern changed in the early eighteenth century as allowances for younger sons started to be included in settlements.⁸² The major aim of squirearchy marriage strategies

⁷⁹ R.B. Outhwaite, 'Marriage as Business: Opinions on the Rise in Aristocratic Bridal Portions in Early Modern England', in N. Mckendrick and R. B. Outhwaite (eds.), *Business Life and Public Policy: Essays in Honour of D. C. Coleman* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 21-37. J. V. Beckett, 'The Lowthers at Holker: Marriage, Inheritance and Debt in the Fortunes of an Eighteenth Century Landowning Family', *Transactions of the History Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 127 (1978), pp. 47-64. *Idem.*, 'English Landownership in the Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 30:4 (1977), pp. 567-581. *Idem.*, *Coal and Tobacco: the Lowthers and the Economic Development of West Cumberland, 1660-1760* (Cambridge, 1981).

⁸⁰ J. Addy, *Death, Money and the Vultures: Inheritance and Avarice, 1660-1750* (London, 1992). A. Simpson, *The Wealth of the Gentry* (Cambridge, 1961). Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture*. A. Radley, *A Georgian Marriage: The Family Papers of Sir Nash and Lady Grose 1761-1814* (Stourbridge, 2007). D. C. Quinlen and J. Shakelford, 'Economy and English Families, 1500-1800', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 24 (1994), pp. 431-463.

⁸¹ R. Breen, 'Dowry Payments and the Irish Case', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26:2 (1984), pp. 280-296. G. Morgan, 'Dowries for Daughters in West Wales, 1500-1700', *Welsh History Review*, 17 (1995), pp. 534-549. A. W. Malcolmson, *The Pursuit of the Heiress: Aristocratic Marriage in Ireland 1740-1840* (London, 2004). Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune', pp. 387-401.

⁸² D. Byrne, 'Younger Sons in the Seventeenth Century', *Wicklow Roots*, 5 (2000), pp. 4-7. R. Hainsworth, 'Fathers and Daughters: Patterns of Marriage and Inheritance Among the Later Stuart Gentry', in L. O. Frapell (ed.), *Principalities, Powers and Estates: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Government and Society*, (Adelaide, 1979), pp. 15-21. G. Jones, 'Wales and Hamburg: The Problems of a Younger Son', in R. R. Davies and G. Jones (eds.), *From Medieval to Modern Wales: Essays in Honour of Kenneth O. Morgan*

was to achieve a balance between what they did for their younger children and what it cost their estates.

Many gentry fathers feared that fortune hunters might seduce their daughters and persuade them to elope or marry clandestinely. This fear is reflected in contemporary literature and led to legislative attempts to tighten parental control over their children. The 1695 Marriage Duty Act was designed to raise much needed revenue by punitively taxing bachelors and childless widowers. It also required official registration of marriages and the publication of banns or the purchase of a marriage licence to regularise marriage. Boulton and Arkell argued that it was effective in reducing clandestine marriages outside London.⁸³

Demands for further reform led to Hardwicke's Act of 1753. This outlawed clandestine marriages and required parental consent for the marriages of minors. Many people criticised this as an attempt by the wealthy gentry to preserve and extend their control over their children.⁸⁴ Younger sons criticised it as an attempt to restrict their chance of making a good marriage.⁸⁵ A significant question is whether these reforms affected gentry marriage strategies in the Midlands. The sample

and Ralph Griffiths (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 15-21. Vivienne Larminie, 'A Younger Son in the Seventeenth Century: The "Inconstant Youth" of Charles Croke of Marston', *Oxfordshire Local History*, 3:1 (1988), pp. 18-23. Susan Staves, 'Resentment or Resignation? Dividing the Spoils Among Daughters and Younger Sons', in John Brewer and Susan Staves (eds.), *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* (London and New York, 1995), pp. 194-218. Joan Thirsk, 'Younger Sons in the Seventeenth Century', *History*, 54:182 (1969), pp. 358-377. H. D. Turner, 'Charles Hatton, a Younger Son', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 3:6 (1965-66), pp. 256-261.

⁸³ T. Arkell, 'An Examination of the Poll Taxes of the Later Seventeenth Century, the Marriage Duty Act and Gregory King', in T. Arkell and K. Schurer (eds.), *Surveying the People: The Interpretation and Use of Document Sources for the Study of Population in the Later Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 166-168. Jeremy Boulton, 'The Marriage Duty Act in London', in Arkell and Schurer, *Surveying the People*, pp. 229-230.

⁸⁴ Rebecca Probert and Liam Brown, 'The Impact of the Clandestine Marriages Act: Three Case Studies in Conformity', *Continuity and Change*, 23:2 (2008), pp. 303-330. *Idem.*, 'The Clandestine Marriage Act of 1753 in Action: Investigating a Contemporary Complaint', *Local Population Studies*, 83 (2009), pp. 66-69. Rebecca Probert, 'The Judicial Interpretation of Lord Hardwicke's Act', *Journal of Legal History*, 23:2 (2002), pp. 129-151. *Idem.*, 'Chinese Whispers and Welsh Weddings', *Continuity and Change*, 20:2 (2005), pp. 211-228. J. Schellekens, 'Courtship, the Clandestine Marriage Act and Illegitimate Fertility in England', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 25 (1995), pp. 433-444.

⁸⁵ E. Bannet, 'The Marriage Act of 1753: A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 99 (1997), pp. 233-254. D. Johnson, 'Publish or be Damned [the Marriage Act as an Aristocratic Measure]', *History Today*, 53:11 (2003), pp. 38-45. Rebecca Probert, 'The Impact of the Marriage Act of 1753: Was it Really "A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex"?'', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 38:2 (2005), pp. 247-262.

archives give no indication that any of these families altered their approach to, or expectations of, marriage because of this legislation.

Parker argued that the Marriage Act was a response to changing gentry attitudes to marriage-making. He suggested that many gentry parents feared that romantic love and closer personal relationships were closely linked and, if encouraged, might threaten estate and family stability.⁸⁶ Romantic love was a central feature of courtship literature, which often represented love as the best foundation for a good marriage. The sample correspondence suggests that love and affection were important features in marriage-making, especially in the eighteenth century, though it is difficult to identify precisely when love became the driving force. This change seems to have followed a process of evolution rather than revolution.

Stone argued that 'love' influenced elite choice after 1750 but was evident among the squirearchy much earlier.⁸⁷ Trumbach suggested that it had been a factor in elite marriage from the early seventeenth century. He argued that lesser gentry daughters, since they did not contribute to family wealth and continuity, were allowed greater freedom to follow their hearts in partner-selection. The main restriction was that they were usually expected to choose from parentally approved status groups. Younger sons were also given greater freedom of choice than their older brother, since they had 'nothing to lose but their hearts'.⁸⁸ Macfarlane asserted that romantic love had been a significant marriage-making feature for most social groups below the aristocracy from the fourteenth-century onwards. His claim is suggestive but weakened because his focus was on lower class society rather than the gentry.⁸⁹ Wrightson claimed that initiative in seeking a partner might come from parents or children according to circumstances. He believed that lesser gentry courtship was more personal and informal than that of the elite and that when property transmission was not involved, children were generally allowed greater freedom of choice.⁹⁰ The sample correspondence shows that several factors influenced lesser gentry marriage strategies, including, financial pressures, personal inclination, age at marriage, family size, birth order,

⁸⁶ S. Parker, *Informal Marriage, Cohabitation and the Law 1750-1989* (New York, 1990). R. B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriages in England 1500-1850* (London, 1995).

⁸⁷ Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?* pp. 50, 56.

⁸⁸ Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family*, pp. 3, 71, 93, 100.

⁸⁹ Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love*, pp. 36, 119, 122-123.

⁹⁰ Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 71-73.

property transmission and family connections which could exert influence for the benefit of most family members.

In the seventeenth century gentry marriage seemed to be an extension of the patriarchal system. Partner selection and the negotiation of marriage contracts was a father's responsibility. By 1700 children, aided by new forms of urban sociability, were becoming more active in partner selection.⁹¹ Fletcher argued that changes in courtship practices demonstrated greater individuality and maturity in young people.⁹² Stone identified a move towards more affectionate marriages in the early eighteenth century, which in turn encouraged parents to allow their children greater freedom of choice. He described a shift from familial towards personal interest.⁹³ A key question is whether this applied to squirearchy marriages and whether it occurred earlier among the lesser gentry than among their wealthier superiors.⁹⁴ Cressy's study of courtship and marriage rituals in the Tudor and Stuart period and Gillis's study of marriage showed that all social groups experienced a tension in their attempts to balance conjugal love with material considerations.⁹⁵

The sample correspondence contains limited evidence about courtship and the effects of sociability. These sources can be supplemented with information from other evidence. Fiction provides a useful commentary, since courtship and courtship rituals are at the heart of most romantic novels and plays. It shows how significant the new forms of public urban sociability were in encouraging greater freedom and personal interaction in courtship activities.

An important question is whether differences in marital strategies existed between emergent squirearchy families, long established ones and those who, having fallen

⁹¹ Borsay, *Urban Renaissance*, pp. 244, 254, 267. E. Griffin, 'A Conundrum Resolved? Rethinking Courtship, Marriage and Population Growth in Eighteenth Century England', *Past and Present*, 215:1 (2012), pp. 125-164. Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 73.

⁹² Anthony Fletcher, 'Manhood, the Male Body, Courtship and the Household in Early Modern England', *History*, 84 (1999), pp. 419-436.

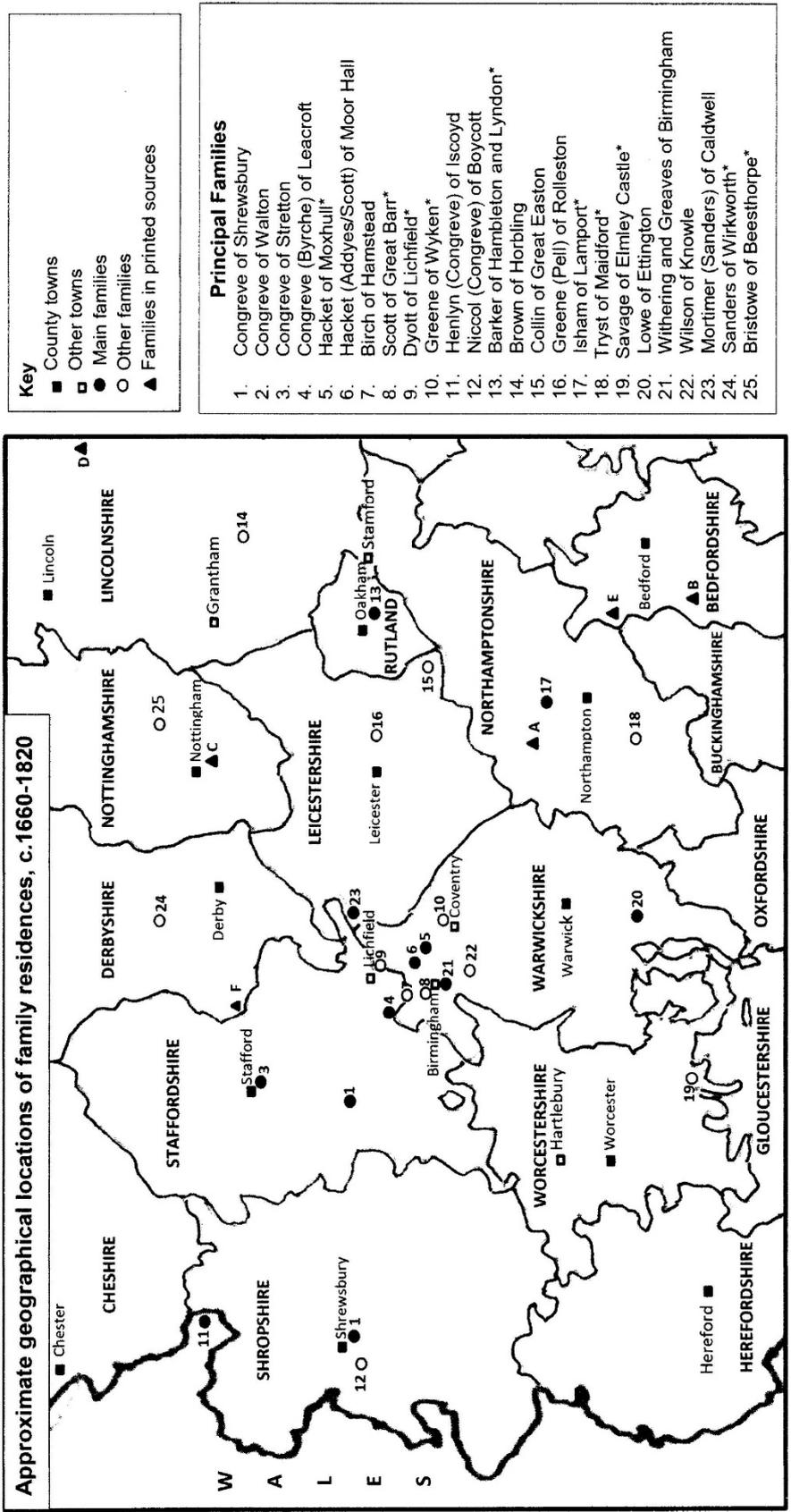
⁹³ Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*. Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?* Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love*. Lloyd Bonfield, 'Marriage, Property and the Affective Family' (review essay), *Law and History Review*, 1:2 (1983), 297-312.

⁹⁴ MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, pp. 36, 119, 122-123. Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, pp. 3, 71, 93, 100. Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 71, 73, 74, 212.

⁹⁵ D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997). J. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (New York, 1985).

on hard times, were on a downward social spiral. How far do shared marriage-making practices indicate the class-cohesion that made the lesser gentry an integral part of the aristocrat-gentry social continuum? Were they a separate and independent group, isolated from their wealthier counterparts by resources, environment and expectations? Did the blurring of distinctions between the squirearchy and people of lesser status mask substantive differences which made them distinctive social groups? Was there really a gulf between the lesser gentry and wealthier yeomen or artisans? Were the urban gentry more concerned with professional advance and capital accumulation rather than estate preservation and transmission? Questions like these show that lesser gentry marriage-making strategies in the long eighteenth century resonate with modern debates about 'forced' and 'arranged' marriages, the nature of 'romantic love' and the continuing relevance of marriage.

Chapter 2 is devoted to a discussion of those Midland families whose archives form the empirical basis for this study. The first section outlines the principal families studied and those families with whom they were linked. The second part contains background details of several families whose letters, diaries and autobiographies supplement the material described in the first section. Some of these families were Midland based but others came from further afield. This material is in published form, having been selected by modern editors and historians for their own purposes, which I refer to as 'printed' or 'published' sources.



* Indicates families which were resident throughout the period. All other families were resident for shorter periods of time

Midland Families and individuals in Published sources
 A. Martin (ed. Viallis and Collins, Northampton, 2004) B. Williamson (Manning, Streetley, 1954) C. Gawthorn (ed. Henstock, Nottingham, 1980) D. Banks (ed. Hall, Lincoln, 1952) E. Rogers (ed. Unell, Streetley, 1950) F. Vernon (Knott, Stroud, 2010)*

Chapter 2: Families

Introduction

This chapter introduces the families used in this study whose archival material provides my evidence base. Although not truly representative, they reflect attitudes, processes and approaches to marriage and marriage-making of seventeenth and eighteenth century Midland squirearchy families. The map on page 41 shows that the sample families were drawn from all parts of four Midland counties. Several of the archives present a continuous history from the early seventeenth century to at least 1820. The Barker and Congreve material is extensive, but the Hacket and Mortimer family records are dispersed and patchy. The Lowes, Witherings, Greaves and Birch archives provide letter collections covering relatively short periods. The *longue durée* approach from 1660-1820 allows the identification of continuity and change.

The Congreves came from South Staffordshire but, during the eighteenth century, settled in Shrewsbury, London and Berkshire while the Barkers from Rutland had strong links with Leicestershire and Lincolnshire. The Hackets, originally from Scotland, settled in North Warwickshire in the 1660s, but had connections with Northamptonshire, Suffolk and Lincolnshire. The Mortimers were a Somerset, family who purchased estates in Essex and, in the mid eighteenth century, settled on the Derbyshire-Leicestershire border. The Lowes, a long-established South Warwickshire family, dispersed after 1800, settling in Gloucestershire and Southwark. William Withering came from Shropshire but settled in Birmingham. He, like his son, was educated in Scotland, while his daughter married a wealthy Northamptonshire landowner. The Greaves of Wythall were Birmingham gentlemen-farmers in the early nineteenth century while George Birch had inherited a South Staffordshire estate from a distant relative. Between them, they represent: old-established gentry families; newly emerging families; early nineteenth century urban gentry; and urban gentry who became landed gentry. The sample includes families which ended in the male line and others which disappeared or were absorbed by other families through marriage. The status of each family fluctuated over time, sometimes reaching higher gentry status. Family trees for the main and several minor families are included as Appendix 1.

These family records can take us a long way but, as with all such projects, archival material is often incomplete and patchy. Barker correspondence is focussed mainly in the period 1640-1660 and the early eighteenth century; Hacket and Mortimer correspondence is focused mainly in the 1720s; the Congreve correspondence is concentrated between 1740 and 1780; the Lowe and Withering correspondence dates from after 1800. Information about the marriages of younger sons, many of the daughters and the cadet branches is often missing. There is little evidence in the sources about public sociability, reading habits, or letters from husbands to wives and it is often difficult to establish the level of affection between couples. An exception to this is the Isham correspondence which contains a series of after-marriage letters between Mary and Justinian which show that strong bonds of love and affection developed between them. The uncertain and sometimes accidental nature of source preservation means that the available evidence is about families which retained or improved status. The sources say little about cadet branches or those families which experienced permanent social decline. These gaps and silences are impediments to the creation of a complete picture.

My empirical evidence is supplemented by reference to other families and individuals of similar social background, using primary material available in published form. Although selected, edited and printed for other purposes they contain material about people and families with lesser gentry backgrounds of relevance to this study. These sources represent different occupations, including lawyers, merchants, shopkeepers, physicians and clergymen. Many were Anglicans, but several were nonconformists and at least one was Roman Catholic. These published sources complement the sample families, almost all of whom were Anglicans, and allow a contrast to be drawn between Anglican and nonconformist approaches to marriage-making.

1. Principal Families

(i) Barker¹

The Barkers were yeomen who rose rapidly in the mid seventeenth century to become wealthy gentry. Although the senior line was eventually too wealthy and

¹ LRO, DG11, *Conant Papers* and Barker family tree, Appendix 1.

powerful to be counted as 'lesser gentry', the cadet branch illustrates the fortunes of a family in decline for much of the eighteenth century, while still retaining lesser gentry status.

(a) The senior line

The senior branch of Baldwin Barker's descendants prospered as graziers and sheep-farmers, acquiring land and purchasing Hambleton Hall in 1634. Baldwin's grandson Abel established the family's position in Rutland society, becoming an influential member of the county community. He was elected M.P. in 1656 and 1679 and held several public offices under the protectorate. Abel married daughters of two local Royalist families. He was nominated for the proposed Order of the Royal Oak and made a baronet in 1665, so joining the titled gentry. With his unmarried brother, he purchased Lyndon estate and built a large mansion which became the main family residence after 1677.² His only son, Sir Thomas, never married, but enjoyed an active social life with the wealthy Lincolnshire gentry. Abel built up the family's wealth and prestige but Thomas, a spendthrift, wasted his resources and left the estate in financial difficulties.³

The negotiations for Abel's marriages are well-documented and were probably arranged to safeguard his political position should the royalists return to power. His standing is shown by the large £1,500 portion he received for each marriage. Abel's daughters all married landed gentlemen. Two of his sisters married well, but the third married a yeoman and after his death illicitly, and probably clandestinely, married her husband's step-brother. This was contrary to canonical rules and was opposed by her brother. Correspondence and wills show that the Barkers were a close-knit family which maintained close contact with descendants of each of these marriages.

The senior branch rapidly attained prominent social status, political influence and wealth. Most of the children married, making useful familial connections. Four of

² B. D. Henning, 'Abel Barker', in Basil Duke Henning (ed.), in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1660-1690* (London, 1983). [<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1660-1690/member/barker-sir-abel-1616-79>, accessed 22.02.2016]

³ Sir Thomas Barker, [www.lyndon-estate.co.uk/04 History/04 Historical Figures](http://www.lyndon-estate.co.uk/04%20History/04%20Historical%20Figures). [accessed 22.02.2016]

seven sons born in the seventeenth century remained single and another died young. This resulted in the ending of the direct male line in 1708, by which time the family was facing severe financial difficulties because of over-large portions for daughters' marriages, failure to attract income through the marriages of sons, the extravagant and uncontrolled spending of Sir Thomas and the heavy burden of lengthy jointure payments. Only one surviving male cadet branch existed to secure the succession after Sir Thomas's death.

(b) The cadet line⁴

Samuel, Baldwin Barker's youngest son, married into a prominent Leicestershire family but was less ambitious and less prosperous than his brother. Five of his seven children did not marry. His eldest son, Samuel, married a widow, twelve years older than himself, who was the sister-in-law of a regicide and daughter of an impoverished cleric dismissed for royalist sympathies. Samuel married, without his father's consent, a woman lacking fortune and expectations. When he succeeded his father, he had a step-daughter, two sons and two daughters.

His eldest son, another Samuel, inherited in 1676 but died unmarried six years later. He was succeeded by his brother Augustine, who married another descendant of his great-grandfather Baldwin. Augustine died in 1689 leaving two children. His heir, another Samuel, had a long minority under his mother's guardianship. This would normally have allowed retrenchment and the restoration of prosperity, but the estate suffered the heavy burden of jointures for Samuel's mother and grandmother. Samuel, the only surviving male Barker, inherited the Lyndon estate when Sir Thomas died.

Samuel, a close friend of the cleric and academic William Whiston, was a noted Hebrew scholar. His marriage in 1714 to Whiston's seventeen-year-old daughter was a love match to a girl without fortune or future prospects.⁵ Barker finances were so strained that they had to lease out Lyndon and live in London.⁶ Samuel's

⁴ Barker family tree, Appendix 1.

⁵ See below pp. 54-55.

⁶ James Mew, 'Barker, Samuel (1686–1759)', revised by Philip Carter, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004, online edition, January 2008). [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/1412>, accessed 29 February, 2016]

heir, Thomas, was a highly regarded meteorologist. He married the sister of his close friend Gilbert White of Selbourne in 1751, but her portion was insubstantial. Since Thomas's sisters remained single, the interest on their portions and the cost of their maintenance was a long-term financial drain.⁷ It is not clear whether they chose not to marry or whether their portions were too small to attract suitable offers. Only two of Thomas's five children married. His son Samuel married the daughter of a poor Northamptonshire vicar, but none of Samuel's three children married so that the family died out. Thomas's daughter Sarah married Edward Brown, heir to a wealthy Lincolnshire family. Their son purchased Lyndon estate after the death of the last Barker in 1843.

The eighteenth century Barkers were less successful socially, politically, and economically than their seventeenth century predecessors. Of six male births after 1689, only three married. After 1680, only a quarter of all Barker children married, which seriously affected estate finances and estate transmission. Financial constraints and small portions may have made the younger children virtually unmarriageable. Each of the wives of those heirs who married were daughters of relatively poor parish clergy. This implies that bride selection was based on friendship and shared interests rather than the desire for financial benefit. The later Barkers were academics, and do not seem to have sought advantageous connections or political involvement. The family had few children, but a surplus of daughters contributed to succession failure.

The extensive Barker archive illustrates the family's marriage strategies and the importance of having reserve male heirs. There is no archival explanation for the number of life-long single adults in the eighteenth century, but it was probably linked to limited finances.

(ii) **Congreve**⁸

The Congreves were a long-established Staffordshire gentry family and members of the mid seventeenth century county community. Their declining fortunes,

⁷ R. E. Anderson, 'Barker, Thomas (1722–1809)', revised by Joseph Gross, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/1414>, accessed 29 February, 2016]

⁸ SRO, *Congreve Papers* and family tree in Appendix 1.

damaged by the Civil War, started them on a downward social spiral. Richard, a staunch Royalist, suffered heavy fines during the Civil War from which the family could not recover. In the 1660s, like Abel Barker, he was nominated for the ill-fated Order of the Royal Oak in recognition of his loyalty. Finances deteriorated in the early eighteenth century thanks to the dissolute life-style of Richard's grandson, John. When John died in 1729 the estate was bankrupt, and a private Act of Parliament was required to resettle the estate and pay his debts. Property was alienated which further reduced estate income.

This situation adversely affected Congreve nuptiality. In the seventeenth century half of all Congreve children reaching adulthood married, attracting partners from the middle and upper gentry of South Staffordshire or Shropshire. John Congreve (1636-1688) married Mary Niccol, daughter of a Shrewsbury-based merchant with a small estate in North Shropshire. Seven of Mary's eleven children married. Her daughters married minor local gentry. Her three younger sons married well. Details of Charles' marriage are not recorded but his brother Ralph married Anne Hanmer of Walsall and inherited her property in London. Their son Ralph married Charlotte Lady Stawell, owner of Aldermaston, and inherited the estate after her death. William, the third brother, married his mother's cousin, joint-heir to her father's estate. Her father, Thomas Niccol was a prosperous Levant merchant with property in London who had inherited his mother's Pentrefelyn property in North Wales. These marriages showed the Congreves willingness to marry urban gentry.

Mary's eldest son, John (1666-1729) married Abigail Harwood, daughter of a Shrewsbury merchant who owned land in Berkshire. John and Abigail had thirteen children, of whom five died before reaching marriageable age. Of the remainder, only two sons and one daughter married. The birth rate declined and the senior Congreve line only survived because of three children born to Richard, their eighth son, after his late second marriage.

Detailed Congreve correspondence, outlining the Clavering-Congreve marriage negotiations, shows the difficulty of reaching a satisfactory financial agreement. Other correspondence contains details about William's marriage to Jane Waller and his cousin's marriage to Charlotte Stawell. It also shows family disapproval when Richard's marriage disrupted the expected succession and when cousins made injudicious marriages. Richard's second marriage restored the fortunes of

the senior branch. By 1780, Richard had become a substantial landowner owning property in North Wales, Cheshire, Berkshire and Staffordshire.

Nuptiality and family size were problems for the eighteenth century Congreves. William, John and Mary's youngest son, and his wife Catherine had four sons and three daughters, but only their eldest son married. He in turn had one son and seven daughters, but only his son William married. This William had three sons and three daughters of whom only three married and had children. In the early nineteenth century this branch of the family prospered so that by 1820 there were two well-established Congreve families in England. A distantly related Irish branch maintained spasmodic contact with the English family and were, for a brief period in the 1770s, included in the succession. The cadet branches show that younger sons who married successfully could retain or even improve their gentry status.

The five surviving sons of the senior line born after 1690 illustrate a pattern of employment common in many gentry families. William, the eldest, was a soldier; Francis the second son was a Cairo merchant; Charles Walter became Arch-Deacon of Armagh; Ralph was an officer in the merchant navy; and Richard, the youngest, was a parish priest. Since none were employed in the professions it is possible that their employment opportunities were constrained by financial limitations and lack of influential friends.

This family fell on hard times but recovered wealth and status through successful marriages. Their history shows the benefit, in a patrilineal society, of having sufficient sons to continue the succession. Some younger sons retained status thanks to prudent marriages. As a military family, overseas postings may explain why some married later in life. William Congreve, as head of the family, interfered in the affairs of cadet branches and tried to influence partner-selection. The correspondence gives some indication of characteristics they looked for in brides. As a family they seem to have valued fortune more highly than personal qualities or deep-seated affection.

(iii) **Hacket**

The Hackets were a migrant Scottish family which prospered in the seventeenth century but declined and experienced financial difficulties after 1720. The family

revived in the 1790s to achieve higher status. The main line died out in 1815, but a cadet branch, having inherited an estate through marriage, survived into the twenty-first century. The experience of the Hackets shows that marriage could establish a newly emerging family, but small family size and lack of sons could create difficulties.

There is no substantial Hacket archive, probably because of a disastrous fire, allegedly started by an owner, which destroyed Moxhull in 1906. It is, however, possible to develop some understanding of their growth and marital policy using the limited material available, which includes isolated papers in other archives. A useful, but incomplete, family tree is included in a nineteenth century local history of Sutton Coldfield.⁹

This family illustrates how the fortunes of lesser gentry families could fluctuate. In the seventeenth century. Successful marriages created strong links with the neighboring Bridgeman family and gave them a Warwickshire estate. However, a marriage arranged in 1725 to achieve higher social status created severe financial difficulties. In the mid eighteenth century the family gradually rebuilt its status and wealth through marriages with minor heiresses. The direct line was broken in 1727, leading to the accession of a younger son. In 1820, after another failure of direct succession, the estate passed to the Noel family. The cadet branch almost died out in the nineteenth century, but survived through a single grandson.

Andrew Halket (alias Hacket), fifth son of a Scottish laird, settled in London as a tailor in the 1590s, and was later employed in Prince Henry's household. Andrew's son John, a cleric and chaplain to both James I and Charles I, was created bishop of Lichfield and Coventry in 1661 as a reward for his royalist sympathies. From his first marriage, John had six children and property in Suffolk. His second wife, the sister-in-law of Orlando Bridgeman, produced two further children. John's eldest son Andrew, a Master in Chancery, was knighted and served briefly as MP for Tamworth. Two of John Hacket's four sons died young, but each of his daughter's married London traders or clerics. His second surviving

⁹ Agnes Bracken, *The History of the Forest and Chase of Sutton Coldfield* (London and Birmingham, 1860). NRO, IC1757-IC2826, *Isham Correspondence*. Hacket family tree, Appendix 1.

son Gustavus, prospered as a member of the London Merchant Taylors. He married Anne, daughter of the politician and prominent Puritan, Sir Francis Rous.

Sir Andrew's first wife, daughter of the Bishop of Peterborough, gave him a daughter. In 1670, a private Act of Parliament allowed him to break the entail on his estate to 'settle a portion of money on Mary his daughter'. His second wife, Maria Lisle, gave him Moxhull and three sons and three daughters, five of these married. Moxhull became the Hackets principal property until 1815 and helped establish Andrew as a Warwickshire gentleman. Knighted in 1671, he was the only Hacket to receive a title or be elected an M.P.¹⁰

After Sir Andrew's death the family declined in importance. His eldest son Lisle was largely inactive in local and regional affairs but experienced financial difficulties which forced him to sell property in Northamptonshire and North Warwickshire. Married twice, he had three children. Both children of his first wife died before 1718 when he resettled his estates to provide for Mary, his remaining child. To raise her £12,000 marriage portion in 1725 he mortgaged his estate, leaving his successor heavily in debt. Lisle's brother and successor, Andrew I, married the daughter of a local gentleman farmer. His marriage contract is unusual because it has no reference to a portion but instead settled the Fullwood property jointly on Andrew and his wife.

Of Andrew's four children, only his eldest son, Andrew II, married. His wife came from a cadet branch of the Staffordshire Scotts. She brought him useful local connections and the Little Aston estate. Two of their three sons married minor heiresses. His eldest son, Andrew III, married firstly a daughter of Lord Leigh of Stoneleigh and then the heiress of a minor Northampton landowner, whose small estate was absorbed into the Hacket property. Three of Andrew III's children married. His eldest son, Andrew IV, married Penelope Adderley of Hams Hall and had two sons, both of whom died young. Andrew IV left his estates to Penelope rather than to his younger brother. Her second husband, Berkley Noel, took Moxhull. The estate passed out of Hacket control through lack of male heirs.

¹⁰ A. M. Mimardi re, 'Andrew Hacket', in B. D. Henning (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1660-1690*.
[<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1660-1690/member/hacket-sir-andrew-1632-1709>, accessed 24.02.2016]

Andrew III's younger brother, John Addyes Hacket, married his mother's cousin, Jane Scott of Great Barr. Having taken her uncle's surname, he inherited the Moor Hall estate in Sutton Coldfield.¹¹ Dying childless, he left his estate to his nephew, Francis Beynon Hacket who, though only a second son, had established a separate landed family, completely independent of the senior Hacket line, showing that a successful marriage could unlock wealth and social prestige. Francis eventually married a niece of Lord Aberdeen, by whom he had five sons and five daughters, but only one of these married and had children. Francis sold Moor Hall in the 1860s and relocated to his wife's Yorkshire property.

(iv) **Mortimer**¹²

The Mortimers were sheep farmers and graziers in Somerset. In the 1650s Mark Mortimer bought land in Essex. His son John prospered as a London merchant before purchasing Toppinghoe Hall in Essex. John married three times. His first wife, Richard Cromwell's daughter, died childless shortly after their marriage. His second wife, Sarah Tippetts, was the daughter of a wealthy London merchant and government official. She and her sister were joint-heiresses. Sarah's sister Margaret had married Samuel Sanders of Derbyshire as his third wife. Margaret's step-daughter, Elizabeth Sanders, married John Mortimer in 1689 as his third wife. Sarah Tippetts marriage settlement made generous provision for her two children. After Sarah's death John married Elizabeth Sanders, with whom he had five children. The Sanders were wealthy, well-established and well-connected Derbyshire landowners. This third marriage marked a change of social direction for the family, probably reflected their steady improvement in prosperity, and brought the family into the Midlands.¹³

Mortimer correspondence illustrates the tensions created when a man had two families.¹⁴ Mortimer's first family had generous portions but the second family, because Mortimer's estate was settled on his elder children, was not well-provided for. Margaret, his eldest daughter by Sarah Tippetts had a £2,000 portion when

¹¹ See below pp. 56-57 for details of the Scott-Addyes-Hacket relationship.

¹² LRO, DE107, *Mortimer Papers*. Family tree, Appendix 1d.

¹³ Thomas Seccombe, revised Anita McConnell, 'Mortimer, John (1656-1736)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004, online edition, 2008). [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/19348>, accessed 29 February, 2016]

¹⁴ LRO, DE107/45, *Mortimer Papers*. Elizabeth Mortimer to Cromwell, 4 March 1728.

she married but her half-sister Elizabeth only received £600. The younger sons and daughter of the third Mortimer marriage had very small portions which did not become payable until after both parents had died.

Cromwell, Elizabeth Mortimer's second son and a London physician, married a woman whose status and background are unknown. They had four daughters and only one son, Hans Winthrop. After the death of his older brother, Cromwell inherited the family estate at Toppinghoe and his maternal grandparents Derbyshire property, Caldwell Hall.¹⁵ Hans Winthrop married in the 1760s and some records suggest that he and his wife had eleven children, of whom at least three may have married. He was elected MP in 1775, by which time the family had ceased to be lesser gentry.¹⁶

This Mortimers were late arrivals as gentry, but rose rapidly in status and wealth. Marriage, migration and purchase changed them from yeoman farmers into landed gentry. However, John Mortimer's multiple marriages created financial problems and prevented him from treating the children of his third marriage in the same way as those of his second marriage. His finances and freedom of action were restricted by his earlier settlements. In the eighteenth century the Mortimers were London based merchants and professionals who owned landed estates. Marriage linked them to a prominent political family, a wealthy London merchant and a well-established Midlands landed family.

(v) **Lowe**¹⁷

Little is known of the Lowes background. They were respectable Warwickshire yeomen in the eighteenth century, with a good reputation and strong local links. As Quakers, they enjoyed extensive connections throughout the country. Jeffrey Bevington Lowe was a wealthy tradesman, based in Ettington, but the nature of

¹⁵ W. P. Courtney, 'Mortimer, Cromwell (c.1693–1752)', rev. Michael Bevan, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/19341>, accessed 29.02., 2016]

¹⁶ John Brooke, 'Hans Winthrop Mortimer', in Sir Louis Namier (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons*, (London, 1964, online edition). [<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/mortimer-hans-winthrop-1734-,1807>, accessed 29 February, 2016]

¹⁷ WRO, CR2926/1-78, *The Lowe Correspondence*.

his occupation is unknown. He died, aged 90, leaving almost £25,000 in money as well as rental property.

Jeffrey's brother and three sisters corresponded with him regularly between 1800 and 1820. His sisters lived in London and Gloucestershire and Hagger, his younger brother, was a trader in Southwark. Their letters informed Jeffrey of family affairs and activities, worship in Quaker meetings, their marriages and those of their friends. The letters show that marriage was important within their close-knit religious community but was often geographically exogamous. Only Jeffrey married a local girl. The collection of letters illustrates the lives of nonconformist urban gentry. The family is one of only two in the sample who were not Anglicans.

(vi) **Withering**¹⁸

William Withering, son of a Shropshire apothecary, trained as a doctor in Edinburgh. He practiced in Staffordshire before moving to Birmingham's General Hospital where he built up his reputation and wealth. His son, also William, trained as a doctor in Edinburgh, but there is no evidence that he practiced or had other employment. He was a gentleman of leisure until he joined the militia during the Napoleonic Wars. Most of the letters in the collection were to William junior, mainly from friends in Scotland. He married twice, but there is no record that he had children. His sister Charlotte married a wealthy Shropshire industrialist and substantial Northamptonshire landowner. Her proposal to remarry after her husband's death was opposed by her brother and her trustees, who threatened to cancel her jointure. The marriage did not take place.

(vii) **Birch**¹⁹

George Birch inherited his estate after the failure of direct male heirs. Extensive mineral deposits on the estate made Birch an extremely wealthy man. Letters between Birch, Richard Congreve II and their lawyers describe marriage

¹⁸ BRO, MS3164, *The Withering Letter Books*. Jeffrey K. Aronson, 'Withering, William (1741–1799)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004, online edition). [ember 2013 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/29805>, accessed 21 June, 2017]

¹⁹ BRO, MS3597/199, *The Meath Barker Collection*. Letters concerning the marriage of Richard Congreve and Mary Ann Birch, 1801.

negotiations in detail. Richard Congreve, a second son, had limited prospects but eventually in 1846 inherited the Congreve estates. This was clearly a love match welcomed by Birch, but the negotiations were entirely concerned with finance. Birch used his great wealth to achieve a favourable settlement for his daughter. This letter collection, which describes the process of marriage-making from a legal rather than family and personal perspective, complements accounts of marriage negotiations contained in other families' correspondence.

(viii) **Greaves**²⁰

Richard Greaves, a gentleman farmer living outside Birmingham, was almost certainly descended from a cadet branch of a landed family. A small collection of papers show that he proposed to Emma Thompson because he wanted a wife to provide 'domestic comfort' after circumstances at home changed. In his will, Emma's father, a prosperous Birmingham tradesman and rentier, left his property to his daughter 'for her own use', barring her husband's rights under coverture. Both families were Unitarians.

2. Family affinities

The principal family archives contain records and references to other families with whom they had marital links, some of which were absorbed into the principal families. Some families occur more than once in genealogies, and often created links through marriage with other families in the sample. These families illustrate the effects of inheritance and the interrelationships created by marriage.

William Whiston, from a village on the Warwickshire-Leicestershire border, had ascribed gentry status as a cleric and academic rather than through birth, wealth or property. A one-time friend and successor of Isaac Newton he was expelled from his Cambridge professorship because of his unorthodox religious views. He depended on the financial support of friends and his son-in-law, Samuel Barker. He and Barker shared academic and theological interests. William's daughter Sarah, who married Samuel Barker, was the only one of Whiston's children to marry into a higher status family.

²⁰ BRO, MS801, *The Greaves Papers*.

Whiston had three sons. William, the oldest, also a clergyman, married but died childless leaving little property. George was a farmer and life-long bachelor. John, the youngest son, was the most successful. He was a London bookseller, possibly in partnership with his brother George and the only one of the brothers to have children. The Whistons have significance because of their links with the Barkers, Conants and Browns.²¹

John Conant (1608-1694) was an academic, cleric and rector of All Saints, Northampton. In 1696 his eldest son, a cleric and lawyer, married and inherited his father-in-law's estate, starting the family's rise to wealth and success. A series of successful marriages had, by the mid eighteenth century, made the Conants prosperous and well-connected. Nathaniel Conant (1745-1822), a sixth son, John Whiston's apprentice, married his 36-year-old youngest daughter Sarah and took over the bookselling business. In 1862, their grandson inherited the Barker estates from his maternal uncle Edward Brown.

In the 1790s, Nathaniel, as a wealthy and influential tradesman, was appointed one of London's first salaried Justices. Retiring from trade he devoted himself entirely to public affairs. In 1817 his eldest son, John Edward Conant, married Catherine Brown, youngest daughter of Edward Brown and Sarah Barker. The Conant family shows that successful marriage could transform an obscure family, create prosperity and raise its social standing. Catherine Brown's marriage settlement of 1817 suggests that the Brown and Conant families were both wealthier than the Barkers.²²

²¹ Stephen D. Snobelen, 'Whiston, William (1667–1752)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004, online edition, October, 2009). [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/29217>, accessed 29.02.2016]. Michael T. Davis, 'Whiston, John (1711–1780)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) online edition, January 2008). [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/29216>, accessed 29.02.2016]

²² Dewey D. Wallace, jun., 'Conant, John (1608–1694)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004, online edition). [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/6051>, accessed 29.02.2016]. Ruth Paley, 'Conant, Sir Nathaniel (1745–1822)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, online edition, September 2010). [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/100486>, accessed 29.02.2016]. Conant Family Tree. [<http://www.lyndon-estate.co.uk/04%20History/Family%20Tree%20Conant/ConantFamilyTree.pdf>. [accessed 29.02.2016]

In the eighteenth century the Browns were a well-established, prosperous and extensive Lincolnshire family, linked by marriage to many other gentry families. In the 1680s a double marriage took place between the Browns and the Bristows of Nottinghamshire. The Brown's father, a younger son, gave his daughter a £900 portion. This was larger than the portions brought in the eighteenth century to the Barkers by any of their brides. The Bristowes and Elizabeth Sanders (Mortimer) had a common ancestor in Sir William Armyne, thus creating an affinity between the Barkers, Browns and Mortimers.²³ William Brown married Robert Clavering's sister Susannah (1720-1746), and so created an affinity between the Congreves, Claverings, Byrches and Browns.²⁴ These links suggest that the Midland's lesser gentry were a tightknit closely interrelated group linked through marriage to make informal affinity-based networks.

The complexity of intermarriage is shown by the Greenes of Coventry. Through marriage they were linked to many Midland families including several of those in the sample.²⁵ Richard Greene's seventh son Henry inherited a Leicestershire estate through his mother and married Abel Barker's youngest sister, Mary. Henry's sister Theophilia married Richard Tryst whose son married Elizabeth Collin of Great Easton, Baldwin Barker's great-granddaughter. Elizabeth's daughter Thomasina married her distant cousin Augustine Barker, a great-grandson of Baldwin Barker, and so united two branches of the Barker family.

The Scotts of Great Barr, like the Greenes, were prosperous yeomen who accumulated land by purchase and marriage in the sixteenth century. By 1600 they were a well-established with branches in South Staffordshire, North Worcestershire and North Warwickshire. Richard Scott purchased property in Great Barr in 1618, establishing his family on the fringes of the landed gentry. His younger son Thomas married Mary, Henry Greene's sister, and created a familial link with the Barkers. Abel Barker and Thomas Scott were trustees for Richard Dyott of Lichfield who married Ann Greene, another sister of Henry Greene.

Richard Scott's grandson inherited Little Aston in Staffordshire and married Anne Addyes of Moor Hall, Sutton Coldfield. Their daughter Mary married Andrew

²³ See above p. 51 for Elizabeth Sanders.

²⁴ See below p. 57 for Clavering and Byrche.

²⁵ See appendix 1g for the Greene and Scott family trees and marital interrelationships.

Hacket II. Anne's grandson, John Addyes Hacket inherited Moor Hall and Little Aston after the death of his childless uncle and in 1769 married Jane Scott, his mother's cousin and a direct descendant of Thomas Scott and Mary Greene.

Another series of inter-family links can be traced through the marriage of Richard Congreve and Elizabeth Byrche of Leacroft, near Cannock. Elizabeth had three children by her first marriage. Her only son, Thomas, inheriting his grandfather's estate at Elmley Castle, changed his name to Byrche-Savage. He died childless in 1776 and the estate passed to his nephew Robert Clavering II, the son of his youngest sister Jane, who had married Robert Clavering after the death of his first wife, Anne Congreve. When he inherited the estate, in accordance with his great-grandfather's will, Robert took the name Savage.

The marriage policies of the Greenes, Scotts and Browns created links of affinity with most of the principal families in this study. The correspondence does not explain how effectively these links were used. However, they show that the Midland's squirearchy were a relatively small but closely interrelated social group.

3. Other families

Evidence from the selected Midland families is supplemented with records from broadly similar families from other areas. These are available in published form and include copies of original autobiographies, diaries and selected letters which provide a range of supporting detail and evidence. Many of these families and individuals, like the sample families, were Anglicans but a small number were nonconformists. Use of this material, though not originally designed for this study, allows comparison of the practices of gentry families in various regions.

(i) Williamson²⁶

Edmund Williamson bought the manor of Husborne Crawley in 1710 and embarked on a programme of land purchase in mid-Bedfordshire. His eldest son Talbot, who inherited in 1737, continued this policy. Resident in London, he left his

²⁶ F. J. Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters 1748-1765* (Bedford Historical Record Society, 1954). William Page (ed.), 'Parishes: Husborne Crawley', in *British History Online: A History of the County of Bedford, volume 3* (London, 1912), pp. 394-399. [<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/beds/vol3/pp394-399>, accessed 7.03 2016]

younger brother Edmund (1713-1776) to manage his estate for him. Edmond, rector of Millbrook, married twice, having a daughter by his first wife and a son by his second. His son inherited the family estate in 1782, but sold it in 1794 to the Duke of Bedford and replaced it with property nearer to Bedford.

The Williamson Letters are a small selection taken from a much larger archive and consist of letters written to Edmund by his family and friends. This selection describes the life and social activities of a minor gentry family in the mid eighteenth century and shows the family's obsession with finding Edmund a second wife. The letters describe the process of identifying and meeting prospective wives, investigating their financial and social status and deciding what qualities to look for in a prospective bride. His family wanted youth, birth and a biddable nature rather than fortune and life-experience. The letters addressed problems faced by a young heiress and argued that Edmund needed to marry to produce a legitimate male heir and to protect his daughter's reputation.

(ii) Reverend Benjamin Rogers (1686-1771)²⁷

Benjamin Rogers, son of a Bedfordshire innkeeper, attended university and worked as a schoolmaster before training for the ministry. He was rector of East Carlton for over fifty years. Though of an urban middling background, he mixed socially with local gentry. He was a contemporary of Edmund Williamson, but of lesser social status. In his diary, Rogers described the life of a small village community and showed that as parish priest he had considerable influence in local affairs. He discussed local social functions and showed how different social groups interacted. He alludes to courtship and marriage and distinguished between the costs of marriages by licence and by banns.

(iii) The Reverend John Martin (1747-1829)²⁸

John Martin, son of a grazier, was employed as a servant, agricultural labourer and finally land agent. In 1782, without formal university education, he became vicar of Naseby in Northamptonshire, a post he held until his death. His

²⁷ C. D. Unell (ed.), *The Diary of Benjamin Rogers, Rector of Carlton 1720-1721* (Bedford Historical Record Society, vol. 30, 1950).

²⁸ Christine Viallis and Kay Collins (eds.), *A Georgian Parson: The Rev. John Martin of Naseby* (Northampton Record Office, 2004).

autobiography shows him as a person of consequence in his community. In 1772, he eloped with a 16-year-old 'heiress' met at a local fair. His autobiography describes their meeting, courtship, elopement, marriage and eventual reconciliation with her guardian, although the guardian refused to release her fortune until she was 21. Her social status was higher than Martin's. Their marriage was a love-match and apparently not based on material considerations. His autobiography gives an insight into the life and influence of a man of humble birth who received ascribed gentry status as a clergyman rather than because he possessed wealth or property. Martin contrasts with people in the other sources who, though their families began as yeomen, achieved gentry status through marriage, inheritance and property-based wealth.

(iv) **Abigail Gawthorn (1757-1822)**²⁹

The only surviving child of an affluent Nottingham grocer, Abigail Gawthorn, inherited wealth from Thomas Secker, a relative and former Archbishop of Canterbury. Though merchants, the Gawthorns had a gentry background and grew wealthy through inheritance as well as trade. In 1783, Abigail married her cousin, a successful factory owner and, after his death, invested her increasing wealth in rental property in Nottingham and a country estate. Her diary describes her involvement in Nottinghamshire society and records her friends' marriages, while noting discrepancies in age or social status.

Abigail described her daughter's encounters with prospective husbands met at assemblies, race meetings, theatres, concerts and private parties. She recorded the offers Anna received and suggested reasons for their rejection. Abigail was conscious of her wealth and social position. Her diary describes the social life and social interaction between the urban and rural gentry at the end of the eighteenth century. It shows that wealthy parents could still exercise control over their children's choice of partner.

²⁹ Adrian Henstock, 'Gawthorn, Abigail Anna (1757–1822)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004, online edition). [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/47589>, accessed 11.03. 2016] Adrian Henstock (ed.), *The Diary of Abigail Gawthorn of Nottingham 1751-1810* Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire, (Nottingham, 1980).

(v) Isaac Archer (1641-1700)³⁰

Archer was the son of an East Anglian dissenting minister and minor landowner who demanded absolute filial obedience from his son. He struggled to reconcile the need to show filial obedience with the desire to satisfy his own personal wishes. Both he and his father married twice because they wanted a submissive younger woman to nurse them in old age. Isaac explained his desire to marry and encounters with women who thought he was wealthy. Arguments with his father about his first marriage resulted in Isaac being disinherited and the estate being left to his children. He described his daughter's disastrous marriage, which he had arranged, and contrasted the support he gave to his daughter with his own father's hostility and opposition to his marriage. Isaac does not seem to have felt affection for either of his wives but was mainly concerned with money, comfort, obedience and companionship.

(vi) Dr Claver Morris (1659-1726)³¹

Morris, youngest child of a Somerset clergyman, was a physician who died a wealthy man, thanks to three prudent marriages. His diary illustrates the life of an early eighteenth century doctor. His only daughter married, clandestinely and without his consent, a local squire's son. Although of higher status than the Morris family the squire experienced severe financial difficulties. After the marriage, Morris disowned his daughter and unsuccessfully prosecuted the cleric who had conducted her marriage service. After a year, father and daughter were reconciled.

Morris acted for his neighbours as an intermediary in undesirable courtships and relationships. His financial accounts imply that he only married his second wife to avoid paying the new Marriage Duty tax. As he had been negotiating to marry a different woman for the previous three years it seems unlikely that he married for affection. His third marriage, for which he probably used a marriage broker, was for pragmatic reasons but proved to be happy and affectionate.

³⁰ Matthew Storey (ed.), *Two East Anglian Diaries* (The Diary of Isaac Archer 1641-1700) (Bury St Edmunds, 1994).

³¹ Edmund Hobhouse (ed.), *The Diary of a West Country Physician (1684-1726)*, (Rochester 1934). Lucinda McCray Beier, 'Morris, Claver (*bap.* 1659, *d.* 1727)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), online edition. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/47346>. [accessed March, 2016]

Dudley Ryder (1715-1716)³²

Dudley Ryder, the younger son of a London draper and rentier, kept a diary while training as a lawyer. In later life, he was an M.P., Solicitor General and Attorney General. His diary shows that as a young man his twin obsessions were marriage and a successful career. He described public sociability and how he met eligible (and sometimes less eligible) young women. Ryder believed that a successful marriage could improve his status, increase his wealth and advance his prospects, but that marriage to a woman without fortune would deny him success. He recognised his total dependence on his father's goodwill and financial support but knew he would not receive his portion until after his father's death. Ryder, who was more concerned with social and financial progress than early marriage, emphasised that love and fortune were both essential ingredients in successful marriage-making, but that love without fortune was a recipe for disaster.

His diary illustrates the life and thoughts of an aspirant member of the London urban gentry in the early eighteenth century. It offers an interesting contrast to the views of his near contemporary, William Stout. There are no comparable figures in the sample families to Ryder in the early period, but the Witherings and Lowes were broadly comparable after 1800. Ryder probably represented attitudes and opinions that were familiar to many of the young urban gentry at the time.

(vii) William Stout (1665-1752)³³

William Stout was the second son of an urban shopkeeper and was converted to the Quaker faith by his master. After completing his training, he became a grocer and ironmonger. Stout was more concerned to help others than to build up his own wealth. He never married, but he had one romance which he ended because the girl was too flighty and another which ended when his bride died days before the

³² Romney Sedgwick, 'Dudley Ryder', in Romney Sedgwick (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1715-1754* (London, 1970, online edition). [<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/ryder-dudley-1691-1756>, accessed 11.03.2016] William Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder, 1715-1716* (London, 1939).

³³ Polly Hamilton, 'Stout, William (1665–1752)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004, online edition, 2009). [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/56678>, accessed 12.03. 2016] J. D. Marshall (ed.), *The Autobiography of William Stout of Lancaster* (Manchester, 1967).

wedding. Stout took interest in the affairs of his family, assisted them when they married and gave them advice and financial support. He was particularly concerned that his nieces protect their good reputation. Although never wealthy, he was a successful merchant who was active in the life of his community.

(viii) Nicholas Blundell (1669-1727)³⁴

The Blundells were long-established minor Lancashire landowners who experienced repeated persecution as Roman Catholics. Ardent royalists, they suffered imprisonment, fines and sequestration during the Civil War. Their fortunes improved in the later seventeenth century and they began to enjoy better relations with their protestant neighbours. Nicholas succeeded his father in 1702 and played an active part in the life and administration of South Lancashire.

Blundell described the life and experience of a Roman Catholic landowner and outlined his search for a wife. His religion restricted his choice of bride so that he chose a young woman he had never met, the daughter of a Catholic nobleman from Gloucestershire. He described the negotiations, courtship and solemnization of this marriage, but does not explain why he chose her. This unhappy marriage lacked affection but created useful connections in the Catholic community.

Blundell's letters describe in detail the search for an acceptable husband for his daughter Mary. Two candidates met with Nicholas's approval on social, financial, religious and personal grounds, but neither attracted the daughter, who repeatedly refused them. The correspondence illustrates the role of intermediaries and the place of public and private sociability in facilitating courtship. It shows the distribution of responsibility between father and daughter when choosing a partner and illustrates changes taking place in the marriage-making process in the early eighteenth century. Nicholas's marriage was a business transaction but his daughter was intimately involved in negotiations which were built around her own happiness and unwillingness to accept her father's choice without question.

³⁴ Margaret Blundell (ed.), *Blundell's Diary and Letter Book, 1702-1728* (Liverpool, 1952). J.J. Bagley (ed.), *The Great Diurnal of Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby, Lancashire* volume 1, 1702-1711, The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, (Cheshire, 1972). Alan G. Crosby, 'Blundell, Nicholas (1669-1737)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004 online edition). October 2006. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/59568>. [accessed 11.03.2016]

(ix) Agnes Weeton (1776-1849)³⁵

Agnes Weeton's father, a second son with a small inheritance, was a naval officer killed during the American War of Independence. After his death, the family were defrauded of his prize-money and reduced to near poverty. Mrs Weeton set up a small school which Agnes continued after her mother's death. Living in straitened circumstances, she devoted her resources to educating her only brother and setting him up as a lawyer, but in later life he treated her shamefully. Agnes claimed to have refused three proposals, before she accepted the factory owner Aaron Stock in 1814. The marriage was a disaster and she soon left her husband.

From 1804-1825 she kept a journal and letter books in which she commented on the courtship and marriages of her friends and presented herself as an intelligent woman but showed that she was always conscious of coming from a higher social class than her companions. She described the difficulties faced by a single gentlewoman who lacked financial resources and influence. She described life as a governess to the Pedders and underlined the social and personal difficulties encountered by a servant who married a wealthy gentleman.

(x) Joseph Banks (1665-1727)³⁶

The Banks family were not always lesser gentry. Their early history compares with some of the other families in this study but later in the period they were more comparable with the Ishams and other wealthy upper gentry families. Their experience of marriage-making offers a comparison with the attitudes and practices of the squirearchy.

³⁵ Ruth A. Symes, 'Weeton, Nelly (1776–1849)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004, online edition, May 2007). [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/45866>, accessed 12.03.2016] J. J. Bagley (ed.), *Miss Weeton's Journal of a Governess vol. 1 1807-1811* (Oxford, 1936).

³⁶ J. W. F. Hall (ed.), *The Letters and Papers of the Banks family of Revesby Abbey, 1704-1760* Lincoln Record Society, vol. 45, (Lincoln, 1952). J. D. Griffith Davies, 'The Banks Family', in *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* vol. 3, Apr., 1940 - Sep., 1941, pp. 85-87 (Published by The Royal Society, 1940). [Stable URL: <http://0-www.jstor.org.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/stable/531141>, accessed 11.03.2016] Romney Sedgewick, 'Joseph Banks I and Joseph Banks II', and Eveline Cruickshanks, William Banks', in Romney Sedgewick (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1715-1754*.

[<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/banks-william-1719-61>, accessed 11.03.2016]

Joseph Banks was the second son of a minor Yorkshire landowner. Qualified as a lawyer, he established his own prosperous legal practice. In the 1690s, he purchased an estate in Nottinghamshire and then in 1711 bought and restored Revesby Abbey in Lincolnshire. He and his descendants continued to prosper and accumulate property, rapidly establishing themselves as leading members of Lincolnshire society. His rapid rise to affluence and status shows how a self-made man from a modest rural background could flourish as an urban professional and buy landed gentry status. At his death, his estate income was £3,000 p.a.

Twenty letters describe the failed negotiations for his daughter's marriage and offers a contrast to the letter series describing the Blundell-Strickland, Isham-Hacket, Congreve-Clavering and Birch-Congreve negotiations. The Banks letters show that Joseph was more concerned with status than with wealth. He was prepared to adjust the size of his daughter's portion to match the jointure offered by a prospective groom and, like Nicholas Blundell, allowed his daughter to veto any unacceptable candidate. Other letters describe how Joseph II chose a second wife and provided for the children of his second marriage. The collection provides an insight into the marriage-making and marital expectations of a wealthy gentry family and shows the similarities between them and the squirearchy.

Conclusion

The correspondence of the sample families and the supplementary published sources provide considerable empirical evidence which illustrates the marriage-making strategies followed by a small selection of families in the long eighteenth century. The selection is a random sample of a handful of families and so cannot be taken as genuinely representative. The families concerned had different social origins and almost all were emergent and upwardly mobile for much of the period. Several experienced times of severe financial difficulties and some were, temporarily, sufficiently significant to be on the edges of the greater gentry. The image created by this empirical evidence can be supported and fleshed out using the representations of marriage and marriage-making found in different genres of contemporary literature. These writings contain confirmatory information but more significantly show the philosophy of marriage-making, and how it was represented during the period.

The next chapter considers different eighteenth century literary genres which dealt with courtship and marriage-making. These representations of marriage and marriage-making can be juxtaposed against the empirical evidence to see how far literary representations matched real-life practices and the extent to which changes in practice were reflected and supported in literary material. This raises the issue of whether literature simply reflected contemporary thinking and attitudes or whether it played an active role in encouraging and bringing about change.

Chapter 3: Literary material

Introduction

A study of squirearchy marriage-making practices depends on family archives and personal correspondence, which at best provide a patchy snapshot of individual circumstances. Contemporary literary material about courtship and marriage-making, by providing different representations, can add another perspective. This chapter considers the contributions of prose fiction, drama and advice literature to an understanding of the eighteenth century marriage-making processes. The first section considers how each of these genres can contribute to an understanding of gentry marriage-making. The second section examines the type of advice writers gave on key themes and topics. Evidence from the different genres provides a social context and contrasting representations of gentry marriage-making. Rather than treating literary evidence independently I shall, in subsequent chapters, juxtapose relevant literary material against empirical evidence, using the literary material to interpret, clarify and contextualise personal evidence. This chapter provides an important framework for the use of literary material later in the study.

The 'new historicity' of the 1980s argued that a literary text represents a moment in time and should be interpreted against the historical context in which it was first read. Every text is a product of its time and a response to the prevailing social system, ideas and assumptions of its era. Used as historical rather than literary texts, novels and drama can help readers reconceive the structure of eighteenth century society to understand how marriage and marriage-making were represented to the original readers.¹

Imaginative literature has much to say about prevailing values and assumptions and about how they were reflected and shaped. Isolated fictional passages are not evidence of prevailing attitudes or behaviours, but when addressed with other material and moderated by advice literature, they can illustrate how practices,

¹ J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Context of Eighteenth Century English Fiction* (New York and London, 1990), pp. x, xii, 93, 338. J. Paul Hunter, 'The Novel and Cultural/Social History', in John Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth Century Novel* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 12-13. Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations, the Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 5, 259, 373.

ideas and attitudes changed. Imaginative writers might exaggerate situations and characters but, as Ruth Perry argued, they often proposed solutions to contemporary issues.² Fiction, whether in the form of novels or drama, should be understood to be representational rather than reflective of any specific ordinary experience.³ Eighteenth century prose fiction regularly addressed different key themes, including the development of companionate marriage, partner-choice, parental authority, filial obedience, coverture, and arranged marriages. It recognised the value of marriage as the only respectable 'occupation' for gentry and upper-middling women, the importance of female reputation, the acceptance of sexual 'double standards', female independence and property ownership, and the emergence of 'feeling' or 'sentiment', especially among men.

Conduct literature, a different literary genre, complements prose fiction and drama. The outpouring of advice literature after the Reformation dealt with many different aspects of personal and public conduct. Initially written by clerics, it had a strong religious and moral flavour. Anthony Fletcher claimed that after 1590 Puritan clerics created a new instructional genre to give advice on marriage and marriage-making.⁴ In the early seventeenth century the volume of output increased to reflect growing public interest in the marriage discourse. Although largely puritanical in origin, this literature showed a growing awareness of the need for mutual love and respect in marriage.⁵ Advice Literature proliferated thanks to the expansion of the print industry and the development of the periodical press which created a swelling audience and an expanding body of writers willing to feed it.

1. Literary material

(i) Prose fiction

This section examines how prose fiction can contribute to a study of lesser gentry marriage-making practices. There is insufficient evidence in the sample archives to establish a causal link between prose fiction and changing attitudes to marriage-

² *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 66-67, 199, 238, 289.

³ Hunter, 'The Novel and Cultural/Social History', pp. 12, 18, 30.

⁴ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven, 1995), p.116.

⁵ Chris Roulston, 'Space and the Representation of Marriage in Eighteenth Century Advice Literature', in *The Eighteenth Century*, 49:1 (2008), p. 28.

making practices, however there are similarities between real-life behaviour and fictional representations.⁶ Writers of prose fiction addressed issues of concern to young people and their parents, using the age and maturity of certain characters to give weight to the advice they offered. Similarities existed between prose fiction, drama and conduct literature in terms of the writers, the questions addressed and the solutions proposed. 'Contemporaneity', an important feature of each of these genres, enabled writers to address current issues, using the bridge of everyday life to allow readers access to the author's imagination.⁷

J. Paul Hunter argued that the proliferation of such content showed a demand from the reading public for this type of material.⁸ Squirearchy literacy, which was well-established before novels developed, gave writers a willing, literate audience. Novel form was attractive because it could deal with issues in greater depth than advice literature while offering social comment which resonated with audiences. Novelists commented in the narrative voice about actions, opinions, characters and complex socio-economic matters and, because they addressed matters of contemporary interest, could appeal directly to young readers who wanted guidance as well as entertainment.⁹ It is relatively easy to establish increased output, but it is more difficult to identify who the readers were, although it has often been assumed that the principal consumers of courtship fiction were young gentry women. However, many eighteenth century consumers of literature had rural or urban gentry backgrounds and took a personal interest in the issues discussed.

Courtship fiction could easily be rejected as irrelevant to this study because it has little to say specifically about the Midlands squirearchy. Even *Sir Charles Grandison* and *Mansfield Park*, ostensibly located in Northamptonshire, could be referring to any county within easy reach of London. But prose fiction is relevant since, although story-lines focus on the metropolitan elite, authors captured the spirit of the age to examine issues of concern to all readers. Writers leavened their work with recognisably accurate detail which Midland readers could interpret in terms of their own first-hand experience. Many could enjoy similar forms of

⁶ See below, pp. 79ff

⁷ Richetti, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion*, pp. 1-2.

⁸ Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp. 12-14, 16, 21.

⁹ Stuart Sim, *The Eighteenth Century Novel and Contemporary Social Issues: An Introduction* (Edinburgh, 2008), pp. 2-3. Paul Goring, *Eighteenth Century Literature and Culture* (London and New York, 2008), pp. 3-4, 9, 26, 101.

sociability to those available in London and described in fiction. They had access to leisure towns like Shrewsbury or Stourbridge, assemblies at Daventry and Nottingham, race meetings at Lichfield and Northampton, and the urban pleasure grounds of Birmingham's 'Vauxhall', or Shrewsbury's 'Abbey Fields'. Promiscuous social intercourse, as described in novels and plays, was experienced in real life and described in the correspondence of provincial gentry families.

The sample archives show that the Midland gentry, a relatively compact, close-knit and interrelated social group (as shown in chapter 2), often had connections through marriage with wealthy upper gentry families, both in their own locality and further afield. Few of the Midlands squirearchy were regular visitors to London or Bath, but most had friends or relatives who were and whose correspondence kept them apprised of metropolitan attitudes and behaviours. Most squires had access to the widely circulated London based print media. The gentry, who can be categorised in terms of wealth, influence, involvement in public affairs and 'connections', had a high level of cohesion and shared a group identity which stretched beyond the narrow confines of their immediate locality and society. Provincial gentry felt part of a wider gentry community and so could relate to the situations, locations and circumstances described in prose fiction. They could interpret and understand fictional material in terms of their own local experiences and translate them into familiar contexts.¹⁰

My study uses a small selection of novels from the vast quantity of eighteenth century prose fiction.¹¹ Each work discusses courtship, marriage-making, romantic love and the relationship between young people and parents. The focus on fashionable London society is aimed at the aspirant squirearchy and urban bourgeoisie. Prose fiction introduced provincial readers to a desirable but possibly unattainable life-style, offering insight into the London marriage-market and 'polite' sociability. Modern, lively and bustling metropolitan life was contrasted with the

¹⁰ Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp. 23, 117, 333.

¹¹ See Appendix 3 for brief notes about themes addressed in the novels. The selection used includes: *Love in Excess* (1799), *Roxana* (1724), *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1744), *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), *Amelia* (1752), *The Female Quixote* (1752), *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (1753), *The Marriage Act* (1754), *The Memoires of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1762), *Evelina* (1778), *The Memoires of Emma Courtney* (1796), *Belinda* (1801), *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813).

slow, dull routine of country estates and small provincial towns. A persistent theme is that love can overcome all obstacles in the way of true (married) happiness.

The selected authors came from different socio-economic backgrounds, including minor gentry, urban tradesmen, clerics and professionals.¹² All had first-hand knowledge of the world of the gentry and could accurately describe their observations and the experiences from which they had gained insight into gentry life-styles. Most of these writers, as adults, lived and worked in London, mixed with the gentry, shared the same public sociability and sometimes visited gentry friends in London or in their country estates. Diverse backgrounds gave the writers different viewpoints enabling them to represent the gentry world from a personal perspective.

Writing with the authority of age and experience allowed authors to defend or challenge different attitudes and patterns of behaviour. Eighteenth century novelists show changing attitudes and approaches to courtship and marriage-making. A fundamental question is whether they depicted life as it really was, or as they wanted it to be. Whatever their underlying agenda, the supporting details they included were sufficiently accurate for them to be acceptable to their readers. However, the moralistic and didactic elements they included, their individual opinions and the messages they wished to convey, were not necessarily universal. Readers were familiar with the practices described, but they might find some of the promoted attitudes both new and challenging.

Novels were an important part of the life-experience of the eighteenth century squirearchy.¹³ Novelistic form gave readers representations of an 'actuality' through the accumulation of recognisable detail.¹⁴ Claims by authors that they described real life must be interpreted within their historical context, since they were representational rather than mirrors of ordinary experience.¹⁵ 'Literary realism' did not describe 'real' events happening to real people but what might

¹² See Appendix 3 for brief notes on the socio-economic backgrounds of the novelists referred to in this study.

¹³ Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth Century England* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 1-2. Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp. 43, 73-74. Richetti, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion*, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-6.

¹⁵ Hunter, 'The Novel and Social/Cultural History', pp. 12, 18, 30.

perhaps 'be'.¹⁶ Yet it created a sense of authenticity which encouraged readers to identify with the events described. 'Contemporaneity' makes novels useful historical sources. Usually set in time-present, they employ recognisable locations, deal with present-day issues and use credible characters to promote authenticity.¹⁷

Many lesser gentry read primarily for diversion, but also wanted guidance about acceptable conduct in the social world to which they aspired. Fiction acted as an agent of stratified diffusion, introducing the lesser gentry to the values, attitudes and behaviours of their social superiors. *The Critical Review* writing about *Evelina* suggested that readers wished to escape everyday routine but did not necessarily expect to experience the life-style about which they read.¹⁸ Individuals in the sample certainly read fiction, although their correspondence gives little evidence of what they read or how it shaped their thoughts, attitudes and behaviours.

Novels were not universally popular. Moralists, concerned by the rapid increase in novel-reading, condemned its supposedly harmful effect on young people.¹⁹ Fordyce attacked them as a 'species of writing which so many young women are apt to dote upon'.²⁰ He thought few novels could be 'read with advantage' by modest young women since they did not contain 'instruction ... and their representations of love between the sexes are almost universally over-strained'.²¹ *The Monthly Review* said they were 'literary weed's' for which 'the youthful part of the fair sex have as keen a relish ... as for other such kind of crude trash'.²² Mary Wollstonecraft, argued that young women would find husbands 'much inferior to the lovers described in novels'.²³ Hester Chapone thought that novel-reading 'generally renders [young women] ridiculous in conversation and miserably wrong-

¹⁶ Perry, *Novel Relations*, p. 288.

¹⁷ Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp. 91, 208. *Idem.*, 'The Novel and Social/Cultural History', pp. 10, 23.

¹⁸ Tobias Smollett (ed.), *The Critical Review or Annals of Literature* vol. 46 (London, September 1778), pp. 203-204. [accessed through British Periodicals Collection II, 15.10.2016]

¹⁹ Hunter, 'The Novel and Social/Cultural History', pp. 19-20.

²⁰ James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women in Two Volumes*, volume 1 (Sixth edition, Dublin, 1766), p. 113. [accessed through ECCO, 17.08.2016]

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 109. [accessed through ECCO, 17.08.2016] This was probably the sermon referred to in *Pride and Prejudice*, chapter 14 (p. 63), that Mr Collins chose to read instead of a novel to the Bennet sisters.

²² *The Monthly Review* no. 48, February 1773 and May 1773. [accessed through British Periodicals Collection, 22.09.2016]

²³ Hunter, 'The Novel and Social/Cultural History', pp. 21-22. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (London, 1788), p. 97. [accessed through ECCO, 17.08.2016]

headed in [their] pursuits and behaviour'.²⁴ Dr Johnson said novels were 'the entertainments of minds ... open to every false suggestion'.²⁵ Hannah More, compared novel reading to the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden. She said they were 'vehicles of vice and infidelity' because they encouraged young women to 'indulge in all those gratifications which custom, not religion has tolerated in the male sex!'. She argued that novels reduced a reader's moral standards, making it easier for them to suffer 'all the subsequent stages of ruin'.²⁶

Some novelists were also concerned about the harmful influence of fiction. *The Female Quixote*, parodied fantasy romances like *Love in Excess*, and attacked their influence on impressionable young minds. *Northanger Abbey* warned of the same danger when it mocked gothic novels like *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Edgeworth refused to call *Belinda* a novel, preferring instead to describe it as a 'moral tale'. Many writers feared that young women, unable to distinguish between everyday life and fictional representations, might be morally endangered if they attempted to replicate what they had read.²⁷

Prose fiction should be treated carefully but can illuminate the appreciation of eighteenth century marriage-making practices. Through different representations of marriage-making it can give insight into the attitudes, values and expectations of the lesser gentry. Evidence from the sample families, as demonstrated in later chapters, shows that the changes described in novels often mirrored real life.

(ii) Drama

Drama, like novels, was criticised for its adverse effect on conduct and ethical values. In 1703 a pamphleteer complained about the 'outrageous disorders of the stage', which were designed 'to gratify the lewd and vicious part of the audience and to corrupt the virtuously disposed'. He demanded the 'suppression of the

²⁴ Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young lady* (London, 1778), p. 146. [accessed through ECCOII, 05.08.2016]

²⁵ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* vol. 1no. 4, 31 March, 1750, p. 4. [accessed through ECCO, 05.08.2016]

²⁶ Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (Dublin, 1799), p. 45. [accessed through ECCO, 02.09.2016]

²⁷ Sim, *The Eighteenth Century Novel*, pp. 78-79.

playhouses totally'.²⁸ John Gregory, who enjoyed theatre, believed 'there are few English comedies a lady can see, without a shock to her delicacy'.²⁹ Fordyce thought plays created false expectations of love and encouraged false values, leaving 'females [to think] ... that it is their business to get husbands at any rate and by whatever means'.³⁰ Hannah More warned 'the more inconsiderate of my countrywomen' against the dangers of the stage.³¹ The turning point in *Mansfield Park* (1814) occurred over a performance of Inchbald's *Lovers Vows* (1798). This was stopped by Sir Thomas, a slave owner, because of 'the impropriety of such a scheme among such a party'.³² Critics feared that drama could shape public opinion, facilitate behavioural change and encourage audiences to replicate unacceptable conduct seen on stage.³³

Such attitudes are echoed in the sample correspondence. In 1797 John Douglas, a friend of Dr Withering, wrote that theatre was 'an authorised school of corruption ... [and] the questionable character of actresses will ... be an incitement to the reformation of the stage'. Demands for new forms of entertainment and the low status of audiences were, he argued, the reason that national standards of morality had declined. Despite this criticism he continued to attend plays and associate with actresses.³⁴

But drama, like prose fiction and advice literature, can offer an insight into gentry attitudes to marriage-making. The selected plays examine themes and issues similar to those addressed in novels and conduct literature.³⁵ Plays show that authors disagreed about the purpose of marriage. Some saw it as about wealth-exchange while others saw it as a response to love and the desire for companionship. Theatre, as a commercial activity, had to meet audience

²⁸ Anon, *A Short Account of the Impiety and Immorality of the Stage: With Reasons for Putting a Stop Thereto: and Some Questions Addressed to Such as Frequent the Playhouse* (London, 1703?) p. 1. [accessed through ECCOII, 03.09.2016]

²⁹ John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughter* (London, 1774), pp. 38-39. [accessed through ECCOII, 17.08.2016]

³⁰ Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, pp. 111-112. [accessed through ECCO, 17.08.2016]

³¹ More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, pp. 41-44. [ECCO]

³² Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London, 1814, Collins Classics Edition, 2011), pp. 123-199, (chapters 13-20).

³³ Misty G. Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage* (New York, 2002), pp. 12, 60.

³⁴ BRO, MS3164, *Withering Letters*, vol. 1, letter 51. John Douglas to William Withering 28 October, 1797. Letter 53, John Douglas to William Withering, 30 December, 1798.

³⁵ Brief notes on themes addressed in each of the plays are included in Appendix 3.

demands. Elizabeth Inchbald wrote that 'an author ... is the very slave of the audience. He must have their tastes and prejudices in view... to humour them.'³⁶ Theatre managers would only stage licenced plays which appealed to popular tastes and met audience demands.³⁷ Consistency in the themes addressed shows that audiences were interested in these issues, even if change was taking place in the attitudes depicted. Plays were primarily written and performed for gentry and middling audiences and so are relevant to this study. They demonstrate formative ideas and concepts to which playgoers were exposed.

The varied socio-economic backgrounds of the sampled dramatists had made them well-suited to deal with the issues they examined.³⁸ Many had urban or artisan origins, but approximately a third had lesser gentry backgrounds. Coming from different geographical locations they all worked from London and belonged to literary circles which gave access to gentry society. Although usually dealing with the upper ranks of London society, the authors understood and could relate to issues of interest to the provincial rural squirearchy. The theatre's 'world of make-believe' connected with audiences and may have influenced their expectations of marriage and marriage-making. Used as a collection, the selected plays can illuminate lesser gentry marriage-making strategies while demonstrating changes in attitudes and behaviours. Plays create a shared illusion and enabled playwrights to develop a dialogue with their audience.³⁹ Larger-than-life characters in a metropolitan context allowed writers to challenge accepted standards of conduct and discuss issues relevant to a socially diverse audience. The correspondence and diaries of the urban and lesser gentry show the importance of theatre to them.

A new style of play developed in the early eighteenth century which made theatre more attractive to middling audiences. These demanded drama that reaffirmed their narrow sexual morality rather than the licentious immorality of the Restoration stage. For commercial reasons authors and theatre managers sought to satisfy

³⁶ Elizabeth Inchbald, in *The Artist*, vol. 1 no. 14, cited in Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, p. 21.

³⁷ Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, p. 15. John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), p. 330. Kathryn Rogers, 'Introduction', in Kathryn Rogers (ed.), *The Meridian Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth Century Plays by Women* (New York, 1994), p. 13.

³⁸ Brief notes on the backgrounds of the dramatists are included in Appendix 3.

³⁹ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, p. 350.

this customer demand.⁴⁰ Technically, public performances of drama were banned outside London, but demand was such that entrepreneurs developed ways to evade the law. The first permanent theatre in Birmingham was built in 1740 and the Theatre Royal, which seated over 2,000, opened in 1774.⁴¹

The sample families illustrate theatre's enduring attraction. Dudley Ryder, a trainee lawyer with an urban gentry background, enjoyed visiting 'the playhouse'. So too did the wealthy Nottingham manufacturer Abigail Gawthern, who regularly visited the Nottingham theatre.⁴² A friend of Dr Withering senior recorded in 1766 that he had 'got once ... to Covent Garden and twice to Drury Lane'.⁴³ John Douglas told Withering junior 'I go to ... the theatre more to indulge observation than I formerly did ... [I have] had the advantage of seeing, not only the different styles of dramatic performances in different countries, but the best specimens of each'.⁴⁴

Most of the selected dramatists concentrated on wealth-exchange in marriage and the relationship between money, marriage and love. Playwrights often focused on the economic value of women as marital objects and concentrated on the heroine's ability to negotiate the best deal through the courtship narrative. This feature can be seen in *The Witlings* and *The Belles Stratagem* and is also present in *The Conscious Lovers*. Heroines were often allocated a specific monetary value as a mark of status.⁴⁵ In *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* Miss Lovely had 'thirty thousand pounds'; Isabella in *The Conscious Lovers* was heiress to 'great wealth'; Lydia, in *The Rivals*, had 'thirty thousand pounds'; Cecilia, in *The Witlings*, had a fortune 'all in her own hands' which was, according to gossip, 'forty thousand pounds'.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1982), p. 267. Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1999), p. 610. Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (London, 1989), pp. 59, 97.

⁴¹ Victor J. Price, *Birmingham Theatres, Concert and Music Halls* (Studley, 1988), pp 1-7.

⁴² William Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder* (London, 1939), p. 18, 6 October, 1716. Adrian Henstock (ed.), *The Diary of Abigail Gawthern of Nottingham 1751-1810* (Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire, 1980), pp. 5, 6, 10, 11.

⁴³ BRO, MS3164, *The Withering Letters*, vol. 2. Letter 28, John Royston from London to Dr William Withering, 29 May, 1766.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vol.1, letter 53. John Douglas to William Withering, 30 December, 1798.

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, pp. 57-58, 68.

⁴⁶ Susannah Centlivre, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718), in Rogers (ed.), *Plays by Women* (New York, 1994), Act 1, Scene 1, p. 198. Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), in Ricardo Quintana (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Plays* (New York, 1952), Act 4, scene 2, pp. 160-161. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals* (1775), in *Eighteenth Century Plays*,

These fortunes were much larger than those of the lesser gentry daughters in the sample. Mary Hacket, unusually for a woman of her status, had £12,000, but the Congreves family could only scrape together £2,000 for Anne. Even Catherine Brown only received £5,000.⁴⁷ Yet despite such lower sums the significance of 'fortune' was as familiar and important to a squire as to an aristocrat.

Drama, an important feature of squirearchy social life, attracted large diverse audiences in London and in the provinces. It exposed audiences to the discourse of courtship and marriage-making. The society depicted might be alien to the audiences' immediate experience but the attitudes and behaviours described were familiar to them. Diaries and letters show that theatre fulfilled an important social function and exposed audiences to playwrights' messages.

(iii) Conduct literature

The perspective of writers of conduct literature gradually changed from a spiritual to a more secular and rational approach in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁴⁸ The rapid increase in volume was encouraged by the growth of the print industry and demand from literate consumers. Advice from a multiplicity of perspectives proliferated, much of it originating in London, but directed to a provincial as well as a metropolitan audience. In the late eighteenth century the amount of material emerging from Scotland, Ireland and the regions increased. How far conduct literature shaped or simply reflected change in the behaviour of the squirearchy sampled is uncertain. Writers did not have uniform views but ranged from the reactionary and conservative to the extreme and radical in how they viewed social change, even though generally addressing the same key themes and promoting broadly similar solutions.

Act 1, scene 2, p. 418. Frances Burney, *The Witlings* (1779), in Rogers (ed.), *Plays by Women*, Act 1 Scene 1 and Act 3 Scene 2, pp. 298, 344.

⁴⁷ NRO, IL1412, *Isham Papers*. Marriage indenture between Justinian Isham and Mary Hacket, 3 June, 1725, p.1 and IL1414, Deed of Settlement, 3 June, 1725. SRO, D1057/M/1/9/11, *Congreve Papers*. Rev. Richard Congreve to his lawyer Mr Dovey confirming details of Anne Congreve's marriage settlement, 24 January, 1748. LRO, DG11/979, *Conant Papers*. Marriage agreement between John Edward Conant and Edward Brown, 3 December, 1817.

⁴⁸ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, pp. xix, 383. Anthony Fletcher, *Growing up in England: The Experience of Childhood, 1600-1914* (New Haven and London, 2008), p. 28.

'Conduct' or 'Advice' literature are modern umbrella terms used to describe a vast body of didactic material which examined different aspects of contemporary life.⁴⁹ It is a genre which includes sermons, books, tracts, pamphlets, essays and periodical articles, varying in length from single sheets to lengthy volumes.⁵⁰ Reflecting contemporary preoccupation with behaviour, conduct writers focused on challenges facing the gentry and urban middling sort. A unifying characteristic was the desire to provide instructional answers to life-style questions. The illustrations used in this study provide advice about courtship, marriage and marriage-making. Ideally, visual material like Hogarth's *Rakes Progress* and *Marriage à la Mode*, should be treated alongside written forms of conduct literature since they fulfilled a similar didactic purpose, but space does not allow their consideration.

The volume of conduct literature addressed specifically to women increased in the later seventeenth century.⁵¹ Most of it was prescriptive and supported traditional patterns of social organisation and behaviour. The most popular works were regularly reprinted or imitated by other writers. The growth and spread of periodicals after 1690 and the popularity of advice literature allowed writers to develop an extended dialogue between author and reader over several issues. This created a sense of immediacy and 'present time' conversation. John Dunton encouraged the development of dialogue in the *Athenian Mercury* by using 'advice column' and 'question and answer' formats. This approach proved so popular that it was adopted by other periodicals.⁵²

A close relationship existed between conduct literature and the novels and drama already considered. Authors such as Defoe, Richardson and Haywood, who wrote in more than one genre, addressed the same issues, so demonstrating the considerable overlap between them.⁵³ Conduct writers generally employed a more prescriptive style than novelists but, since both forms adopted a didactic approach, the boundaries between them often seem blurred. Novels, plays and conduct literature should be read in the context of ongoing debates about partner selection,

⁴⁹ Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp. 252, 297.

⁵⁰ Vivien Jones, 'The Seductions of Conduct: Pleasure and Conduct Literature', in Roy Porter and Mary Mulvey Roberts (eds.), *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1996), p. 109.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109, 130. Roulston, 'Space and the Representation of Marriage', p. 38.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 28. Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp. 175, 290-293. John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 141-142. Goring, *Eighteenth Century Literature*, p. 59.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 29. Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp. 77, 92. H. J. Shroff, *The Eighteenth Century Novel: The Idea of the Gentleman* (New Delhi, 1978), pp. 96-97, 108.

courtship, marriage-making, material considerations and filial obedience.⁵⁴ A significant difference between the genres is that conduct literature could consider the long-term effects of behaviours and encourage reflective reading, whereas novels and plays usually dealt only with the immediate short-term.⁵⁵

Authors of conduct literature, as with the other genres, came from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Writers whose work is used in this study include: aristocrats (Lord Halifax); landowners (Joseph Addison); clergymen (Wendell Wilkes and James Fordyce); the children of clerics (John Dunton and Addison); minor gentry (Wilkes and Hester Chapone); professionals and public servants (Richard Steele); tradesmen (Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Eliza Haywood); academics (John Gregory); and school teachers (Hannah More). Many were lesser gentry and wrote from personal experience. Most belonged to literary circles which allowed them close contact with the gentry. The majority lived and worked in London and enjoyed the same public sociability as the people for whom they wrote. The advice they gave was firmly based on knowledge and experience of gentry and lesser gentry society and so had relevance for the provincial squirearchy. Personal experience enabled writers to provide insight into changing gentry attitudes to marriage-making and related matters. Early conduct writers were usually male but felt able to offer authoritative advice to women. Later in the eighteenth century women became more active and often specifically addressed 'female issues'.⁵⁶ An implication of this proliferation of advice literature is that many readers welcomed a prescriptive approach about how they should conduct their lives.⁵⁷

2. Themes and ideas

These three genres addressed similar themes, although in different ways and with varying depths of detail. Writers addressed perennial social and cultural concerns facing young people and their parents. The frequent repetition of the same issues suggests that they were cultural obsessions for readers and writers alike.⁵⁸ Issues

⁵⁴ Jones, 'The Seductions of Conduct', pp. 114, 116-117, 119-120.

⁵⁵ Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp. 92, 95.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121. Jones, 'The Seductions of Conduct', p. 123.

⁵⁷ Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp. 188, 227, 230, 253-257.

⁵⁸ Perry, *Novel Relations*, p. 5. Richetti, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion*, pp. 4, 7. Hunter, 'The Novel and Social/Cultural History', p. 12.

most often considered included: what was meant by 'marrying well'; how could women protect their virtue in a licentious age; were material concerns more important than love; should children accept and obey parental advice without question; was it possible for children to comply with parental demands and still satisfy their own desires; how could a person know if they were in love; how could women's interests be protected in a male oriented society; and how far should young people be financially dependent on parental goodwill?⁵⁹ Recurring themes in each genre included: gaining and enhancing social status; leaving home; entering fashionable society; the nature of romantic love and its changing role in courtship and marriage-making; moral standards as they were applied to men and women; the nature of female passion; bride selection; obtaining and protecting fortune; upward social mobility; and the process of marriage-making. Perhaps the most frequently addressed theme concerned the role of 'fortune' in marriage-making. Many writers showed marriage as a path to improved social status.⁶⁰

Early writers based their ideas on biblical precepts and the Anglican marriage service which allowed them to offer their readers a simple choice between good and evil, expressed as moral absolutes.⁶¹ Some harked back to an imagined 'golden' age, but later writers challenged established patterns of behaviour and advocated change, showing a desire to influence and alter conduct. If the behaviour they advocated had already been part of gentry conduct, there would have been little need for them to write as they did. The sheer volume of advice material shows that a deep gulf existed between theoretical principles advanced by writers and the normal practices of readers.⁶² Many didactic writers elevated the need for ethical conduct above love, affection, and the desire for wealth.

Novelistic form and conduct literature encouraged extended discussion and allowed dialogue between contrasting viewpoints. Writers usually referenced the highest social group but their arguments were directed to and had relevance for

⁵⁹ Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp. 18, 44, 253-257. Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, 2011), p. 5. Jones, 'The Seductions of Conduct', p. 127.

⁶⁰ Julia Epstein, 'Marginality in Frances Burney's Novels', in *The Cambridge Companion*, p. 198.

⁶¹ Jones, 'The Seductions of Conduct', p. 113. Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp. 55-56, 92, 229-231, 243, 267. K.M. Davies, 'Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage', in R.B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London, 1981), p. 62.

⁶² Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, p. 117. Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter*, p. 6.

the squirearchy since the issues discussed addressed questions frequently asked by gentry audiences. Read collectively, this literary material shows that the guidance offered changed gradually during the long eighteenth century. The issues remained the same but the emphasis placed on attitudes, beliefs and practices showed subtle changes.⁶³

An important issue addressed across the genres was the extent of parental authority and how far parents should be involved in selecting partners for their children. Conduct writers often supported such involvement.⁶⁴ Lord Halifax argued that it was necessary because young women were too easily influenced by their emotions and needed the advice of an experienced adult. Well-brought up females should, he argued, accept parental advice, even if it conflicted with their own wishes. However, he did imply that daughters should be allowed a veto.⁶⁵ Thomas Salmon argued that young men should be free to choose their own partner without interference, but ought to listen to advice.⁶⁶ These writers offered conflicting advice, albeit Halifax wrote to a daughter while Salmon was advising young men.

In the late seventeenth century a consensus began to emerge that partner selection was the responsibility of young people, but that they needed advice and guidance from friends and relatives. Playwrights and prose fiction writers discussed the extent of parental involvement in marriage-making. For many writers, critical questions were whether a woman should have the same freedom to choose a partner as a man, and whether filial obedience should outweigh personal choice. Filial obedience was a powerful philosophy in the seventeenth century, but its significance decreased during the eighteenth century while remaining a significant topic for debate.⁶⁷

Seventeenth century writers based their arguments on the analogy of God's relationship with his creation, claiming that families represented the same structure in microcosm. This, they argued, obliged children to obey parents throughout their

⁶³ Perry, *Novel Relations*, p. 5. Richetti, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion*, pp. 4, 7. Hunter, 'The Novel and Social/Cultural History', p. 12. Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, p. 46.

⁶⁴ Jones, 'The Seductions of Conduct', p. 113.

⁶⁵ George Saville, Marquis of Halifax, *The Lady's New Year's Gift: or, Advice to a Daughter* (London, 1688), pp. 2-4. [accessed through EEBO, 07.08.2016]

⁶⁶ Thomas Salmon (?), *A Critical Essay Concerning Marriage* (London, 1724), pp. 81-84. [accessed through EEBO, 07.08.2016]

⁶⁷ Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, pp. 46-48.

lives. Halifax, arguing that male supremacy was God-given, instructed his daughter to accept this without question, even if it was irksome to them. He extended this precept to show that wives must demonstrate the same obedience to their husbands as to their fathers.⁶⁸

Early conduct writers assumed that because young women were expected to passively accept the decisions of others they ought not to demonstrate either aversion or affection for a suitor chosen for them.⁶⁹ Young women, Halifax argued should 'endeavour to make the best of their lot, and by a wise use of everything they may dislike in a husband, turn that by degrees to be very supportable'.⁷⁰ Mary Astell argued that 'women should not love before marriage, but only make choice of one whom she can love hereafter'.⁷¹ John Gregory thought few women should marry for love but that a gentlemen married because he loved one woman more than any other. He urged women to be submissive in courtship, showing gratitude for any proposal received. He advised his daughter 'never discover ... the full extent of your love ... [since marriage] sufficiently shews your preference, which is all he is entitled to know'.⁷² However, 'Philogamus' argued that young people should love each other before marriage. This, he felt, was the best defence against unfaithfulness in marriage. Men, he suggested, having 'obtained what they sought with so much anxiety, would preserve [it]'.⁷³

Gradually the emphasis changed. In 1735 Sarah Chapone, arguing that women should have greater independence and freedom from male authority, complained that:

- I. The estate of wives is more disadvantageous than slavery itself.

⁶⁸ Halifax, *Advice to a Daughter*, pp. 17-21. [EEBO]

⁶⁹ Jones, 'The Seductions of Conduct', p. 118. Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, p. 105. Gina Hausknecht, "'So Many Shipwrackes for Want of Better Knowledge": The Imaginary Husband in Stuart Marriage Advice', in *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 64:1-2, (2001), pp. 92, 96.

⁷⁰ Halifax, *Advice to a Daughter*, pp. 18-19. [EEBO]

⁷¹ Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest* (London, 3rd edition, 1696), pp. 99-100. [accessed through EEBO, 11.08.2016]

⁷² John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy*, pp. 39-40. [ECCOII]

⁷³ 'Philogamus', *The Present State of Matrimony; Or The Real Causes of Conjugal Infidelity and Unhappy Marriages* (London, 1739), pp. 38-39. [accessed through ECCO, 07.08.2016]

- II. Wives may be made prisoners for life at the discretion of their despotic governors.
- III. Wives have no property, neither in their own persons, children, or fortunes.⁷⁴

Eighteenth century dramatists contributed to this debate. Parental prerogative in marriage-making was a central theme in *The Conscious Lovers*, *She Stoops to Conquer* and *The Rivals*. By 1750 playwrights were arguing that control over partner-selection should pass from parents to their children. Most of the plays in the sample argued against parentally arranged marriages and in favour of personal choice, based on love.⁷⁵

Dramatists used different characters to voice contrasting viewpoints. Older characters often defended the traditional position, while younger ones championed a more enlightened approach. Sir Anthony in *The Rivals*, justified the marriage that he had arranged without his son's consent. He argued that a financially prudent marriage was more desirable than one based on love. In reply, his son claimed he would not marry someone he had never seen. Paying lip service to filial obedience, he promised not to marry without his father's consent but insisted that he would have his own way and not marry unless he was in love.⁷⁶

The dilemma for many writers was how to balance romantic love with the reality of male supremacy.⁷⁷ Buchan recognised that parents and children often had different marital aims. Parents, he argued, usually wanted a materially advantageous marriage while 'their children often suffer a real martyrdom betwixt their inclinations and duty'.⁷⁸ Many writers argued that marriage simply for material reasons was wrong and that compatibility was essential even if initially love and affection were absent.⁷⁹ Gregory urged his daughters only to marry if they were

⁷⁴ Sarah Chapone, *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives* (London, 1735), p. 4-5. [accessed through ECCO, 17. 08. 2016]

⁷⁵ Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, pp. 21-22, 57-58, 66-67.

⁷⁶ Sheridan, *The Rivals*, Act 2, scene 1, p. 432 and Act 3, Scene 1, p. 441.

⁷⁷ Hausknecht, 'So Many Shipwrackes', pp. 89, 94.

⁷⁸ Jones, 'The Seductions of Conduct', pp. 126, 123. William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine or A Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Diseases* (fifth edition, London, 1776), pp. 127-128. [accessed through ECCO, 17. 08. 2016]

⁷⁹ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 189. Jones, 'The Seductions of Conduct', pp. 113-114.

attracted to their future spouse, claiming that if '[you] marry from vulgar or mercenary views [it] will embitter all your married days'.⁸⁰

This focus on mercenary marriages reduced the importance of 'love'. Defoe warned against 'men overlooking all considerations but fortune'.⁸¹ Fordyce claimed that parents wanting to 'sell their sons and daughters in marriage' had overthrown 'that idle, youthful, unprofitable passion [love] which has for its object personal attractions'.⁸² Mary Astell wanted 'Protestant nunneries' to protect wealthy young women from 'designing men' and from the 'danger of being bought nor sold'. A young woman, she argued, should not 'be forced to marry for her own quiet when she has no inclinations to it'.⁸³

Some writers argued that parents should withhold a daughter's fortune if there was the danger of an imprudent marriage. Richardson described a father's attempt to protect his daughter from her seducer by saying he would only release her fortune. 'in such a manner as I thought would most contribute to her advantage'. The father argued that if a fortune hunter had 'married her for her own sake she will find no alteration of behaviour. ...but if he married her only for her money, she will soon be glad to find it in my possession rather than his'.⁸⁴ Material comfort was a desirable pre-requisite for marriage but could not compensate for personal incompatibility or lack of affection. Passion and emotion, however, could encourage imprudence. By the end of the period many writers argued that mutual fondness and like-mindedness were more important than the purely mercenary in marriage-making, but that love combined with poverty were certain to fail.

'Love' was central to marriage-making discussions in novels and conduct literature. Novels idealised love, showing the tension which existed between the conflicting aims of the triangle of 'consent', 'fortune and mercenary pressures', and 'love and affection'. Early readers needed to know how to reconcile these tensions. Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* showed 'the cultural shift towards a

⁸⁰ Gregory, *A Father's Legacy*, pp. 117-118. [ECCO]

⁸¹ Daniel Defoe, *Some Considerations Upon Streetwalkers with a Proposal for Lessening the Present Number of Them* (London, 1726), pp. 6-7. [accessed through ECCO, 20.08.2016]

⁸² Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, pp. 150-151. [ECCO]

⁸³ Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, pp. 17, 40-46, 108-110. [EEBO]

⁸⁴ Samuel Richardson, *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions – The Father's Answer Letter 67* (London, 1741), pp. 94-95. [accessed through ECCO, 18.08.2016]

companionate model of marriage ... and ends with “conjugal affection”.⁸⁵ Defoe’s *Roxana* described ‘prudential’ marriages as ‘matrimonial whoredom’.⁸⁶ Love, not mercenary gain, was the driving force in *Emma Courtney* since ‘Emma wants to love and be loved ... to become the emotional focus of [one] person’s life’.⁸⁷ *Belinda* depicted ‘a process by which a young woman makes her own choice of husband ... informed but not controlled by those whose advice she respects’.⁸⁸ John Shebbeare attacked the Hardwicke Marriage Act because it emphasised material gain and reduced the importance of love.⁸⁹

Prudent or imprudent marriage, finance and fortune, and parental authority were regular themes for dramatists.⁹⁰ *The Beggars Opera* suggested that marriage, even when based on love, was a temporary phase before the welcome independence of widowhood. Some writers claimed that love was unnecessary in a prudent marriage but others, like Cowley and Gay, argued that marriage should not just be for security but should be based on ‘love’. They saw ‘affection’ and ‘esteem’ as a necessary prelude to marriage. In *The Witlings*, despite the assumption that Cecilia’s loss of fortune would alienate her lover, love finally triumphed.⁹¹ Letitia, in *The Belles Stratagem*, when asked whether she agreed with the saying ‘marry first and love will follow’ replied that ‘a woman that has not touched the heart of a man before he leads her to the altar’ would not be able to afterwards.⁹² Sadly, this ideal was not always reflected in real-life.

⁸⁵ David Oakleaf (ed.), ‘Introduction’, in Elizabeth Haywood, *Love in Excess* (New York, 1994), pp. 12, 20-21.

⁸⁶ David Blewitt (ed.), ‘Introduction’, in Daniel Defoe, *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* (London, 1982), pp. 14-15.

⁸⁷ Sally Cline (ed.), ‘Introduction’, in Mary Hays, *Memoires of Emma Courtney* (London and New York, 1987), p. vii.

⁸⁸ Kathryn J. Kirkpatrick (ed.), ‘Introduction’, in Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (Oxford and New York, 1994), pp. ix, xvii, xviii-xix, xxii.

⁸⁹ John Shebbeare, *The Marriage Act* (London, 1754, reprinted New York, 1974).

⁹⁰ The plays sampled: Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678); William Congreve, *The Way of the World* (1700); Susannah Centlivre, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718); Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers* (1722); John Gay, *The Beggars Opera* (1728); George Lillo, *The London Merchant* (1731); Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer* (1771); Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals* (1775); Fanny Burney, *The Witlings* (1779); Hannah Cowley, *The Belles Stratagem* (1780). For comments about each of the plays see Appendix 3.

⁹¹ Frances Burney, *The Witlings*, p. 325, Act 2 scene 2, Lady Smatter to Dabbler and pp. 392-394, Act 5, scene 1, Cecilia and Beaufort.

⁹² Hannah Cowley, *The Belles Stratagem*, in Rogers (ed.), *Plays by Women*, Act 3, scene 1, p. 443.

Love was a common theme in conduct literature and post-1700 periodicals. John Gregory, wishing his daughter to be happy, told her that marriage 'if entered into from proper motives of esteem and affection, will be the happiest for yourself'.⁹³ Some writers saw love as dangerous, because it threatened the lineal transfer of property, wealth circulation and the preservation of status. These, many thought, should be the true criteria for partner selection but could easily be overlooked if relationships were governed by emotion rather than reason. However, there was a growing awareness that love provided a sounder foundation for marriage than material self-interest, financial gain or obedience to family needs, but even writers who promoted this ideal argued that love on its own was insufficient.⁹⁴ In a 'model letter' Richardson had described a father urging his infatuated daughter to 'think well of the certain misery that must attend ... be cautious of pushing yourself into ruin' if she remained determined to marry a poor man.⁹⁵

Many eighteenth century writers who discussed conjugal love thought that marriage was a less rewarding experience for women than for men.⁹⁶ However, contemporary evidence challenges this claim, showing that many couples enjoyed compatibility and 'loving mutuality'. The sample correspondence rarely shows love as a causal factor in marriage-making but does show that it could develop after an arranged marriage between strangers. Mary Hacket's letters show that she and her husband Justinian Isham fell deeply in love after their mercenary arranged marriage and disliked being separated. She called him 'her dearest dear' and they often used affectionate nicknames, calling each other 'Mr and Mrs Tub'.⁹⁷ Abel Barker and his second wife also seem to have developed love for each other.⁹⁸ Samuel Barker's marriage to Sarah Whiston, his grandfather's marriage to Elizabeth Wildbore, and the Congreve-Clavering and Congreve-Birch marriages all appear to have been driven by love rather than material gain.⁹⁹ In contrast,

⁹³ John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy*, pp. 108-111. [ECCO]

⁹⁴ Jones, 'The Seductions of Conduct', p. 113. Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 189.

⁹⁵ Samuel Richardson, *Familiar Letters. Letter 63*, pp. 84-85. [ECCO] See above p. 83 for the father's response to the fortune hunter.

⁹⁶ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, pp. 113, 190.

⁹⁷ NRO, *Isham Correspondence*. Approximately 50 letters from Mary to her husband Justinian after their marriage, including: IC1969, IC1985, IC1989, IC1990, IC2046 and IC2068, written between 1725-1737

⁹⁸ LRO, DG11:4, *Conant Papers*, letter 44, 10 May, 1656. Mary Barker to her husband, in London. Letter 53, 30 June, 1661, Mary Barker to her husband in London.

⁹⁹ LRO, DG11/1, *Conant Papers*, letter 103, 17 January, 1715. Samuel Barker to Sarah Whiston. DG11/962, January 1662. Post-nuptial settlement between Samuel Barker and

Richard Greaves knew Emma Thompson very well, having previously jilted her. He made it clear to her that his proposal was because a wife was more convenient to him than a housekeeper. Greaves wanted a wife because his 'domestic circumstances' had changed and not because he loved her.¹⁰⁰

Writers often distinguished between love and passion. 'Love' usually meant respect, esteem, affection, or even just 'liking', but 'passion' was dangerous because it blinded 'victims' to the dangers they faced. Young women were assumed to be morally vulnerable because their sexual passions were thought to be naturally greater than men's. Many writers accepted that women could easily be seduced unless properly trained in the importance of virtue. Catherine Graham argued that trying to explain the differences between virtue and vice to a young woman would encourage an inquisitive attitude and lead to experimentation. 'She will entertain doubts either of your wisdom or your sincerity ... [and] will fall a victim to the first plausible being who has formed a design on her person.'¹⁰¹ 'Philogamus' claimed that women had 'more amorous tempers' than men and were 'more inclined to criminal excesses'. Blaming this on their more passionate nature he concluded that 'they must be more nicely guarded from all objects too apt to excite that flame'.¹⁰² Mary Wollstonecraft agreed that young women were driven by passion rather than reason because they were forced 'to please the other sex, in order ... to get married'.¹⁰³

In 1740 a physician wrote that women's 'hot blood' made them more passionate than men. 'Excess of love [can] ... [be] ascribed to ... the providence of nature that has made them to serve us as play toys after our more serious occupations.'¹⁰⁴ A

Elizabeth Wildbore. DG11/1006, May 1676. The will of Samuel Barker. SRO, D1057/M/I/3/39, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve to his brother Richard, 23 December, 1747. D1057/M/I/8/34, Charles Congreve to his brother Richard, 18 January, 1748. D1057/M/I/9/12, Anne Congreve to her brother Richard, January 1748. BRO, MS3597/199/2, *Meath-Barker Collection*. Richard Congreve to George Birch, 29 May, 1801.

¹⁰⁰ BRO, MS801/2, *The Greaves Papers*. Richard Greaves of Wythall to Miss Emma Thompson of Bradford Street, Birmingham, 24 February, 1817. For further details of this relationship see Chapter 2, p. 54, Chapter 4, p. 119 and chapter 5, pp. 129-130.

¹⁰¹ Catherine Macauley Graham, *Letters on Education, With Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects: Letter 24* (London, 1790), pp. 218-219. [accessed through ECCO, 21.08.2016]

¹⁰² 'Philogamus', *The Present State of Matrimony*, pp. 11, 20-21. [ECCO]

¹⁰³ Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, pp. 93-94. [ECCO]

¹⁰⁴ A Physician, *The Pleasures of Conjugal Love Explained in an Essay Concerning Human Generation* (London, 1740), pp. 25-26. [accessed through ECCO, 19.08.2016]

generation later, Dr Buchan described love as ‘the strongest of all the passions ... [and] less subject to the control either of the understanding or will’. He criticised men who made love to women simply for pleasure, saying they ignored the consequences of their actions because ‘the too credulous fair is often betrayed into a situation which is truly deplorable’.¹⁰⁵

Female modesty, virtue and reputation were enduring themes in each of the literary genre. Gregory thought ‘one of the chief beauties in a female character is that modest reserve ... which avoids the public eye and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration’. He stressed that ‘indelicate conversation’ was ‘shameful, and ... highly disgusting ... It is better to [be] thought ridiculous than disgusting’.¹⁰⁶ Attitudes to female reputation had hardly changed since Lord Halifax’s time, and had possibly hardened. Even those who wished to show sympathy to ‘fallen women’ were compelled to accept that gentle society was unforgiving.

A woman’s damaged reputation could last for life. Writers consistently stressed that a good character was more valuable than fortune or family. Wilkes claimed that females incur great danger ‘by too much familiarity with a male companion’.¹⁰⁷ Haywood, accepting the contemporary belief that young women were dominated by passion and not reason, argued that reputation was easily lost but almost impossible to recover. She said society eagerly criticised a woman’s conduct, but ignored the circumstances which had influenced it, because ‘people no longer allow [a young creature] to be possessed of any virtues, if once detected in transgression’. Haywood, expressing sympathy for ‘ruined women’, noted that her purpose was to reform and not excuse ‘those very errors in conduct’. She asserted that a young person ‘cannot be judge of her own heart’ but that young women should not be condemned for ever for one mistake if their ‘future regularity of conduct atoned for the errors of the past’.¹⁰⁸ She emphasised the fragility of female reputation; the difficulty of recovery; and the weight of societal censure. A sermon of 1759 combined Wilkes’ attitude and Haywood’s compassion. The writer blamed

Taken from a section headed ‘At what age a young man and a young woman ought to marry’.

¹⁰⁵ William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, pp. 127-128. [accessed through ECCO, 17.08.2016]

¹⁰⁶ Gregory, *A Father’s Legacy*, pp. 26-36. [ECCO]

¹⁰⁷ Wetenhall Wilkes, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (First edition, Dublin, 1740), pp. 109-110. [accessed through ECCO, 17.08.2016]

¹⁰⁸ *The Female Spectator*, Book 14 (London, 1745), pp. 57, 83, 84, 85, 87. [accessed through 18th Century Journals]

the seduction of young females on male sexual lust but argued that compassion could help save disgraced women. He noted the operation of the 'double sexual standard' which ensured that while men who seduced young women were not condemned, women with damaged reputations were ruined for ever.¹⁰⁹

The 'double standard of sexual morality' was frequently addressed in each of the literary genres. Promiscuity was regarded as a natural male characteristic, but women were required to be chaste and above suspicion. Wives were expected to tolerate or ignore male 'indiscretions'. Halifax defended the double standard, advising his daughter that her purity was essential, because a wife's responsibility was 'the preservation of families from any mixture which may bring a blemish to them', but men did not have this responsibility. Wives who were critical of their husband's affairs would damage their own reputation not his, but 'your discretion and silence will be the most prevailing reproof [to him]'.¹¹⁰ 'Philogamus' adopted a similar view, claiming that procreation was a woman's main purpose in life and arguing that a man's sexual misbehaviour had no lasting effect while a woman's misconduct was 'a greater crime ... because she imposes a spurious breed on her husband's family' and may rob her husband's legitimate heirs of their true inheritance.¹¹¹

Restoration and early eighteenth century drama and prose fiction showed a different attitude. It dealt explicitly with extra-marital sex but adopted a more liberal view than the moralists. In *Love in Excess*, Ciamara willingly submitted to her seducer 'with eyes which sparkled with wild desires and left no want of further explanation'.¹¹² A generation later, Haywood had changed her attitude to reflect values more like those of Halifax. Whereas Jemmy Jessamy was expected to have sexual liaisons Jenny was required to remain virtuous. Jemmy showed contempt for a woman who had been seduced and ruined by his friend, but Jenny regretfully accepting such behaviour, said 'I am sensible ... that things of this nature too frequently happen'. Her female friend could 'see nothing strange in ...

¹⁰⁹ 'The First Sermon Preached Before ... the Governors', April 28, 1759, in *An Account of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the Magdalen Hospital for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes Together with Doctor Dodd's Sermons* (London, 1770), pp. 49-66. [accessed through ECCO, 11. 08. 2016]

¹¹⁰ Lord Halifax, *Advice to a Daughter*, pp. 19-20. [EEBO]

¹¹¹ 'Philogamus', *The Present State of Matrimony*, p. 12. [ECCO]

¹¹² Haywood, *Love in Excess*, pp. 229-230.

[a man] keeping a mistress'.¹¹³ When Jenny agreed to marry Jemmy she accepted he would still have affairs and simply asked him to 'be more cautious in concealing them'.¹¹⁴ The moral perspective of plays also changed. Later plays highlighted the problem of the 'double sexual standard', questioning why men with a lurid past demanded that their wives should have unblemished reputations. This dichotomy is evident in *The Conscious Lovers*, *The London Merchant* and *The School for Scandal*.

Francis Sheridan criticised the 'double sexual standard' but presented a different argument advocating a return to the supposedly higher moral standards of the past. When Sidney Bidulph broke her engagement to Faulkland because of his unsavoury reputation, her brother, echoing Halifax, said that such behaviour was natural and ought to be accepted. He told her that jilting Faulkland would make her a laughing stock and damage her reputation and that she would learn it was almost impossible to 'find a man that never offended in that way'.¹¹⁵ Haywood's didactic approach was illustrated when Sidney's mother argued that an unsatisfactory marriage was preferable to one with an immoral man.¹¹⁶

Despite being regularly challenged the sexual double standard was still powerful at the end of the eighteenth century. Graham argued that it was about male power and authority and that women as 'the mere property of men ... had no right to dispose of their own persons'.¹¹⁷ She claimed that while one false step for a woman was irretrievable comparable male conduct was socially acceptable. Edgeworth's *Lady Delacourt* told Belinda that a 'mistress ... can be of no consequence ... [since] the most moral ladies in the world do not expect men to be as moral as themselves'.¹¹⁸ Lady Delacourt's maid explained that although people accepted that young men would have mistresses it was, 'morally speaking, ... very wicked and shocking and makes one blush before company'.¹¹⁹ But, as Belinda's

¹¹³ Haywood, *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy*, in John Richetti (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Novels by Women* (Kentucky, 2005), pp. 22-23.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

¹¹⁵ Frances Sheridan, *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (Pandora edition, 1987), pp. 47-48.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 236-237.

¹¹⁷ Catherine Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education: Letter 24, 'Chastity'*, pp. 220-222. [ECCO]

¹¹⁸ Edgeworth, *Belinda*, pp. 148-149.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

aunt explained, even the highest born and wealthiest Ladies 'cannot dispense with the strictest observance of the rules of virtue'.¹²⁰

By 1800, despite evidence showing that attitudes towards the sexual double standard were beginning to change, novelists and conduct writers continued to emphasise the importance of women preserving their reputation, even though men were shown greater tolerance. There is little evidence of the sexual double standard in the correspondence of the sample families apart, perhaps, from a reference to the possibly improper conduct of Justinian Isham with a married woman and the implied relationship between George Whiston and Mrs Always.¹²¹ Absence of direct evidence, however, is not proof that behaviour was always above reproach.

Many writers criticised rather than supported the normal attitudes to marriage-making. *The Tatler* said settlements and jointures were 'the bane of happiness ... and the ruin of their fortunes who enter into them'.¹²² It argued that a financial limit should be imposed to avoid the rising cost of marriage and suggested that these recently developed devices had made 'beauty and virtue the purchase of money'.¹²³ The writer thought that time spent negotiating and agreeing portions, jointures and settlements turned marriage-making into a commercial transaction and removed a parent's right to discriminate between children. Financial settlements, the writer argued, reduced the importance of love in marriage.

A closely related issue concerned the negotiation of marriage treaties. These were condemned because they delayed marriages unnecessarily and gave too much power to lawyers. In 1726, *The Country Gentleman* argued that protracted negotiations depersonalised marriage and reduced the two principals to objects rather than equal participants. It claimed that 'the lover very often never sees his mistress till the bargain is made and is just allowed so much time for courtship as the lawyers are pleased to take in drawing up the settlement'.¹²⁴ Fielding described

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

¹²¹ NRO, IC2157, *Isham Correspondence*, Vere Isham to her brother Justinian, 3 March, 1715. For George Whiston's bequest to Mrs Always see chapters 5, p. 128.

¹²² *The Tatler* no. 195, Thursday July 6-Saturday July 8, 1710. [accessed through 17th 18th Century Burney Collection, 18.07.2016]

¹²³ *Ibid.*, no. 199, Saturday July 15-Tuesday July 18, 1710. [Burney]

¹²⁴ *The Country Gentleman* no. 43, Friday 5 August, 1726. [accessed through 17th 18th Century Burney Collection, 18.07.2016]

a negotiation in which the father pursued his own interests at the expense of his daughter. Receiving a proposal for his 'ruined' daughter, he rapidly concluded negotiations, making her portion larger than he had given her sister to persuade the groom to accept her. Negotiations were concluded with indecent haste, the groom accepting the terms with indifference so that an otherwise unmarriageable girl was 'disposed' of.¹²⁵

Fictional accounts of negotiations are like those described in the sample correspondence. The Clavering-Congreve negotiations were delayed while the Congreves made financial concessions to win Mrs Clavering's approval for an otherwise unsuitable marriage.¹²⁶ Similarly, in the Birch-Congreve negotiations a younger son with few expectations had to make major financial concessions to 'buy' the father's financial agreement, even though on a personal level Mr. Birch favoured the proposed marriage.¹²⁷

Eighteenth century dramatists were obsessed with the wealth-exchange aspect of marriage-making.¹²⁸ Several plays implied that marriage negotiations were about the protection of the financial interests of the wife, especially in widowhood. Some writers condemned the matrimonial power structure based on affluence which turned women into mechanisms for wealth transmission and reproduction. Cibberton, in *The Conscious Lovers*, says 'The woman in the bargain, like the mansion house in the sale of the estate, is thrown in, and ... not at all considered'.¹²⁹ Several plays challenged the legal doctrine of coverture which underpinned male dominance. Occasionally, playwrights depicted wives as equal partners in a companionate marriage and not just chattels. Defoe criticised coverture and matrimonial property laws as two major challenges facing females. Roxana said 'If I should be a wife, all I had then was given up to the husband'.¹³⁰ Periodical essays and conduct literature regularly addressed these issues, as writers described and criticised different aspects of the marriage-market process.

¹²⁵ Henry Fielding, *Amelia* (London, 1987).

¹²⁶ SRO, D1057/M/I, *Congreve Papers*. Letters written December 1747 to January 1748, including: D1057/M/I/3/32, 33, 39, 40; D1057/M/I/8/34; D1057/M/I/9/4,5, 8, 9-12, 33-34. For further details of these negotiations see chapter 2, pp. 47-48 and chapter 8, p. 221.

¹²⁷ BRO, MS3810/199/1-25, *Meath-Barker Collection*. A series of letters concerning marriage negotiations between George Birch of Hamstead Hall and Richard Congreve of Iscoyd, 29 May to 10 December, 1801. The marriage took place on 8 December, 1801.

¹²⁸ Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, pp. 53-58.

¹²⁹ Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers*, pp. 148-149.

¹³⁰ Defoe, *Roxana*, pp. 170, 183.

Parents who made an expensive public show of their daughters, hoping to secure a 'good marriage', were condemned. *The Mirror* wrote about a young man who 'frequently met the same young women at places of public resort as well as at private entertainments ... always attended by their mother'.¹³¹ In a later edition it reported a young heiress whose guardian focused 'solely on ... the disposal of my person in marriage'. She complained that she was paraded around and exposed to all eligible gentlemen but kept away from those who lacked fortune.¹³² The *Gentleman's Magazine* also drew attention to this feature of marriage-making. Parents, the writer said, 'are for showing [their daughter] off to get a husband' and the girl 'thinks of nothing but dress, receiving and returning visits, tea drinking ... and ... gadding abroad'.¹³³ Passages such as these, found in each of the genres, argued that marriage-making was commercialised, so that many gentry marriages were about finance and security rather than love and happiness. Writers consistently, but unavailingly, demanded changes in attitude and the emphasis placed on marriage-making.

Conclusion

Prose fiction, drama and advice literature are separate genres but have a commonality of intent which makes them a useful resource for this study. Each of the works selected examines perennial questions asked by young people about partner selection, relationships with parents, and the balance between material, practical and emotional forces as they affected marriage-making. Since most of the texts focus on the lives and behaviours of the metropolitan aristocracy and wealthy gentry they might be dismissed as having little relevance to the Midlands squirearchy. But they are relevant, because the questions they raise and the solutions they propose were of significance to young people and parents of all social classes and in most historical periods. The audiences addressed were not just the metropolitan elite but the provincial lesser gentry to whom writers offered advice. Many writers had a squirearchy or urban gentry background and understood and could relate to the interests and needs of their audience. Descriptive detail framed the writers' thoughts with a context and in terms with

¹³¹ *The Mirror* volume 2, issue 67, 28 December, 1779. [accessed through 17th-18th Century Burney Collection, 22.07.2016]

¹³² *Ibid.*, no. 81, Tuesday 15 February, 1780. [Burney]

¹³³ 'The Education of Women for Careers', pp. 525-526, in E.A. Reitan (ed.), *The Best of the Gentleman's Magazine 1731-1745* (New York, 1987), pp. 154-156, 9 October, 1789.

which the rural gentry could easily relate. The audience could translate what they read or saw in terms of what they knew.

The three genres complement each other since many of the writers worked in two and sometimes all three forms. There is a surprising similarity and consistency in the themes and topics addressed by each genre. Writers had their own agendas and wrote from a personal perspective offering different answers to the questions raised, but the consistency with which the same issues were addressed shows that these were matters of lasting concern to the writers and their audiences.

The proliferation of material in each genre testifies to a strong and growing demand from readers and shows the availability of writers willing to moralise and offer practical guidance to enquiring readers. It is unfortunate that the sample correspondence, despite some references to the influence of drama, does not show how this literary material was consumed in real life or whether it influenced behaviour or inhibited change. Yet such changes, as depicted in the literary material, are evident in the correspondence, lives and attitudes of the sample families. This is shown in the next chapter which examines the marital strategies and processes followed by squires for their heirs.

Chapter 4: Marriage strategies

Introduction

In 1740 William Congreve, the head of the family who had settled in Shrewsbury, was concerned that his cousin Tom, heir to a cadet branch, intended to marry into the disreputable Handyside family, without his father's knowledge or consent. William thought Tom should not marry while he still needed his father's financial support and was worried because 'much fortune he cannot expect with that lady ... Her relations ... cannot probably be of any use to him'. William wanted Tom's father to know about the marriage because keeping it secret would 'expose me to the just reproaches of my uncle for concealing what I knew from him in so material a concern of his family'. Another cousin condemned the marriage as 'to the great dislike of my uncle and most of his friends'. Eventually, Tom's father 'consented to the marriage' hoping that the Handysides might be able to help Tom's military career'.¹

The marriage of a male heir was a critical and potentially disruptive event for a lesser gentry family in a patrilineal society since an heir's marriage was meant to secure family continuity and protect estate transmission. This chapter explores the marriage strategies followed by fathers for those sons who stood in direct succession or who were heirs for some other reason. It links with chapter 6 which is about younger sons some of whom might eventually inherit if circumstances changed or if the heir was childless when he died. This chapter will show that fathers usually treated heirs differently to other children when distributing family wealth.

The adoption of the strict settlement progressively reduced the amount of unsettled land available for alienation or distribution to children, forcing fathers to discriminate between their children. Maintaining estate integrity meant that from the late seventeenth century onwards few squirearchy younger sons could inherit land from their parents. Strict settlements guaranteed the heirs succession but forced parents to find alternative methods of providing for other children. Funding

¹ SRO, D1057/M/I/3, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve to his brother Richard, 1 January, 1739. D1057/M/I/3/9, William to Richard, 6 February, 1739. D1057/M/I/17a, pp.16-17, Richard Congreve to William, 20 May, 1740. D1057/M/I/17a, Richard to Francis Congreve, pp. 21-22, 5 June, 1740.

expenditure by borrowing rather than land sales was a short-term benefit but created long-term financial difficulties, as reflected in contemporary literature and in the experience of the sample families.²

Urban gentry rarely used strict settlements since few of them, unlike the landed gentry, were committed to the principle of primogeniture. Urban gentry children usually experienced a more equitable distribution of family wealth than the children of the landed gentry. Primogeniture and patrilineal inheritance affected the marriage-making strategies of landed gentry more than their social inferiors and helped to bind gentry with modest estates to the wealthier landed elite.³ The lesser gentry and their social superiors shared attitudes to marriage-making which encouraged group cohesion.

Declining nuptiality in the late seventeenth century increased the number of single people and encouraged many to delay marriage. This caused the median age for first marriages among the gentry to increase until the 1750s after which it began to fall.⁴ Data for age at first marriage in the sample is limited for the later seventeenth century but seems to have been high. However, the evidence suggests that the nuptiality rate and age at first marriage of heirs in the sample broadly matched the national pattern.

The second section examines practical aspects of marriage-making. It shows that most fathers had clear aims and played a central role in bride-selection and marital decisions affecting their heirs. In the third part the focus changes to a discussion of the marriage-making process mainly from the heirs' perspective and demonstrates tensions which existed between reconciling parental aims with a sons' wishes. In this part, the emphasis is on how brides were found, the changing priorities of parity and prudence and the relationship between affection, passion and material considerations. This section shows that marriage-making increasingly revolved around personal choice even though parental influence could never be entirely excluded because of their control of finance. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the changing nature and purpose of courtship in relation to bride-selection, parity and personal inclination.

² See below, pp. 105-106

³ Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700* (London, 1984), pp. 20, 25.

⁴ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (abridged edition, London, 1979), pp. 38-42, 45.

1. Demographic matters⁵

The Barker, Congreve and Hacket family trees show a high nuptiality rate for sons and daughters in the seventeenth century, but a marked downturn in the early eighteenth. A similar pattern existed with the Mortimers, who had a trading background, and the Ishams who were wealthy gentry. In the later eighteenth century, the position improved as nuptiality increased and the mean age at first marriage, especially for heirs, was reduced.⁶ The dip in the nuptiality rate combined with a relatively high mean age at first marriage, a reduction in the number of male births and high infant mortality meant fewer cadet branches were formed in the early eighteenth century. This could create succession problems if the senior line came to an end.

Historians have offered various explanations for declining nuptiality. Increased freedom of choice allowed some heirs to deliberately choose to remain single.⁷ Many lesser gentry could not afford the large portions and jointures which priced them out of the marriage-market, leaving their children with little alternative but to remain single – a serious problem for squirearchy families with many children. Inability to match or give generous portions may explain why Samuel Barker (d. 1682) and Samuel Mortimer (d. 1750s) did not marry and why few eighteenth century Barker daughters married.⁸ Some people rejected marriage for cultural reasons.⁹ William Stout of Lancaster, having twice been disappointed in love, rejected several possible brides because of their ‘unbecoming behaviour’. He ‘resolved never to marry any other woman than a ... Quaker’.¹⁰ The single state was not always permanent. Several Congreves delayed marriage until late in life. William (aged 48) and his younger brother Richard (aged 32) married late. Their brother Charles was 35 when his proposed marriage collapsed, while Samuel Barker was aged 33 when he married Sarah Whiston in 1717. Indeed, the mean age at first marriage rose steadily, peaking at 27-29 for men and 26 for women in

⁵ See Appendix 1. for the family trees of each of these families.

⁶ Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 38-40, 45. E.A. Wrigley, ‘Marriage, Fertility and Population Growth in Eighteenth Century England’, in R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London, 1981), p. 146.

⁷ Alan MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300-1840* (Oxford, 1987), p. 122.

⁸ G. E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1963), p. 36.

⁹ MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, p. 150.

¹⁰ J. D. Marshall (ed.), *The Autobiography of William Stout of Lancaster* (Manchester, 1967), p. 142.

the early eighteenth century, before falling after 1750. This pattern was matched by an increase in life-long celibacy.¹¹

Declining numbers of potential husbands among owners of medium-sized estates was a major contemporary concern.¹² Harriet Bryan, in *Sir Charles Grandison*, believed

there are more bachelors now in England ... than were a few years ago; and probably, the number of them (and of single women, of course) will every year increase. The luxury of the age will account a good deal for this; and the turn our sex take in undomesticating themselves, for a good deal more.¹³

High levels of celibacy could break the direct line of succession and separate fortune and estate. In the 1770s celibacy ended the direct male line in two Leicestershire gentry families, the Hartopps and the Craddocks. Edmund Bunney, son of a yeoman, inherited from both families through his mother. Bunney, combining the names of both families, became Craddock-Hartopp, prospered, and established a wealthy and influential Midlands landowning family.¹⁴

In the sample families, many heirs married so that there were few serious succession problems. If an heir or owner was childless a younger brother was usually available to succeed. Three seventeenth century Barker owners, who inherited when in their thirties, failed to marry. Two were succeeded by a younger brother but the third, Sir Thomas, having no direct successor, left his estate to a distant cousin. Apart from those who died as children, few of the heirs in the other

¹¹ Rebecca Probert, *Marriage, Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 305. Ralph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth Century England* (New York, 1978), p. 112. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 42, 214. MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, p. 182. Wrigley, 'Marriage, Fertility and Population Growth', pp. 146-147. John Gillis, *For Better for Worse: British Marriages 1600 to the Present* (Oxford, 1985), p. 110. Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (London, 1989), pp. 180-181.

¹² J. R. Rosenheim, *The Emergence of a Ruling Order: English Landed Society 1650-1750* (London and New York, 1998), p. 22. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 38-39.

¹³ Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* ed. Jocelyn Harris, (London, 1753, London, 1972), Book 2, chapter 2, p. 231.

¹⁴ Rosenheim, *Ruling Order*, pp. 17, 19. LRO, D72, Craddock-Hartopp Family Papers. M. H. Port, 'Edmund Craddock Hartopp', in R. Thorne (ed.), *History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1790-1820*. [<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/cradock-hartopp-sir-edmund-1749>, accessed 01.02.2017]

families were celibate. Only John Hacket, Lisle's heir, was unmarried when, aged 30 in 1718, he predeceased his father. John and Samuel, two of John Mortimer's sons, were life-long bachelors as was Cromwell Mortimer's eldest son. The archives do not explain why these men remained bachelors. Four Congreve sons who were heirs or eldest sons died before reaching marriageable age.¹⁵

High adult mortality resulted in a short duration of marriage. In the 1650s only 50% of fathers were alive when their eldest son married. Most early eighteenth century children lost at least one parent before they reached 21. Improved longevity in the later eighteenth century meant that a higher proportion of fathers were alive when their heirs married so that heirs were usually older than their predecessors when they inherited. The pattern, reflected in the Barker and Congreve family trees, shows that the age-at-marriage profile of Midland squires broadly matched the national pattern.

2. Parental aims

Squires, as parents, were actively involved in the marriage-making process throughout the period. In the mid seventeenth century, many fathers controlled their heir's choice of bride, but gradually the level of control changed. Parents continued to exercise influence in the early nineteenth century, relying on a combination of filial obedience, financial control and the conviction that marriage was mainly about safeguarding property transmission. This was as important for squires as for the wealthier gentry. A father's main aim was almost invariably to secure a prudent marriage of benefit to his family and estate, rather than simply to satisfy the emotional desires of an individual child.

Prudent marriages were those with equality between bride and groom in terms of status, wealth, age and religion. This ideal was not always adhered to or achieved and the evidence suggests that these priorities were gradually modified. Social status was replaced by wealth as the principal criterion, but even so, few heirs in the sample married women of lesser status. Parity of religion was more important to Dissenters and Catholics than to Anglicans while broad parity of age was thought to be desirable but not always essential. If an age disparity existed, it was thought better for husbands to be older than their wives.

¹⁵ See Congreve, Mortimer and Hacket family trees, Appendix 1, (1b, 1c and 1d).

Not all owners married, not all marriages produced sons, and not all sons outlived their father so that an estate might pass to someone other than an eldest son. In the absence of sons, succession usually passed to a younger brother.¹⁶ In 1727 Andrew Hacket I succeeded his brother Lisle and in 1772 Richard Congreve I succeeded his brother William. Succession might pass to a cadet branch if there were no males in the direct line of succession, as happened in 1707 when Samul Barker succeeded his cousin, Sir Thomas. Such inheritance could leave a cadet branch encumbered with debt if the previous owner had given his wealth to his daughters or siblings. Andrew I inherited Moxhull and substantial debts from Lisle; the estate stayed in the Hacket family but much of the family wealth had been transferred to the Ishams as a marriage portion. Owners lacking an obvious heir, or who owned unentailed property, might choose their own successor or sell the estate. An heir might be a sister's son or a wife's nephew, (as with the Hacket-Scott families in 1762 and 1810), or a daughter's husband (as proposed by Thomas Savage), or a virtual stranger (as with the Barker estates in 1843).¹⁷

Male primogeniture was a vital principle for eighteenth century gentry, irrespective of their wealth or the size of their estate. To maintain an estate in 'the family name' ownership had to pass to a junior branch if the direct male line came to an end. Embodied in the strict settlement, primogeniture could create a division between heirs and their siblings, affect marital prospects and build a social and economic gulf between senior and cadet branches of a family. These considerations made the marriage of an heir a matter of interest to all family members.

Landowners believed patrilineage and primogeniture were essential to maintain social stability, sound governance and good order and so they were more actively involved in the marriages of heirs than of other children.¹⁸ Landowners usually wanted to preserve their family name and secure the transmission of an intact patrimony to future generations.¹⁹ This was what Richardson meant when he wrote 'daughters are but an encumbrance, and the [eldest] son is to be

¹⁶ See below p. 153.

¹⁷ See above pp. 50-51, 57 for details of the Hacket and Savage inheritances. See also Hacket (supplementary) and Savage-Byrche family trees, Appendix 1, (1g and 1h).

¹⁸ Lloyd Bonfield, *Marriage Settlements 1601-1740: The Adoption of the Strict Settlement* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 15, 50-51.

¹⁹ Lawrence Stone and Jeanne Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (abridged version, Oxford, 1986), p. 46. Mingay, *English Landed Society*, p. 32. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 71.

everything'.²⁰ He condemned society for making 'a daughter change her name in marriage and gives to a son, for the sake of name only, the estate of the common ancestor of both'.²¹ Patrilineal inheritance meant that daughters and younger sons only received a relatively small share of estate wealth. The eldest son's marriage was essential for estate continuity, debt redemption and to fund widows' jointures and younger children's portions. This caused an author to complain in 1763 that by 'conferring the whole estate to the eldest male branch the younger ones become disabled to marry'.²² An heir's marriage was a major strategic decision having long-term effects for most family members.²³

The strict settlement helped change the way eldest and other sons were treated. Baldwin Barker (d. 1603) and Abel Barker (d. 1637), John Congreve (d. 1688) and Sir Andrew Hacket (d. 1709) were not bound by the strict settlement and were able to give land to their younger sons, so enabling them to marry well. The social and economic division that existed between older and younger brothers was intensified as the eighteenth century progressed and increasing amounts of land were tied up in settlements. John Mortimer used a strict settlement in 1689 to settle his estate on the oldest son of his second marriage, which left him with insufficient resources to provide for his younger children and adversely affected their marriage prospects. The strict settlement, which maintained heirs as landed gentry, could help reduce the status of younger sons. The effects are seen in the treatment of Mortimer children in the early eighteenth century and of the Congreves in the mid eighteenth century.

A settlement often described an extended succession route. Henry Greene left his estate to his heirs got 'on the body of the said Mary [Barker] and for default of such heirs to the heirs of ... [his brother] and ... to ... the right heirs of the said Henry Greene for ever'.²⁴ 'Right heirs' meant that, if necessary, a search would be made

²⁰ Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison*, p. 314, Book 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 329, chapter 14.

²² *The Universal Museum of Gentlemen and Ladies Polite Magazine of History and Literature for 1763*, volume 2, no. 2, February 1763, pp. 92-94. [accessed through Eighteenth Century Journals]

²³ H.J. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650-1950* (Oxford, 1994), p. 154. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 71. Susan Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: the Cultural World of the Verneys 1660-1720* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 116, 143.

²⁴ LRO, DG11/958a, *Conant Papers*. Marriage settlement between Henry Greene and Mary Barker, January 1648.

for a living male descendant from a common ancestor and helps to explain why many gentry families maintained detailed pedigrees or family trees. In 1772 William Congreve used evidence from his family tree to vest succession to his estates in a distant Irish branch of the family. The Congreves of Mount Congreve had become separated from the main family in the 1640s, and most of the Staffordshire family were unaware of their existence.²⁵

Relatives were often deeply interested in an heir's marriage. The Williamsons repeatedly recommended suitable candidates to Edmund.²⁶ Abel Barker was encouraged by his mother-in-law to remarry after seven years as a widower. He reassured her that he would 'whenever it shall please God to dispose me that way'.²⁷ In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Bennet worried about Mr Collins on whom 'Mr Bennet's property ... unfortunately for his daughters was entailed in default of heirs' male', but failed in her attempts to marry him to one of her daughters.²⁸ In 1779 *The Mirror* referred to a correspondent's concern that his friends and relatives wanted him 'to marry [and have a son] to prevent a considerable part of [his] fortune from going to a worthless and distant relative'. Family members, not themselves likely to benefit directly, were often anxious that family estates should not be alienated.²⁹

Many urban gentry were self-made men like John Mortimer, William Withering, James Thompson or J. B. Lowe. Their wealth usually consisted of business capital, and urban rental property. Many were not committed to the ideal of family continuity, preferring equal distribution of property among their children.³⁰ Fathers often expected their sons to continue in the family business but some, like Beriah Botfield, withdrew from active involvement in the family business and purchased a

²⁵ SRO, D1057/S/17/31, *The Congreve Papers*. William Congreve of Shrewsbury to his brother Richard, 15 April, 1769. D1057/S/17/61, (no. 2 wrapper). Several letters from William Congreve of Shrewsbury to John Congreve of Mount Congreve about their joint ancestry. D1057/S/17/61, (No. 4 wrapper), 24 December, 1773. See Appendix 1b(ii) D for the Congreves of Mount Congreve.

²⁶ F. J. Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters, 1748-1765*, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society Publications, vol. 34, (Streatley, 1954), p. 59, Talbot Williamson to his brother Edmund, January, 1760.

²⁷ LRO, DG11/4, *Conant Papers*, letter 216, Abel Barker from Hambleton to Lady Frances Burton at Stockerton, 22 December, 1654.

²⁸ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London, 1817, BBC edition, 1995), p. 35, chapter 7.

²⁹ *The Mirror* volume 2, No. 67, 28 December, 1779. [accessed through 17th-18th Century Burney Collection]

³⁰ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 235.

landed estate.³¹ The Mortimers illustrate the difference in attitude to landed estates between urban and rural gentry. Rising in social status and wealth they purchased an Essex estate, but sold it in the 1730s to ease financial difficulties.³² The urban gentry's preferred route to landed gentry status was through marriage. The Niccols, Heylins and Harwoods, all Shrewsbury merchants, married their daughters into the Congreve family. They injected wealth into impoverished estates and in return gained permanent gentry status for their descendants.³³

That fathers had a vested interest in their heirs' marriages and played an important role in marriage-making is reflected in different forms of contemporary literature. In 1710, *The Tatler* wrote that some families 'kept their heads just above water not by prudent economy but by expedients in matches' by marrying the 'eldest son [into] what they call a good fortune.'³⁴ It called gentry marriage-making theft for making 'beauty and virtue [subject to] the purchase of money', and said that 'fathers looked for matches for their estates and not their children'. The writer argued that many parents were more concerned to avoid a lower status marriage than to secure the happiness of their children.³⁵ Fiction represented marriage as an agency for cementing friendships. Hardcastle assured Marlow, in *She Stoops to Conquer*, that the marriage they had arranged for their children would 'make our personal friendship hereditary'.³⁶ The core story in *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* is that two friends had resolved 'on a marriage between their children' to cement their own 'most perfect friendship'.³⁷

Authority lay with the father or guardian, but mothers often played an active role as marriage-makers. Elizabeth Barker, a widow, encouraged her 28-year-old second

³¹ University of Manchester Library, Bot, *Records of the Botfield family*, biographical note.

³² LRO, DE107/45, *The Mortimer Papers*. Mrs Elizabeth Mortimer to her son Cromwell, 4 March, 1728.

³³ SRO, D1057/S/17/12, 15, *Congreve Papers*. Notes on the Congreve family. D1057/S/17/39, account of the Congreve family, tracing it back to Saxon times, compiled (probably) after 1814. D1057/S/17/50, extracts from notes on the Congreve family (nd). See Heylin and Niccol family trees, Appendix 1f.

³⁴ *The Tatler*, No. 189, Thursday 22 June to Saturday 24 June, 1710. [accessed through 17th-18th Century Burney Collection]

³⁵ *The Tatler*, No. 199, Saturday 15 July to Tuesday 18 July, 1710. [accessed through 17th-18th Century Burney Collection]

³⁶ Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer, or the Mistakes of a Night* (London, 1773), in Ricardo Quintana (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Plays* (New York, 1952), p. 395, Act 5, scene 1.

³⁷ Eliza Haywood, *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (London, 1753), in John Richetti (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Novels by Women* (Kentucky, 2005), p. 8.

son Abel to marry, identified a potential bride, initiated proposals and conducted negotiations. William Whiston wanted to know whether Samuel Barker's 'mother will be pleased' about the proposal he had made for 14-year-old Sarah Whiston.³⁸ William Congreve, aged 48, asked for his mother's consent when he was about to marry Jane Eyre. The Clavering-Congreve negotiations were dominated, delayed and undermined by the two mothers who dictated the size of portion, fixed the terms of the marriage contract and jointure, and decided what should happen financially if Anne died childless.³⁹

Children, of any age, were expected to conform to social norms by accepting parental advice about marriage.⁴⁰ Elizabeth Barker, supporting her proposal to Sir Thomas Burton, said 'I have had such experience of [Abel's] obedience ... in matters of less consequence that I do not doubt of his obedience in this'.⁴¹ Robert Clavering feared that disobedience to his mother would 'render my life unhappy for ever', but even so tried to deceive her by suggesting a secret agreement with the Congreves. They would not agree to this without her knowledge and consent.⁴² Isaac Archer was over 21, but was expected to tell his father if he 'thought of marrying ... which was ... part of the honour due to a father'.⁴³ In 1715 Dudley Ryder was advised that 'it [was] very imprudent in any young woman to entertain a... courtier before he had made his application to her parents and gained their consent'.⁴⁴

Punitive sanctions were imposed on William Congreve, who lived in Woolwich, when he married against the wishes of his father and family members. His uncle

³⁸ LRO, DG11/4, *Conant Papers*, letters 40-42. Correspondence between Mrs Elizabeth Barker and Sir Thomas Burton, 1645-1646.

³⁹ SRO, D1057/M/1/3/38, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve to Richard Congreve, 13 December, 1747. D1057 /1/3, various letters between members of the Clavering and Congreve families, 1747-1748.

⁴⁰ Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* (London, 1994), pp. 60, 154. Richard M. Smith, 'Some Issues Concerning Families and Their Property in Rural England, 1250-1800', in Richard M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Lifecycle* (London, 1984), pp. 1-86. Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (London, 1982), pp. 81, 127.

⁴¹ LRO, DG11/4, *Conant Papers*, letter 42. Elizabeth Barker to Sir Thomas Burton, 2 April, 1646.

⁴² SRO, D1057/M/1/9/5, *Congreve Papers*. Richard Congreve to Mrs Clavering, 28-29 December, 1747. D1057/M/1/9/8, Robert Clavering to Richard Congreve, 12 January, 1748.

⁴³ Matthew Storey (ed.), 'The Diary of Isaac Archer 1641-1700', in *Two East Anglian Diaries* (Bury St Edmunds, 1994), p. 93, 1663.

⁴⁴ William Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder, 1715-1716* (London, 1939), p. 67, August 2, 1715.

Ralph immediately changed his will, excluding William's children from the succession and left his unsettled property to a distant relative. His uncle William also at first excluded William's children from the succession, but relented and reinstated them after four years. The two uncles objected to his wife's premarital pregnancy and her socially inferior background.⁴⁵

Children usually tried to avoid open disobedience but most assumed that defiance would eventually be forgiven.⁴⁶ Parents might try to coerce their children but found that reliance on filial obedience was more effective.⁴⁷ However, if necessary they would exert financial influence. A young man complained to *The Ladies Mercury*, 'my [financial] circumstances [are] such that I am forced to obey [my father]'.⁴⁸ A marriage settlement guaranteed an heir's future inheritance but he might have to depend on his father's goodwill for current income. On its own this would usually have been insufficient to support an independent lifestyle or maintain a wife and children.⁴⁹

Fiction and drama regularly explored the concept of filial obedience. Bevil, in *The Conscious Lovers*, claimed that he had never disobeyed his father, saying 'as I am ever prepared to marry if you bid me, so I am ready to let it alone if you will have me'.⁵⁰ Marlow, in *She Stoops to Conquer*, rejected Kate because 'I owe too much to ... the authority of a father' to marry without his consent.⁵¹ Mrs Vere, in *The Memoires of Sydney Bidulph*, said her father 'would not think of putting any force on [her] inclinations' but her mother insisted that she must allow 'parental authority to guide [her] ... choice'.⁵² Jenny Jessamy told Lady Speck 'our parents have ... an undoubted right to dispose of us [and] are also much better judges of what will

⁴⁵ SRO, D1057/M/H/13/1, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve of Shrewsbury to Captain William Congreve of Woolwich, 16 January, 1776. D1057/S/17/61. Letters from William Congreve of Shrewsbury to John Congreve of Mount Congreve, Ireland, No. 3 wrapper, 11 June, 1773; No. 4 wrapper, 24 December, 1773; No. 7 wrapper, 6 October, 1775; No. 8 wrapper 10 and 11 July, 1776.

⁴⁶ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, p. 63.

⁴⁷ Gillis, *For Better for Worse*, p. 37.

⁴⁸ *The Ladies Mercury*, vol. 1, no. 3, Friday 10 March, 1693. [accessed through *Eighteenth Century Journals*]

⁴⁹ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, p. 63. MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, pp. 140, 266.

⁵⁰ Sir Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers* (London, 1722), in Quintana (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Plays*, p. 125, Act 1, scene 2.

⁵¹ Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer, or the Mistakes of a Night* (London, 1773), in Quintana, (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Plays*, p. 389, Act 4.

⁵² Frances Sheridan, *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (first published London, 1761, London, 1987), p. 60.

make our happiness'. Lady Speck's rather radical response was that parents 'often decree for us what we do not think fit to comply with, even while they live'.⁵³ Open opposition to parental choice most often occurred when personal affection was involved. Claver Morris, having 'taken all the pains I possibly could to prevent [her marriage]', refused to see his daughter Betsy because of her disobedience in marrying against his wishes.⁵⁴

Control of finance and filial respect meant that parental influence continued to be important and could if necessary be supported by sanctions to deter injudicious actions. The ultimate ineffectiveness of financial sanctions had forced the paternal role to evolve gradually from one of selection and direction to one of guidance, advice and encouragement. This was the inevitable consequence of a more liberal attitude to personal choice and individualism. However, because squires were responsible for the safe transmission of their estate and maintaining their family name, their continuing participation in an heirs' matrimonial decisions was guaranteed. Heirs were rarely totally free agents and might face considerable pressure to marry. An early marriage, with a father's blessing, was often in an heir's financial interest. Settled land, which could not be alienated, could provide surety for loans to heirs and offer a level of independence.

The centrality of financial and material concerns often seemed to reduce the marriage of an heir to a largely commercial transaction. This was helped by the availability of relatively cheap mortgages which allowed landowners to support current expenditure, including marriage settlements, by borrowing rather than selling assets. Borrowing was acceptable because unlike the sale of land it preserved estate integrity. Mortgages were used regularly in the sample families to finance necessary expenditure, including portions. William Congreve raised mortgages to redeem his father's debts and finance his sister's portion and relied on the repayment of a mortgage loan he had made to finance his own marriage.⁵⁵ Mortgages financed the Leigh-Barker, Hackett-Isham and Whiston-Plaistow

⁵³ Haywood, *Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy*, p. 99.

⁵⁴ Edmund Hobhouse (ed.), *The Diary of a West Country Physician 1684-1726* (Rochester, 1934), pp. 66-72, 1 December, 1718–23 October, 1719.

⁵⁵ SRO, D1057/M/1/3/38, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve from Dublin to his brother [Richard?], 13 December, 1747. D1057/M/1/9/11, Reverend Richard Congreve to Mr Dovey, the Congreve family lawyer, outlining terms for his sister's marriage contract, 24 January, 1748.

marriages.⁵⁶ The ease with which they could be arranged concealed the long-term problems they created, which included the accumulation of heavy and eventually unsustainable debts which could only be serviced with the injection of new money through marriage-portions. Debt helped drive up demand for larger portions and helped make the squirearchy less competitive in the marriage-market.⁵⁷

In the early eighteenth century many squires feared that clandestine marriages and new attitudes to personal choice might threaten their control over the marriages of underage heirs. These worries eventually led to the Hardwicke Marriage Act, although it made little impact on most heirs because of their relatively high age at first marriage. It did, however, create difficulties for fortune hunters and younger sons who wished to exploit young heiresses.⁵⁸ John Shebbeare wrote *The Marriage Act* to attack the new legislation. He argued that it was an unreasonable attempt to bolster parental authority and restrict the right of children to choose their own partner. He argued

these marriages, [are] a kind of taking money with the mortgage of a wife to pay off a mortgage on an estate ... This late Act restrains the sexes from marriage till they are of age; these old plebeian people, who are rich, will always be actuated by ambition or avarice and generally marry their daughters ... tho' they live wretched lives; if this Act had not taken place [they] would have chosen husbands for themselves amongst men they liked, and been happy.⁵⁹

Bride-selection was eased when it became socially acceptable for the gentry to marry the daughters of urban gentry. Gentry marriage had been socially endogamous, but the increased numbers of wealthy merchants and the need for larger portions made intermarriage with urban gentry more tolerable. In 1660, John Congreve married Mary Niccol, daughter of 'a London Turkey merchant'. In 1694 his heir, also John, married Abigail Harwood, daughter of a Shrewsbury grocer. In

⁵⁶ LRO, DG11/968, *Conant Papers*. Marriage agreement between Francis Leigh and Elizabeth Barker, 11 June, 1686. DG11/971, Marriage agreement between William Whiston (the younger) and Mary Plaistow, 20 August, 1735(?).

⁵⁷ Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989), p. 244. MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, pp. 263, 264, 269.

⁵⁸ Rebecca Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 3, 206-208, 210-215.

⁵⁹ John Shebbeare, *The Marriage Act* (London, 1754), p. 93.

1718 John's younger son William married his mother's niece, Catherine Niccol, daughter of another merchant.⁶⁰

Contemporary fiction replicated this change in attitude. In *Sir Charles Grandison* Harriet Bryan claimed that rich wives 'from the city' were socially acceptable because they were 'as genteel and polite as the court was formerly. The wives and daughters of citizens ... are apes of us gentry'.⁶¹ Sealand, in *The Conscious Lovers*, claimed 'we merchants are a species of gentry ... as honourable and almost as useful as you landed folks that have always thought yourselves so much above us'.⁶²

The rapid expansion of the gentry and the blurring of social distinctions reduced the significance of birth, but social inferiority continued to be a barrier. *The Ladies Mercury* said a married woman assumed her husband's social status, so that 'what her original birth wanted, her present marriage has given her'.⁶³ In *The Mirror* a wealthy gentleman married an impoverished social inferior but claimed that 'rank and fortune give me the power of ... raising her to a station in life less unworthy of her distinguished merits'.⁶⁴ The Countess of D, in *Sir Charles Grandison*, thought 'a man of quality ... confers quality on his wife'.⁶⁵ Although marriage changed a woman's status it did not affect that of a man. Ralph Congreve and Andrew Hacket III married aristocratic daughters, but remained 'esquires'. Lady Stawell became simply Mrs Congreve when she married Ralph Congreve. When Mr Pedder married his dairy maid, she became a gentlewoman and he employed a governess to teach her to be 'a little better fitted for the society he wishes hereafter to introduce her to'.⁶⁶

Fathers whose estates were not entailed or who had alternative sources of income were best placed to influence an heir's choice of partner.⁶⁷ Unsettled land could

⁶⁰ SRO, D1057/S/17/29, *Congreve Papers*. Undated note describing Congreve genealogy. D1057/S/17/30, undated note headed 'Lineage of William Congreve of Aldermaston and Congreve'.

⁶¹ Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison*, p. 331, Book 1, chapter 15.

⁶² Steele, *The Conscious Lovers*, p. 159, Act 4, scene 2.

⁶³ *The Ladies Mercury*, vol. 1 no. 3, 10 March, 1693. [Eighteenth Century Journals]

⁶⁴ *The Mirror*, vol. 2 no. 67, 28 December, 1779. [Burney]

⁶⁵ Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison*, pp. 214-215, Book 1, chapter 41.

⁶⁶ J. J. Bagley (ed.), *Miss Weeton's Journal of a Governess*, vol. 1, 1807-1811 (Oxford, 1936), pp. 200-201. Agnes Weeton to her brother from Liverpool, 9 December, 1809.

⁶⁷ Trumbach, *Egalitarian Families*, p. 80. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, p. 40.

be left as an owner wished and was a powerful instrument which gave a father considerable leverage to influence marital choice. Edward Brown in 1779 and George Birch in 1801, having substantial income from non-landed sources, dictated the financial terms of their daughter's marriages.

3. Bride selection and the ideal of parity

Perceptions of how brides for heirs should be chosen changed, but the fundamental aims of maintaining estate integrity, securing estate transmission between generations and preserving the family name remained important.⁶⁸ Arranged marriages for heirs in the sample were common in the seventeenth century, but this changed during the eighteenth century as personal feelings and individual choice became more significant. Even so, personal attraction did not totally displace material considerations in marriage-making. The changing attitude was brought about in part by the new urban sociability, even though its influence is not made evident in the sample correspondence. There were also significant changes in courtship procedures. Originally courtship served a confirmatory role but it changed to become an early but essential part of the selection process.⁶⁹

Unlike the marriages of other children, those of heirs intimately involved the transfer and transmission of real and personal property between families and generations. Therefore, conduct writers urged, they should be prudent and injudicious unions should be avoided.⁷⁰ A prudent marriage could enhance estate wealth and influence but an ill-judged marriage might dissipate both wealth and social assets.⁷¹ Writers argued that the essential elements for a successful marriage were parity of age, status, wealth and religion. Marriages between lower status man and higher status woman were regarded as mercenary and therefore imprudent, as were marriages between young men and wealthy but much older women. Some heirs, like their fathers, adopted a calculating approach to bride-selection, but this did not necessarily exclude the influence of personal feelings.⁷²

⁶⁸ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, pp. 65, 74.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of courtship see below, pp. 120-122.

⁷⁰ Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 72.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147. Borsay, *Urban Renaissance*, p. 244.

⁷² Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, pp. 153-154, 159.

William Congreve of Shrewsbury recognised the importance of prudence in marriage-making. He opposed his cousin Tom's marriage because it would 'determine the good or ill fortune of his whole life'.⁷³ Abel Barker's two marriages were, for him, prudent and advantageous. Having risen from yeoman stock he twice married into semi-aristocratic families. As a lukewarm parliamentarian, this gave him useful connections with Royalist families which proved advantageous after the Restoration. However, judged by contemporary standards they were less socially prudent for either of his brides or their families, even though they offered some short-term political benefit. His cousin Samuel's marriage to Elizabeth Wildbore was imprudent for him but beneficial for his bride and her family.⁷⁴

Prudent marriages brought wealth and useful connections because the main priority was to achieve a satisfactory outcome in terms of property and finance. Compatibility was desirable, but not essential and, ideally, a couple should not be mismatched. Affection was, however, often regarded as an optional extra. Contemporary writers, like Fielding, frequently addressed this issue. In *Amelia*, he described Mrs James marriage as 'of the prudent kind'. She 'had never had any violent affection for James [but] the match was ... to her advantage; for his fortune was become very considerable; and she had gained everything by the bargain'.⁷⁵ Sidney Bidulph, having broken her engagement, was advised by a friend to marry prudently to protect her reputation and secure an acceptable life-style:

If you find no disinclination, it is enough. ... If you marry him with nothing more than indifference, gratitude will soon produce love. Were there anything like aversion in your heart, then indeed it would be criminal in you to accept him.⁷⁶

However, many novelists questioned this view and argued that personal feelings were as important as material considerations.

Parity between partners was an important aspect of prudence. Advice literature consistently claimed that financial and social parity between equal partners was

⁷³ SRO, D1057/M/1/3/5, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve in Minorca to his brother Richard, 1 January, 1739. See above p. 94 for details of Tom Congreve's marriage.

⁷⁴ See above p. 45 and Barker family tree, Appendix 1a.

⁷⁵ Henry Fielding, *Amelia* (first published London, 1751, Penguin edition, 1987), p. 163.

⁷⁶ Sheridan, *Sidney Bidulph*, p. 75.

the foundation of a successful marriage.⁷⁷ Marriages in which families made unequal contributions, whether in land, property, money, religion or social standing were imprudent.⁷⁸ *The Post Angel* urged men to ‘marry in your own rank and seek ... contentment and preferment’. A writer in 1755 argued that ‘the parties [should be] as evenly proportioned as may be, [with] no eminent disproportion of fortune’ and that a woman should not marry ‘meanly, too much below herself’ because ‘irregularity of wealth’ would attract ‘contempt from her husband and his relations’.⁷⁹ In 1764, *Lloyds Evening Post* claimed the ingredients for a happy marriage were ‘easy governable passions, circumstances not confined, a parity of sentiment, a domestic turn, and a mind fraught with religious principle’.⁸⁰ Twenty years later, *The Lounger* suggested that ‘parity’ was more likely than ‘passion’ to result in happiness.⁸¹ In *The Morning Chronicle*, ‘W. H.’ advised that ‘parity, or similitude of tempers and dispositions,’ was necessary for a happy marriage, but urged ‘never bestow your hand where you cannot give your heart’.⁸² Richardson stressed the role of parity, writing that ‘equality of fortune and degree, tho’ not absolutely necessary to matrimonial felicity, [is] a circumstance not to be slighted’.⁸³

Many of the marriages in the sample matched these criteria. Some, especially those of the eighteenth century Barkers, placed higher priority on shared interests than on wealth. None of the heirs in the sample seem to have encountered religious differences and most, but not all, were of similar age to their spouses. The one aspect where parity was less obvious was in fortune. A few, like Ralph Congreve, married women of greater fortunes than themselves, but most married

⁷⁷ MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, p. 256.

⁷⁸ Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, pp. 153-154, 159. Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 80.

⁷⁹ ‘A Lady’, *The Lady’s Present to the Fair Sex, Being an Infallible Guide for their Happy Deportment Through Every Stage of Life* (London, 1755), pp. 176-178. [accessed through ECCOII, 20.12.2016] *The Post Angel*, vol. 2, December, 1701, p. 424. [accessed through Eighteenth Century Journals, 18.12.2016]

⁸⁰ *Lloyds Evening Post*, 7 November-9 November, 1764, no. 1,144, p. 450. [accessed through 17th-18th Century Burney Collection, 16.01.2017]

⁸¹ *The Lounger*, vol. 1 no. 21, 25 June, 1785, pp. 81-84. [accessed through 17th-18th Century Burney Collection, 16.01.2017]

⁸² *The Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, Friday 15 September, 1786, no. 5,409. [accessed through 17th-18th Century Burney Collection, 16.01.2017]

⁸³ Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison*, p. 219, book 1, chapter 44.

women of lesser fortune. Some, like William Congreve, stressed that personal qualities were more significant than birth or fortune.⁸⁴

Most heirs and their brides in the sample had broad social parity. In the 1640s all but one of Abel Barker's sisters and cousins married into gentry families, while the exception married a prosperous yeoman. Samuel, Abel's great-nephew, married the daughter of a clerical academic and two of his descendants married into minor clerical families, which were gentry by courtesy rather than birth or wealth. The eighteenth century Congreve heirs, apart from Captain William Congreve of Woolwich, married women of broadly comparable or higher status.⁸⁵

In *Pride and Prejudice* Lady Catherine said that Elizabeth as 'a young woman without family, connections or fortune' was Darcy's social inferior and so not fit to marry him. Elizabeth acknowledged the wealth differential, but insisted on equality of status because 'he is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far, we are equal'.⁸⁶ A gentleman's daughter in the eighteenth century was socially superior to the children of a yeoman, farmer or merchant, irrespective of wealth, and so might expect to marry a person of gentry status.

The century after 1650 saw an increasing emphasis on parity of fortune rather than birth, an approach which was consistently attacked in the periodical press. *The Tatler* criticised 'parents who only place their thoughts upon bringing riches into their families by marriages and are wholly insensible of all other considerations'. *The Universal Museum* condemned the 'bartering of happiness for the gratification of avarice'.⁸⁷ The Banks-Talbot negotiations illustrate this focus on wealth. Joseph Banks wanted a high-status husband for his daughter, but proposed to adjust her portion to match the jointure offered. Nicholas Blundell would only consider proposals for his daughter from gentlemen who were wealthy and Catholic.⁸⁸ William Congreve's claim that his bride's '£500 a year has little

⁸⁴ SRO, D1057/M/1/38-39, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve to his brother Richard, speaking of his affection for the widow Eyres, 13 and 23 December, 1747.

⁸⁵ Barker and Congreve family trees, Appendix 1a and 1b.

⁸⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 315-316, chapter 56.

⁸⁷ *The Tatler* no. 198, 13 July-15 July, 1710. [Burney] *The Universal Museum*, vol. 2 no. 2, 1762, p. 93. [Burney]

⁸⁸ J. W. F. Hall (ed.), *The Letters and Papers of the Banks Family of Revesby Abbey, 1704-1760* Lincoln Record Society, vol. 45, (Lincoln, 1952), pp. 6, 9-10. Letter 6 and letter 12, 23 July, 1710 and 28 September, 1710 to Reverend William Steer. Margaret Blundell (ed.), *Blundell's Diary and Letter Book, 1702-1728* (Liverpool, 1952), pp. 217-

share in my inducement' to marry seems rather disingenuous in view of his financial difficulties. Ralph Congreve, heir to a cadet branch, boasted of his new wife's 'landed estates ... to the amount of £1,300 per ann. ... which ... she settles on me and my right heirs'.⁸⁹ Claver Morris married his social inferior who had a portion of £3,000 for material rather than emotional reasons, although it seems to have become a contented marriage. He objected to his daughter's clandestine, but socially acceptable, marriage because her father-in-law was heavily in debt.⁹⁰ However, Tidy Russell, from a newly emerged family with a trading background, preferred that her brother marry a young woman 'with her poor pittance [rather] than if she had been raised to twenty times her fortune and had sprung from a plebeian race'. She preferred 'birth before money, provided there is sufficient'.⁹¹

Tidy Russell and Isaac Archer both thought there should be a wide age gap between husband and wife. Tidy believed a younger woman would be submissive and grateful to an older husband for rescuing her from 'dependency on the great'.⁹² Archer's second wife was 'young in years, but religious and suitable to me on all occasions'.⁹³ Edward Ward would have agreed with them:

The best time for a young man to marry, is at the age of twenty-five and then to take a wife at the age of seventeen years. ... A young woman of tender years [will] do anything according to the will and pleasure of her husband.⁹⁴

However, Bishop Hough encouraged age equality, praising 'a match of more than common prudence. ... [because she] is thought almost equal to him in fortune and in years'.⁹⁵ Abigail Gawthorn also disapproved of a wide age differential, noting:

October, 1794: Sally Wright married the Rev. Neale ... she is 38 and he only 25 years.

218. Nicholas Blundell to Mr. Royden, 10 January, 1724 and to Father Joseph Blundell, 16 May, 1724.

⁸⁹ SRO, D1057/M/I/3/39, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve to his brother Richard, 23 December, 1747. D1057/M/C/2, Ralph Congreve to his cousin (Richard?) 26 May, 1752.

⁹⁰ Hobhouse (ed.), *A West Country Physician*, p. 14.

⁹¹ Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters*. Tidy Russell to her brother Edmund, pp. 53-54, 22 July, 1760.

⁹² *Ibid.*, Tidy Russell to her brother Edmund, p. 56, 31 July, 1760.

⁹³ Storey (ed.), *The Diary of Isaac Archer*, p. 183.

⁹⁴ Edward Ward, *Female Policy Detected; Or the Arts of a Designing Woman Laid Open* (London, 1725). [accessed through ECCO, 15.12.2016]

⁹⁵ SRO, D1057/M/J/20, *Congreve Papers*. Bishop Hough of Worcester to William Congreve, 22 February, 1728.

November 1798: Mr Maltby is 75, Mrs M. 45.

October 1800: Sir H. Parker married ... he is 43 years older than [her].

February, 1804: Rev. Dashwood married ... she is 32 and he 26.

July, 1807: Miss Launder married... aged 49 [he] aged 22.⁹⁶

The writer of *The Lady's Present to the Fair Sex* thought that 'a great disproportion ... in years' was to be avoided' because a young wife marrying a much older husband leads to 'jealousy ... and perpetual disagreements'. She added when a young man marries an older woman, the 'match [rarely] proves happy', since she may be defrauded of her fortune or deserted by her husband.⁹⁷

Some brides in the sample were considerably older than the heirs they married but generally there was broad comparability. Abel Barker was seven years younger than his first wife Ann Burton and Samuel Barker was eleven years younger than Elizabeth Wildbore. The marriage of twenty-year-old Robert Claving and 38-year-old Anne Congreve was 'unsuitable', because 'at her time of life [she has little] prospect of ever improving her fortune'.⁹⁸ Ralph Congreve, aged 31 played down the age gap with his 43-year-old bride, whom he described inaccurately as 'a widow, under forty'.⁹⁹ William Whiston thought his 14-year-old daughter too young to marry 30-year-old Samuel Barker, but agreed to the marriage three years later. William Stout was worried about the 12-year age difference between himself and Berthia [*sic.*] Greene, but was more concerned by her immature behaviour and her social inferiority. Although broad parity of age was desirable it was not always achieved, and wide age differentials did not always lead to the emotional disasters predicted by contemporary writers.¹⁰⁰

The author of *The Lady's Present* argued for 'equality [in] religion' without which a marriage was doomed to conflict and disunity because, even with agreement in

⁹⁶ Adrian Henstock (ed.), *The Diary of Abigail Gawthorn of Nottingham, 1751-1810* (The Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire, (Nottingham, 1980), pp. 61, 75, 84, 106, 120.

⁹⁷ A Lady, *The Lady's Present to the Fair Sex*, pp. 176-180. [ECCOII, accessed 11.11.2016]

⁹⁸ SRO, D1057/M/1/3/32, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve to Reverend Richard Congreve at Leacroft, near Lichfield, (nd).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, D1057/M/C/2, Ralph Congreve to his cousin (Richard?), 26 May, 1752.

¹⁰⁰ LRO, DG11/1, *Conant Papers* letter, no. 102. William Whiston to Samuel Barker, 27 January, 1715. Marshall (ed.), *William Stout of Lancaster*, p. 141, 1702.

other matters, religious differences ‘beget disputes ... ending in aversion’.¹⁰¹ The Lowes (Quakers) and Nicholas Blundell (a Catholic) would only marry members of their own faith community. Hagger Lowe criticised a ‘Friend’ who was ‘married by a priest to such another poor thing as himself’.¹⁰² Stout, who ‘would only marry another Quaker’, chose to remain single.¹⁰³ In 1740, Catherine Perkins (née Hutton) ‘born of dissenting parents, and having imbibed strong Calvinist principles’ refused to marry a persistent Anglican suitor. He gave up his employment in the church and his faith in order to marry, but the marriage was a disaster.¹⁰⁴ Eugenia Wynne noted the difficulties faced by an Anglican friend who wanted to marry a Catholic, saying ‘[we] make every effort to dissuade them ...because of the difference of their religion’.¹⁰⁵ Abigail Gawthern wrote of a friend married to a Roman Catholic whose father-in-law, objecting on religious grounds, refused to see her until she ‘turned dissenter’.¹⁰⁶ Interfaith marriage created serious social difficulties, which the heirs in the sample do not appear to have directly experienced. Prudence and broad parity guided the marriage-making decisions of most of the heirs in the sample, in line with contemporary thinking.

Many heirs in the sample families, especially in the seventeenth century, married local brides. The bride-selection process was transformed by the development of new forms of urban sociability in the later seventeenth century. Regional centres and leisure towns attracted provincial gentry and provided opportunities for social intercourse.¹⁰⁷ These facilities provided a more rewarding life-style and encouraged the growth of larger more broadly based friendship groups.¹⁰⁸ The greater social freedom allowed to young people encouraged the exercise of personal choice based on affection and compatibility as an alternative to parental

¹⁰¹ A Lady, *The Lady's Present to the Fair Sex*, pp. 177-178. [ECCOII, accessed 11.11.2016]

¹⁰² WRO, CR2926/3, *The Lowe Letters*. Hagger Lowe from Southwark to his brother JBL, 15th second month, 1804

¹⁰³ See above, p. 96. Marshall, (ed.), *The Autobiography of William Stout*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁴ BRO, MS3597/1/4/1, The Hutton Papers. Memoir by Catherine Hutton about her aunt, Catherine Hutton (Perkins), 17 April, 1810.

¹⁰⁵ Anne Freemantle (ed.), *The Wynne Diaries, vol. 1, 1789-1794* (Oxford, 1935), p. 105, Friday 1 February, 1792.

¹⁰⁶ Henstock (ed.), *The Diary of Abigail Gawthern*, p. 79, September, 1799.

¹⁰⁷ See chapter 1, pp. 26-28 and chapter 7, pp. 188-190. Borsay, *The Urban Renaissance*, pp. 28, 34, 135, 224. Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?* pp. 30-31.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Borsay, ‘Politeness and Elegance: The Cultural Refashioning of York’, in M. Hallet and J. Rendall (eds.), *Eighteenth Century York: Culture, Space and Society* (York, 2003), p. 9.

partner selection.¹⁰⁹ Popular eighteenth century courtship fiction like *Evelina*, *Belinda* and *Pride and Prejudice* described these facilities and reinforced the view that they were places of assignation, courtship and marriage-making.

The sample correspondence mentions occasional visits to spas or leisure towns, but usually for reasons of health or business rather than for sociable purposes. The sources rarely explain how, where or when heirs and their future brides first met. Only the Withering correspondence describes the development of relationships between men and young women through public social activities, although some of the published diaries, especially those of Abigail Gawthorn and the Wynnes, do so. There is no direct evidence of the part played by public sociability in the marriage-making of gentry heirs in the sample families.

Seventeenth century heirs in the sample usually conformed to bride selection patterns as described by historians. Partners were often identified or selected by third parties who negotiated settlements, emphasising the material focus of marriage while paying little attention to the suitability of character or personal relations. Many of these marriages were between strangers. Abel Barker, in 1645 and 1656, and Justinian Isham in 1725 had little contact with their future brides until after negotiations had reached a satisfactory stage. There is less evidence in the sample that eighteenth century marriages were arranged, but there is some suggestion that personal choice and sometimes affection were influential.

William Congreve of Shrewsbury married an Irish widow, sister of a close friend, while his cousin Tom Congreve met his bride while on active service in Ireland. William Congreve of Woolwich married a colleague's daughter while Francis Raynsford of Brixworth married Hester Isham, a neighbour whom he had known from childhood. This Raynsford-Isham marriage was recognised by family members as a love match. However, it contributed little in terms of finance or status to either bride or groom.¹¹⁰ Robert Clavering, Samuel Barker (m. 1652) and his grandson Samuel (m. 1717) married the daughters of clergymen who had been their tutors or landlords. Robert Clavering's second wife was the step-daughter of his brother-

¹⁰⁹ Gillis, *For Better for Worse*, p. 136.

¹¹⁰ NRO, IC2144, *Isham Correspondence*. Susannah Isham to her brother, 5 July, 1720.

in-law, Richard Congreve.¹¹¹ Thomas Barker married the niece of a friend and scientific correspondent, while Nathaniel Conant married the daughter of his employer. Several, including Augustine Barker and William Congreve of Highgate, married relatives and some, like Richard Greaves and J. B. Lowe, married neighbours or members of the same religious community. Few, apart from John Martin of Naseby, are recorded as having married women they first met at public social activities.¹¹²

Distance from London seems to have increased geographical endogamy. Ann Hughes claimed that 50% of gentry marriages in mid seventeenth century Warwickshire and neighbouring counties were geographically endogamous, although this decreased towards 1700.¹¹³ Evidence from the sample families supports this claim. Of nine seventeenth century Barker marriages of heirs, or Barker females who married heirs from other families, eight involved partners from Rutland or a neighbouring county. Eight came from within forty miles of Lyndon and four from less than ten miles away. Eighteenth century Barker marriages were more widely dispersed, with only two out of seven heirs residing within twenty miles of their brides and another five being separated by at least 100 miles.

The marriages of seventeenth century Congreve heirs were also to local brides, but those of the eighteenth century were more widely dispersed. Two Congreve heirs married women from Shrewsbury, approximately thirty miles away, but nine of the heirs who married between 1700 and 1820 chose brides from over fifty miles distant. The Hackets, new-comers to Warwickshire in the 1660s, usually married local brides. Four out of eight heirs married women from neighbouring estates, with the other brides coming from further afield. Two of these, one from Norfolk and the other from Northamptonshire were minor heiresses who brought landed property to their marriages. John Mortimer from Essex firstly married Dorothy Cromwell from Hampshire, secondly Sarah Tippetts from London and finally Elizabeth Sanders from Derbyshire. William Withering married twice,

¹¹¹ SRO, D1057/M/I/13/19, *The Congreve Papers*. Robert Claving, Bishop of Peterborough, to Richard Congreve, 18 April, 1745. D1057/M/I/9/11, Reverend Richard Congreve to his lawyer, 24 January, 1748.

¹¹² See family trees, Appendix 1.

¹¹³ Ann Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 38ff.

choosing women he knew, but whose place of origin is not recorded and J. B. Lowe married the daughter of a neighbour and friend.

'Love' is an inexact term and must be carefully defined if used in discussion.¹¹⁴ Contemporary writers treated it with suspicion, often equating it with irrational passion or 'romantic love'. As personal choice began to replace parental selection writers advised against extreme 'passion' or 'love'. They argued that liking, affection, or esteem provided a more reliable foundation for success in marriage than 'passion' which blinded participants to reality. *The Female Spectator* described a couple who 'married without the consent of friends', and 'were too much in love with each other's persons to consider the differences there were between them'.¹¹⁵ Driven by irrational emotion they ignored their religious differences and, as their passion waned, their marriage was undermined and made miserable. The author of 'On the Improprieties of Courtship' expressed similar concerns, arguing that 'passion' was irrational and if it was allowed to replace simple affection would undermine reason and judgement. He thought 'matrimony, if founded on any other principle than that of affection, cannot possibly conduce to the happiness or interest of either party'.¹¹⁶

Squirearchy parents thought that passion which encouraged unwise decisions was dangerous and that even affection was unnecessary before marriage. Many thought that sound finances were as necessary as affection for a 'good' marriage.¹¹⁷ Wrightson suggested that this may explain why heirs were often allowed less freedom of choice than their siblings. An heir's marriage was too important and complex to be left to irrational choice and youthful passions, since wise, mature heads were needed to deal objectively with practical issues.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Diana O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester and New York, 2000.), p. 4.

¹¹⁵ 'The Fatal Effects of Different Opinions in Religion to Married Persons', in *The Female Spectator*, reprinted in the *Newcastle General Magazine, 1748-1760*, no. 9 (September 1748), pp. 475-478. [accessed through British Periodicals Collection, 17.12.2016]

¹¹⁶ 'On Improprieties in Courtship' (1792), in *Walkers Hibernian Magazine, or Compendium of Entertaining Knowledge*, May 1785-December 1811, pp. 521-522. [accessed through British Periodicals Collection, 21.11.2016]

¹¹⁷ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, p. 62.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62. Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 72-73. Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 76. Anthony Fletcher, *A County Community in Peace and War: Sussex 1600-1660* (London, 1975), p. 30.

Correspondence in the sample gives little evidence that heirs were influenced by passion or love when choosing a bride. Several heirs talked about their 'esteem' or 'affection' for their bride but rarely mentioned love. Failure to refer to passionate love does not prove that it did not exist or that it did not influence decisions. Samuel Barker did not explain why he married Elizabeth Wildbore but the marriage seems to have been based on familiarity and affection rather than practical expediency.¹¹⁹ When their thirty-year-old grandson proposed to Sarah Whiston he explained 'I have a long time loved you entirely and have not yet discovered any reason to repent the sincerity of my affections.'¹²⁰ Her father suggested that love alone was an insufficient basis for marriage and reminded Samuel that he needed his mother's financial support if he was to marry.¹²¹ These marriages seem to have been driven by liking and affection rather than material advantage. Two Congreve marriages were also based on love, perhaps even passion, rather than a considered and rational decision. Both Tom Congreve and his son William Congreve of Woolwich married against the advice of relatives and with little prospect of financial or social benefit.¹²²

In the seventeenth century many lesser gentry marriages were impersonal and arranged for dynastic or financial reasons. Sometimes, it was more important to get the right deal than the right person. This is shown when Abel Barker proposed to two different women in the same week and did not appear concerned about which of the two women might accept him. The parents of both Nicholas Blundell and Justinian Isham had explored various possibilities spread over several years, before a final decision was made, and Claver Morris had been negotiating to marry one woman when he suddenly married a different one.

It is not possible to generalise about the reason for marriage since each marriage is unique. Companionship and domestic comfort were often advanced as justification for marriage. William Congreve claimed that the widow Jane Eyre was

¹¹⁹ LRO, DG11/962, *Conant Papers*. Post-nuptial alteration to the jointure of Elizabeth Barker 11 January, 1662. See page 109 for details of this marriage.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, DG11/1, letter 103. Samuel Barker to Sarah Whiston, in Hatton Garden 19 January, 1715.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, DG11/1, letter 102. William Whiston to Samuel Barker in reply to his proposal, 27 January, 1715. Letter 103, Samuel Barker to Sarah Whiston, in Hatton Garden 19 January, 1715.

¹²² See above pages 94 and 115

'the only person ... I have hopes of being happy with'.¹²³ He had previously explored the possibility of marriage with other widows, which suggests that he was more interested in companionship and comfort than in material benefit, passion, or romantic love. Charles Congreve congratulated his nephew William Congreve of Woolwich on his marriage, saying that the comfort of marrying a bride of his own choice was preferable to wealth.¹²⁴ Richard Greaves, needing 'a female to manage [his] domestic affairs' believed that a wife could satisfy his needs more conveniently than a housekeeper.¹²⁵ William Withering's second marriage was driven by the desire for comfort and companionship. He was told by a friend that 'your character would not be improved by a longer continuance of the bachelor life. ... You [are] admirably adapted to enjoy domestic happiness'.¹²⁶

A proposal did not guarantee acceptance. Several heirs in the sample were refused either because their financial terms were unacceptable, the couple were incompatible or the woman just did not want to marry. Rebecca Parselow refused Abel Barker because

[your] affection [was not] real ... [your] desire was rather from [your] friend's persuasions than [your own] inclinations ... I cannot think of committing myself and estate into the hands of any man upon the terms you desire. More especially ... [as] you have a son.¹²⁷

Abel Barker received a financially attractive offer for his son Thomas but chose, for undisclosed reasons, not to pursue it. A Northamptonshire landowner offered for Mary Hacket but she rejected him, again for undisclosed reasons.¹²⁸ Children were usually allowed to veto a proposal favoured by parents if it was unacceptable or their personal feelings were not engaged. Nicholas Blundell said of his daughter

¹²³ SRO, D1057/M/I/3/38, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve from Dublin to his brother [Richard?], 13 December, 1747.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, D1057/M/F/14/2, Archdeacon Charles Congreve to Lieutenant William Congreve, in London, 1 September, 1772(?).

¹²⁵ BRO, MS801/2, *The Greaves Papers*. Richard Greaves of Wythall to Miss Emma Thompson of Bradford Street Birmingham, 24 February, 1817.

¹²⁶ BRO, MS3164/vol.1, *The Withering Letters*, letter 19. J. Bostock in Liverpool to William Withering of Edgbaston, 30 November, 1807.

¹²⁷ LRO, DG11/1 *Conant Papers*, letter 41. 'To her much-respected friend Mr Abel Barker at his house at Hambleton', 30 July, 1655.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, letter 75. Walter Kirkham to Sir Abel Barker making a marriage proposal, 20 May, 1674. NRO, IC2163, *The Isham Correspondence*. Vere Isham to her brother Justinian, 1 April, 1730.

'[I] leave her entirely to please herself' because he did not want her to be unhappy.¹²⁹ When Sir Thomas Burton's replied to Elizabeth Barker he said 'I will refer your desires to Ann [his daughter], it being her own business ... I leave your desires to my daughters will'.¹³⁰

In several collections of sources, the correspondence shows that seemingly advantageous proposals were refused because of incompatibility. Susannah Hanmer rejected Edmund Williamson because she did not want to marry and would only accept his offer if 'there was a greater probability of your engaging my affections'.¹³¹ Mary Blundell rejected a suitor, even though negotiations were well advanced. The reason, her uncle explained to a suitor, was that she 'was not in haste to settle in the world, but had positively resolved not to marry you, for she thought she could never sincerely love you'.¹³² Mary Banks rejected Talbot despite thinking at first that 'she [could] ... live happily with him' because '[I] cannot ... think him agreeable, nor [will] a longer acquaintance make him appear more taking'.¹³³ The practice of allowing children a veto supports the view that the Midlands lesser gentry followed a national marriage-making process.¹³⁴

Whether driven by material considerations or affection and personal attraction, courtship was an important part of the marriage-making process. *The Country Gentleman* (1726) stated that the lover 'never sees his mistress till the bargain is made, and is just allowed so much time for courtship as ... in drawing up the marriage settlement'.¹³⁵ In arranged marriages courtship was usually a formal process which followed the acceptance of a proposal and was designed to let a couple become acquainted, investigate compatibility and, if necessary, exercise their veto.¹³⁶ Courtship lasted only as long as the negotiations took.

¹²⁹ Blundell (ed.), *Blundell's Diary and Letter Book*, pp. 222-223. Nicholas Blundell replying to a renewed proposal for his daughter Mary, 6 April, 1725.

¹³⁰ LRO, DG11/4, *Conant Papers*, letter 41. Sir Thomas Burton to Elizabeth Barker at Hambleton, 26 February, 1645.

¹³¹ Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters*, p. 38. Susannah Hanmer to Edmund Williamson, January, 1759.

¹³² Blundell (ed.), *Blundell's Diary and Letter Book*, p. 227. Nicholas Blundell to Mr Strickland, 31 August, 1725.

¹³³ Hall (ed.), *The Banks Papers*, pp. 10-11, letter 13. The Reverend William Steer to Joseph Banks at Scofton, p. 15, 11 October, 1710. Letter 19, Mary Banks to the Reverend William Steer, p. 17, no date, January, 1711.

¹³⁴ MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, p. 285.

¹³⁵ *The Country Gentleman*, No 43, Friday 5 August, 1726, pp. 322-326. [accessed through Eighteenth Century Journals, 10.11.2016]

¹³⁶ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, pp. 70-71, 76.

Justinian Isham's courtship followed the traditional formal pattern. In January 1725, his father decided 'there remains nothing more but an interview betwixt the young couple'.¹³⁷ Justinian visited Moxhull to meet Mary and her parents and reported back favourably. Sir Justinian responded, saying he was 'glad you are so well pleased with your reception ... and that you like the young lady so well'.¹³⁸ Further visits followed, formal letters were exchanged and gifts given. After eight months of courtship and negotiation the contract was signed and the marriage finalised.¹³⁹ Mary Banks and Mary Blundell experienced similar courtship rituals lasting for several months before rejecting their suitors.¹⁴⁰ Few details survive of Abel Barker's courtships, but he seems to have had no personal contact with either future brides until discussions were almost completed.¹⁴¹ This pattern is very similar to that described by Diana O'Hara for the Tudor and early Stuart period, especially in terms of visits, token giving and formal letter exchange.¹⁴²

The process changed in the eighteenth century thanks largely to greater freedom of interaction and the new forms of sociability which allowed young people to indulge in flirtation and courtship before proposals were made.¹⁴³ Evidence of the courtship practices of eighteenth century heirs in the sample is limited. William Congreve of Shrewsbury conducted his courtship through third parties during his overseas military postings. Contemplating marriage he asked his brother to speak to a Worcestershire woman for him, instructing Richard to tell her he wanted 'to renew ... my old esteem and sincere friendship for her and hers' but then, changing his mind he added 'on second thoughts, be not quite so particular and formal in what you say to her but endeavour to gain her esteem and ... hint mine

¹³⁷ NRO, IC1853, *Isham Correspondence*. Sir Justinian Isham to Lisle Hacket, 28 January, 1725.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, IC2421, Sir Justinian Isham to his son Justinian, 13 March, 1725.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, IC1854 and IC1855. Mary Hacket to Justinian Isham, 31 March and 14 May, 1725. IC2819 and IC2820, Edmund Homer, the Hackets' lawyer, to Justinian concerning the purchase of a ring and ear rings, 12 June and 21 June, 1725. IC1859, Lisle Hacket to Sir Justinian after the latter had visited Moxhull, 10 August, 1725. IC 1864, Sir Justinian to Justinian following his marriage, 26 September, 1725.

¹⁴⁰ Blundell (ed.), *Blundell's Diary and Letter Book*. Various letters to different correspondents dealing with proposals and negotiations for Mary Blundell, written between 1724 and 1726, pp. 217-235. Hall (ed.), *The Banks Papers*. Letters 1-22 to various correspondents about proposals for Mary Banks, pp.1-18, June 1710 to January 1711.

¹⁴¹ LRO, DG11/4, *Conant Papers*. Letter 43, Abel Barker to Mrs Anne Burton in London, 25 June, 1646.

¹⁴² O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, pp. 1, 64-65, 70-72.

¹⁴³ Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 73-74. Gillis, *For Better for Worse*, pp. 135-136.

for her'.¹⁴⁴ William also asked his relative Bishop Hough to recommend him to a widow to whom he was 'inclined'. The bishop did this but advised William that her poor health might prevent marriage, while her lack of fortune made her an unsuitable bride.¹⁴⁵ William, an older man, dealt with widows he already knew.'

In 1801 Richard Congreve the younger, a second son but heir presumptive to the Congreve estates, asked George Birch for permission to marry his daughter. Richard had known Mary Ann for several years and had been a regular welcome visitor in the Birch home. He said he was 'most warmly and sincerely attached to her ... [my feelings] have long existed with increasing fervency'.¹⁴⁶ Birch agreed to his proposal, subject to satisfactory financial terms. A lengthy courtship, during which the couple learned to appreciate each other, preceded the proposal which was clearly based on personal choice and affection rather than parental wishes.

Similar courtship practices were conducted by other people in the Midlands and elsewhere. John Martin met Mary Gurney at a social function, spent time with her and made 'a connexion ... the consequence of reciprocal respect and mutual love'. This led to a proposal and opposition from her guardian which resulted in elopement and marriage.¹⁴⁷ Edmund Williamson proposed to a young lady whom he had met at an assembly and seen frequently before she refused his proposal.¹⁴⁸ Mr Burland courted Elizabeth Morris for some months, despite her father's hostility, before marrying her clandestinely and illegally.¹⁴⁹

Courtship developed to match changes in methods of bride-selection. It came at a relatively late stage in arranged marriages and was more about confirmation of choice than about selection, but as marriage-making became more personal, courtship became an essential part of the decision-making process and preceded the making of any offer. Eighteenth century courtship enabled couples to get to know each other in a semi-controlled environment and decide whether they liked

¹⁴⁴ SRO, D1057/M/1/3/25, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve from Minorca to Richard Congreve (nd).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, D1057/M/1/17a, pp. 58-61. Richard Congreve to his brother William in Minorca, 24 August, 1742.

¹⁴⁶ BRO, MS3810/199/2, *Meath Barker Collection*. Richard Congreve from Iscoyd Park to George Birch at Hamstead Hall, Birmingham, 29 May, 1801.

¹⁴⁷ Christine Viallis and Kay Collins (eds.), *A Georgian Parson: The Rev. John Martin of Naseby* Northampton Record Office, (Northampton, 2004), pp.18-19.

¹⁴⁸ Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters*, pp. 34-38. Various letters, October 1758 to January 1759. See above p. 120.

¹⁴⁹ Hobhouse (ed.), *A West Country Physician*, pp. 65-72.

each other, before seeking parental consent. Questions of material suitability, parity and prudence therefore followed the desire to marry rather than as earlier, under the more formal style, following acceptable answers to these questions.

Conclusion

Primogeniture and patrilineal inheritance dominated marriage-making in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for lesser gentry heirs. An heir's marriage, often the most critical and far-reaching decision taken by a gentry family, was treated differently to those of their siblings and usually involved those fathers who were alive, in the marriage-making process. These differences were reinforced by the adoption of the strict settlement which specified provision for heirs and later for their siblings but also limited the freedom of fathers to act as they might wish.

The marital experience of heirs in the sample families confirms national patterns of behaviour. In the seventeenth century, most heirs' marriages were parentally arranged. Fathers selected brides and dictated settlement terms. Their influence decreased in the eighteenth century, because of changing attitudes to relationships, facilitated by new forms of public sociability. Tensions between the pressures of filial obedience and the desire to choose their own brides increased. The role of parents changed from selection to guidance, but control of finance allowed fathers to retain influence and involvement.

Several heirs in the sample outlived their fathers and married later in life, so that bride-selection was not subject to parental influence and control. There is insufficient evidence to say precisely how surviving fathers influenced choice in the eighteenth century but marriage contracts show they remained active in the later stages of marriage-making. Examples exist of disagreements between parents and heirs over bride selection and of ineffective attempts to impose sanctions on children who ignored advice. Fathers with un-entailed estates or income from sources other than land were better placed to influence decisions than those whose income came mainly from settled land.

Perceptions about the marriages of heirs changed. Initially an heir's interests and desires were subordinated to family and estate needs but this changed as greater stress was placed on individualism and personal choice. Parity and prudence were

important guiding principles, but their significance changed over time. In the early seventeenth century parity of birth and social status were pre-eminent, but by 1700, more emphasis was placed on parity of fortune and less on status. Parity of religion was always important but was rarely a problem for the sample families. Broad parity of age was not a critical issue for heirs in the sample. Few marriages in the sample were imprudent, since many brought advantage to the groom, even if the brides did not always have large fortunes. Marriages were usually between people of broadly comparable status.

Brides in parentally arranged marriages were often 'found' through family friends or relatives and might be personally unknown to the family when negotiations began. In the eighteenth century, grooms in the sample increasingly selected their own brides, but there is little evidence to show how brides were first met. Some marriages were love affairs, but most were based on affection rather than passion and some were marriages of convenience. The sample shows that proposals were not always accepted, even after a period of courtship.

Between 1660 and 1820 the marriage-making process changed but a continuous element remained. Whether based on parental or personal choice the marriages, of heirs continued to be critical for a family and its estate since the personal desires and happiness of an heir could never be completely separated from the constraints of property transfer and estate integrity. Their marriages demanded more family interest and involvement than those of their siblings. The key to whether siblings might marry was the financial provision made for them by their parents. This is the subject of the next chapter which provides a foundation for chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 5: Providing for younger sons and daughters

Introduction

When Dudley Ryder, second son of a London tradesman, thought of marriage, he knew that lack of employment and his father's inability to support him financially made a profitable early marriage unlikely and that marriage at the status-level he could afford would not improve his prospects. He wrote, 'it would ruin me to marry, keep me low in the world and prevent my rise'.¹ A month later he wrote 'as I am in no business it would be madness for me to go to marry under a considerable fortune. ... I don't see how it is possible for me with what my father will give me'.² He recognised that love or passion were not a substitute for a comfortable fortune.

This plight faced many squirearchy younger children. A 'good' marriage depended on finance and required parental support. Primogeniture, the desire to maintain estate integrity, and providing for widowhood often prevented fathers from treating their daughters and younger sons as generously as their heirs. A squire's limited resources were needed to support an eldest son's marriage while the expense of educating, maintaining and marrying other children was usually an irrecoverable cost to an estate. A perennial problem faced by fathers was how much family wealth they could afford to set aside to provide for younger children. Excessive generosity could easily overburden an estate and leave heavy debts for future generations.³ Many daughters and younger sons like Ryder, who lacked financial support, were forced to defer marriage until middle age or renounce it altogether. This can be seen with the Barkers after 1720, the Congreves in the 1740s, and the Lowes in the early nineteenth century.⁴ This chapter, dealing with provision for lesser gentry daughters and younger sons, argues that changing economic circumstances in the late seventeenth century significantly affected their marital prospects. Inevitably, it contains a considerable amount of descriptive detail to

¹ William Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder, 1715-1716* (London, 1939), p. 251, 5 June, 1716.

² *Ibid.*, 11 July, 1716.

³ Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500-1700* (London, 1994), pp. 60, 87, 88.

⁴ Samuel and Sarah Barker had 13 descendants who were younger children, but only Sarah married, aged 27. John and Abigail Congreve had 12 younger children, of whom only two married, aged 32 and 38. Richard Lowe had six younger children, of whom two died young but the others all married. Hagger Lowe was aged 36 and two of his sisters were in their late twenties. Appendix 1a, 1b and 1e.

provide the necessary background for the discussion of marriage-making for daughters and younger sons in later chapters. Chapter 6 is about younger sons and shows that their relatively small portions were used to set them up in employment, leaving little to support early marriage which usually had to be delayed until they were self-supporting. Chapter 7 shows that marriage was essential for females, but that the level of financial support they received was an important factor in determining success in the marriage-market. This chapter helps to show why daughters and younger sons were financially disadvantaged when compared with the heir.

As already explained, the adoption of the strict settlement by the squirearchy meant that an increasing proportion of estate land was settled on heirs, limiting the resources available to provide financial support for other children. Nationally, this increased the social and economic gulf between heirs and their younger brothers, although this was not always reflected in the sample families. Squires with several daughters could rarely provide each of them with a respectable 'fortune'. This could create a potential barrier to successful marriages.

Provision for younger sons and daughters was usually made by will, by gift or in a parents' marriage settlement. Wills and gifts allowed parents to discriminate between children, but a portion legally fixed at a parent's marriage was difficult to alter if a child fell out of favour. Some contemporary writers argued that provision through wills rather than settlements allowed parents to exercise greater control over their children, so encouraging filial obedience.⁵ The most difficult situations for young people were when there was no will or if their father left his heir to provide for them, making them dependent on the uncertain generosity of an older brother.

Second sons occupied a slightly anomalous position. It was always possible for them to inherit if their older brother died unmarried or left no surviving sons to succeed him. This happened occasionally in the sample families.⁶ Sometimes

⁵ *The Tatler*, no. 223, Saturday 9 September to Thursday 12 September 12, 1710. [accessed through 17th-18th Century Burney Collection, 10.10.2016]

⁶ In 1727, Lisle Hacket was succeeded by his brother Andrew. *Shakespeare Birthplace Trust*, ER4/775. Abstract of title to Moxhull of Andrew Hacket I, formerly belonging to Lisle Hacket deceased, 1727. SRO (Lc), B/C/11, Lisle Hacket's will, 1727. William Congreve was a third son whose older brothers died young. He was succeeded by his youngest brother Richard, following the early deaths of his own children. SRO, D1057/M/H/12/5,

second sons were treated more generously than their younger siblings. Second sons were sometimes made heirs of childless relatives and inherited their estates. Preferred methods of making provision for younger sons changed as the century progressed. In the earlier period, they might receive a small portion of land which enabled them to retain minor gentry status, but by the end of the seventeenth century provision was more usually money-based. This change was encouraged by the adoption of the strict settlement and the availability of cheap mortgages. Most parents aimed to arrange a 'good' marriage for their daughters but, for younger sons, were more concerned to 'set them up' in a trade or profession. Marriage settlements sometimes allowed money to be raised to pay for appropriate training. It was even more difficult to provide adequately for children of a second marriage. Remarriage could create serious financial and relationship problems between first and second families, encouraging the relatives of the two brides to seek actively to protect their family's 'investment'. This chapter shows that financial provision was a key element in the marriage-making process and, irrespective of other factors, determined the quality of match a daughter or younger son might attract.

1. Provision

The principal costs associated with a daughter were childhood maintenance and a one-off portion, which represented her share of family wealth and was intended to facilitate marriage or generate a small income should she remain single. Younger sons were more expensive, requiring education, training and entry fees for a trade or profession. Sometimes they might receive a small annuity for living expenses, which represented interest on their portion. Training costs were usually charged against a son's portion, leaving little surplus for use in the marriage-market. It was important that younger sons became self-supporting and ceased to be a perpetual drain on estate finances.

Congreve Papers. William Congreve of Shrewsbury to Captain William Congreve explaining that his brother and heir Richard had a son. D1057/S/17/39, Account of Congreve family compiled c. 1820. Cromwell Mortimer succeeded his brother Samuel. Samuel had inherited the estate in place of his older half-brother who had predeceased their father W. P. Courtney, revised by Michael Bevan, 'Cromwell Mortimer', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 9Oxford, 2004, online edition). [<https://0-doi-org.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/19341>] [accessed 03.02.2018] See appendix 1b, 1c and 1d.

Daughters and younger sons might receive financial help from other family members, especially those who were unmarried or childless. This could be in the form of gifts during childhood, bequests at a testator's death, inheritance of estates and sometimes adoption. Examples of each of these forms of assistance are represented in the sample families and can generally be tracked through wills. Elizabeth Barker (d. 1665) left small sums to each of her daughters and grandchildren.⁷ The unmarried George Whiston left £50 each to his Barker nieces and intriguingly £200 to 'Mrs Alway and £10 a year for her life'.⁸ A large bequest or the promise of inheriting an estate might transform a child's status and marital prospects. Wills and settlements were the two key legal instruments available to manage the distribution of property among younger sons and daughters. The next two sections deal with these two forms of provision.

(i) Wills⁹

Wills were the lesser gentry's preferred method of providing for daughters and younger sons, especially in the early part of the period. Once portions began to be specified in settlements, wills were used to 'top-up' previously agreed amounts. The extensive collection of Barker wills shows how important this mechanism was. Abel Barker bequeathed most of his property to his eldest son, £1,200 to his second son Abel and £1,000 to each of his daughters. His youngest son Thomas received £1,500 and several small leases.¹⁰ A century later, William Whiston senior left his eldest son £40, his second son £540 and his youngest son John only £250.ⁱ In 1733 Andrew Hacket I left £20 to his second son but £1,500 to each of his daughters, later reduced to £1,000 each so that 'I may not ... lay too great a weight upon my son and thereby frustrate what I willed and intended'.¹¹

Superficially, this variation implies discrimination in favour of some children at the expense of others. Further examination suggests that this was not so, and that

⁷ LRO, DG11/1000, *Conant Papers*. Probate copy of Elizabeth Barker's will, 16 July, 1656.

⁸ *Ibid.*, DG11/1024. George Whiston's will, 30 July, 1774.

⁹ Wills are a useful source of evidence. Some have been used from PROTNA but the majority of those used are probate copies held in the family archives. Wills can provide information about family relations and relationships, indicate wider kin, give a sense of family property and wealth. In this study they have been consulted for some case studies but could be used more systematically to try to reconstruct familial networks, status and family wealth.

¹⁰ LRO., DG11/995, *Conant Papers*. Abel Barker's will, 6 April, 1637

¹¹ PROB/TNA, PROB11/664/222, Andrew Hacket's will, 21 March, 1734.

bequests simply 'topped-up' earlier provision. By 1637, John and Abel Barker had already been established with land and employment but their youngest brother Thomas, not then twenty, had received nothing. William Whiston junior had already been given a living and the fees of his youngest brother John had been paid when he was apprenticed as a bookseller. George, the second son, had not previously received significant financial support. Andrew Hacket's bequest to his second son was in addition to the earlier gift of an advowson and his two daughters were already guaranteed portions of £1,000 each. Small bequests to some children supplemented earlier more generous provision and may not show adverse discrimination.

Wills were sometimes used to discriminate and show disapproval. Ralph Congreve objected to William Congreve's marriage to Rebeccah Elmston but could not cut him out of the succession to his Aldermaston estate. Instead, he 'left the estate ... to Sir Harry's two sons' and so excluded William's children to demonstrate his displeasure.¹² John Mortimer ignored the two surviving children of his second marriage, the eldest son of his third marriage and his married daughter Elizabeth in his will. He left the residue of his estate which he could 'dispose of by will' to be sold and 'equally divided between [his] three younger children'.¹³ These bequests, smaller than previously promised, were only payable twelve months after John's death. When they were paid his two youngest sons were aged 44 and 31 and were already established in life, so that the bequests did not enhance their marriage prospects. Each son received £183, which was considerably less than the £600 portion given to their sister Elizabeth Lubb, or the £2,000 given on her marriage to their half-sister Mary.

Wills could be used to protect married women's property rights by setting up trusts.¹⁴ James Thompson of Birmingham used his will to bar his son-in-law Richard Greaves from control of his estate, leaving his property to his widow for life and then, in trust for 'the separate use' of his daughter Emma, and then jointly

¹² SRO, D1057/M/H/13/1, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve of Shrewsbury to Captain William Congreve of Woolwich, 16 January, 1776.

¹³ LRO, DE107/42, *Mortimer Papers*. The will of John Mortimer of Toppinghoe Hall, 1736. DE107/45. Letter from Elizabeth Mortimer to her second son, Dr Cromwell Mortimer, 4 March, 1728.

¹⁴ Property trusts were developed in the late Middle Ages by the Court of Chancery to protect land ownership.

to her children. Emma was authorised to dispose of this property 'not withstanding coverture'.¹⁵

Some squires left provision for daughters and younger sons to their heir's discretion, making them subject to the whims of an older brother. He might be reluctant to be generous to them in case it damaged the prospects of his own children.¹⁶ Informal directions and nuncupative, or spoken wills, were rarely legally enforceable. Prose fiction, as in so many other aspects of marriage-making, reflects real life. Jane Austen examined the difficulties created by a vague nuncupative will in *Sense and Sensibility*.¹⁷ Mr Dashwood commended his second wife and her children to the benevolence of his heir who 'promised to do everything in his power to make them comfortable'. Mr Dashwood junior and his wife rationalised this to mean 'presents of fish and game and so forth. ... [and] such neighbourly acts', so as not to financially disadvantage their own son.¹⁸

Wills were often used to provide for daughters and younger sons, or 'top-up' earlier provision. They might be used to show affection or displeasure, to differentiate between individual children, to clarify or modify confusion caused by conflicting settlements, or respond to changing personal and family circumstances. A major disadvantage of wills was that bequests did not become payable until after the testator's death, so that a child might not receive financial support when it was most needed. Bequests to daughters and younger sons may therefore have delayed early marriages rather than improved their matrimonial prospects.

(ii) Settlements

Normally, provision for daughters and younger sons was not included in early seventeenth century marriage contracts. 'Legal silence' allowed a father freedom to decide when to give a share of his estate to a child.¹⁹ This began to change in

¹⁵ BRO, MS801/5, *Greaves Correspondence*. Abstract of the will of Mr James Thompson of Bradford Street, Birmingham, 28 November, 1821.

¹⁶ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, p. 88.

¹⁷ A nuncupative will was delivered orally (that is, in speech) to witnesses, as opposed to the usual style of will which was written using a proper format.

¹⁸ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (first published 1811, London, 1996), pp. 4, 10-11.

¹⁹ Ralph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth Century England* (New York, 1978), p. 70. H. J. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650-1950* (Oxford,

the late seventeenth century as the strict settlement came into more general use. Settlers began to specify amounts to be raised for younger children and when they should be paid. Initially this was done for daughters, but during the early eighteenth century younger sons were included. This made it easier for landowners to calculate how much they would have to lay out for younger children before any were born and gave children a legally enforceable financial expectation, so reducing reliance on parental whims.

Barker marriage settlements illustrate the adoption of this device, although it was at a slower rate than by some other sample families and the national norm. Twelve marriage contracts made between 1646 and 1735 make no reference to financial provision for younger sons or for 'setting' them up in a trade or a profession. Few of them mention provision for daughters.²⁰ Elizabeth Mortimer, however, implied that her family adopted the strict settlement as a means of providing for younger children much earlier than the Barkers. The 1718 resettlement revised an earlier agreement which had specifically provided for her younger sons.²¹

Some Barker settlements included provision for daughters if a marriage failed to produce male heirs. Trustees in the Bristow-Brown settlement (1684) could raise portions for each daughter, up to a maximum amount to be distributed on a sliding scale according to the number of daughters. The 1686 Leigh-Barker settlement included separate provision for daughters but did not refer to their place in the succession.²² The Whiston-Plaistow agreement (1735) specifically mentioned younger sons as well as daughters and reserved to Whiston junior the decision about whether and when a child should receive their portion. It also permitted trustees to use part of a portion for 'preferring, placing out or advancing all or any of the children ... to trades or in marriage or other ways they shall think fit'.²³ Other

1994), pp. 16, 97. Lloyd Bonfield, *Marriage Settlements 1601-1740: The Adoption of the Strict Settlement* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 104.

²⁰ LRO, DG11/958 to DG11/979, *Conant Papers*. Assorted Barker and related family marriage contracts and settlements between 1646 and 1817.

²¹ LRO, DE107/45, *Mortimer Papers*. Elizabeth Mortimer to Cromwell Mortimer, 4 March, 1728.

²² LRO, DG11/966, *Conant Papers*. Marriage settlement of Thomas Bristow and Bridget Brown, 1684. DG11/968. Marriage settlement of Francis Leigh and Elizabeth Barker, 1686.

²³ *Ibid.*, DG11/971. Marriage agreement between William Whiston (the younger) and Mary Plaistow, 20 August, 1735.

marriage contracts included similar provision, but sometimes as in the Brown-Barker settlement, they were included in a separate document.²⁴

According to Elizabeth Mortimer's letter to Cromwell and the 1751 'abstract of Mr Mortimer's settlements' the late seventeenth century Mortimer settlements provided fixed sums for younger children, as a rent-charge against named portions of land. The amount payable should have increased as family circumstances improved, but since finances deteriorated the size of portions was reduced.²⁵ The Congreve-Clavering correspondence also shows that portions were reduced in size because of the family's bankruptcy. Eventually portions were fixed at £150 for each younger son and £500 for each daughter, but they were only to be paid from Mrs Congreves jointure after her death.²⁶

Younger sons depended more on parental goodwill than the heir.²⁷ Provision for Barker younger sons was only payable at the father's death which gave parents some control over their behaviour and obedience. In contrast, the eldest son's inheritance was guaranteed by settlement which was difficult to alter. Heirs had to wait to inherit, but their obedience was less constrained as they could borrow against future expectations. If the decisions of other squires were like the Barkers it may help explain the delay in the marriages of younger sons until later in life.

The sample correspondence provides little evidence of differential provision between children, but it was part of Dudley Ryder's experience. His father contributed immediately to his eldest son's marriage but reserved Dudley's inheritance until after he and Mrs Ryder had both died. Mr Ryder probably thought that paying for Dudley's legal training had fulfilled his parental obligations. Dudley thought this was unfair because it would 'quite destroy my prospect of marrying and keep me low as long as he and mother live'.²⁸ He had to rely on verbal

²⁴ *Ibid.*, DG11/977. Agreement making provision for children from the marriage of Edward Brown and Sarah Barker, 25 August, 1779.

²⁵ LRO, DE107/42, *Mortimer Papers*. Abstract of Mortimer settlements compiled in 1751. De 107/45, Elizabeth Mortimer to Cromwell Mortimer, 4 March, 1728.

²⁶ SRO, D1057/M/1/3/38, *Congreve Papers*. William to Richard Congreve, 13 December, 1747. D1057/M/1/9/10, Richard Congreve to Robert Clavering, 31 January, 1747.

²⁷ Bonfield, *Marriage Settlements*, p. 102. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London, 1984), p. 232. Vivienne Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture: The Seventeenth Century Newdigates of Arbury and their World* (London, 1995), p. 23.

²⁸ Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder*, pp. 326, 369, 12 September and 27 November, 1716.

promises, keep his father's goodwill, survive until his father died and hope that his father remained prosperous.

Designed originally to protect estate succession, marriage settlements proved to be a useful mechanism for determining future expenditure on younger children, although the uncertainties of birth and death made them simply statements of intent. By the late seventeenth century settlements usually specified provision for daughters and, during the early eighteenth century, began to include provision for younger sons. The next two sections consider this latter group in more detail.

(iii) Second sons

Second sons might sometimes inherit from childless relatives. Some, as potential heirs, were given a small estate to maintain gentry status, as was done for Sir Andrew Hacket's second son when he married.²⁹ Abel and Samuel Barker both gave their second sons land rather than money.³⁰ Land which came as part of a wife's portion was sometimes settled on her second son rather than the heir, so effectively creating a new landed family. This happened more frequently among the wealthier gentry, but occasionally occurred within the squirearchy. Sometimes second sons, like Francis Benyon Hacket who was given his maternal grandfather's name, were named after relatives in the hope of future inheritance.³¹ Childless maternal relatives might take a special interest in younger children and leave land to a nephew, provided they assumed the relatives surname.³² John Addyes Hacket, a second son, took his grandmother's surname and inherited a childless uncle's estate. He in turn was childless and left the estate to his nephew, Francis Benyon Hacket. Cromwell Mortimer was named after his father's first wife, possibly in the hope of inheriting property.³³ The significance of this 'naming' practice is emphasised by the frequency with which it occurs in the sample families and is used as a device in novels.

²⁹ SRO (Lc), D15/10/2/35, Hinckley, Birch and Exham, Solicitors, clients' papers. Marriage settlement of Andrew Hacket and Dorcas Fullwood, 1699.

³⁰ LRO, DG11/995, *Conant Papers*. Abel Barker's will, 6 April, 1637. DG11/999, Samuel Barker's will, 1 June, 1656.

³¹ Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, 'Childless Men in Early Modern England', in Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (eds.), *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 181.

³² Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, p. 101. Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, pp. 41, 43. Trumbach, *The Egalitarian Family*, pp. 70, 82, 97.

³³ LRO, DE107/45, *Mortimer Papers*. Elizabeth Mortimer to Cromwell, 4 March, 1728.

Inheritance from a childless relative was a key strategy for the Banks family. William Hodgkinson, Joseph's brother-in-law, 'settled ... all his estate ... upon ... William Banks and his heirs', provided he changed his surname to Hodgkinson. The contingency plan was that if William, as second son, inherited the Banks estates he would resume the Banks name and 'settle all the estate given him by my brother Hodgkinson ... on his younger brother Robert'.³⁴ Thomas Byrche inherited his maternal grandfather's estate at Elmley Castle and changed his name to Byrche-Savage to meet his grandfather's wishes. Thomas then left the estate to his nephew Robert Clavering, who also took the name Savage.³⁵ It has been estimated that a third of gentry younger sons inherited an estate from a maternal relative.³⁶ A daughter's marriage could affect estate transmission, maintain lineal continuity and reinforce intra-familial relationships.

A childless landowner might adopt as his heir a nephew or, as Talbot Williamson proposed, his younger brother's only daughter.³⁷ Childless relatives often left generous legacies to nephews and nieces. In 1680 Thomas Barker left £160 to each of his brother's daughters and small bequests, payable when the recipients reached 21, to his sisters' eldest sons. He left more generous bequests to their younger siblings. This suggests that as a younger son himself, he recognised that eldest sons were more generously endowed than their siblings. George Whiston, a gentleman farmer, left £50 to each of his five nieces.³⁸ John Hacket left £20 to each of his sisters' children, but nothing to those of his older brother.³⁹

Similar behaviour is represented in eighteenth century fiction. In *Amelia*, Colonel James inherited a 'considerable fortune, by the death of an uncle'.⁴⁰ Bellpine, in *Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy*, needed a wealthy wife when his 82-year-old uncle

³⁴ J. W. F. Hall (ed.), *The Letters and Papers of the Banks Family of Revesby Abbey, 1704-1760* Lincoln Record Society, vol. 45, (Lincoln, 1952), pp. 247, 251, extracts from the will of Joseph Banks (the elder), 27 July, 1727.

³⁵ SRO, D1057/M/117a, p. 59, *Congreve Papers*. J. W. Willis-Bund, (ed.), 'Elmley Castle', in *Victoria County History, A History of the County of Worcestershire*, vol. 3, (London, 1913). [*British History online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol3>. accessed 09.11.2016]

³⁶ Trumbach, *The Egalitarian Family*, p. 96.

³⁷ Berry and Foyster, 'Childless Men in Early Modern England', p.181. Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture*, p. 56. F. J. Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters 1748-1765* Bedford Historical Record Society (Streatley, 1954), p. 2.

³⁸ LRO, DG11/1008, *Conant Papers*. Thomas Barker's will, 1680. DG11/1013, Sir Thomas Barker's will, 1704. DG11/1024, George Whiston's will, 30 July, 1774.

³⁹ PRO/TNA, PROB11/745/276, 4 March, 1746. John Hacket's will.

⁴⁰ Henry Fielding, *Amelia* (London, 1751, Penguin, 1987), p. 163.

unexpectedly married and had a son, to rob him of an expected inheritance.⁴¹ Emma Courtney's uncle, Mr. Morton, inherited a distant relative's estate.⁴²

Legacies might carry restrictions. Thomas Barker left 'money to his nieces and nephews, provided they married in a certain time'.⁴³ Joseph Banks said that 'if [his grandsons] marry not with his consent or in any ways prove undutiful to him' payment would be stopped.⁴⁴ That such restrictions were common is reflected in fiction. Sidney Bidulph's husband, son of a second marriage, had an 'estate ... which came to him by his mother'.⁴⁵ In *Emma Courtney*, August Harley's large legacy was 'on condition of his remaining unmarried'.⁴⁶ In *Sir Charles Grandison*, Mr Fowler's uncle promised him a fortune but because he opposed 'a match of mere love ... requires ... that he marries not without his approbation'.⁴⁷

Inheritance from relatives could be life-changing for squirearchy younger sons and daughters, but lack of resources might condemn them to downward social mobility with little hope of a good marriage. Inheriting an estate or a large legacy, might improve a younger son's prospects, help him to keep gentry status and marry well.

(iv) Land and annuities

The nature of provision for squirearchy younger sons changed between 1600 and 1800. The prosperous yeoman Baldwin Barker gave two sons land in Rutland; they in turn gave land leases to their own younger sons.⁴⁸ As the seventeenth century progressed, it became increasingly difficult to give land to younger sons because of settlement restrictions and many parents resorted to monetary gifts.⁴⁹ Few squires had the resources to purchase an estate for a second son, and the

⁴¹ Eliza Haywood, *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (London 1753, Kentucky, 2005), p. 61.

⁴² Mary Hays, *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (London, 1759. London, 1987), p. 29.

⁴³ LRO, DG11/1, *Conant Papers*. Letter 148a, an account of Barker marriages.

⁴⁴ Hall (ed.), *The Banks Letters*. The will of Joseph Banks (the elder), p. 248.

⁴⁵ Frances Sheridan, *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (London 1761, London, 1987), p. 85.

⁴⁶ Hays, *Emma Courtney*, p. 54.

⁴⁷ Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* vol. 1, (ed.), Jocelyn Harris, (London, 1753, London, 1972), p. 31.

⁴⁸ LRO, DG11/989, *Conant Papers*. Baldwin Barker's will, 1603. DG11/995 Abel Barker's will, 1637. DG11/999, Samuel Barker's will, 1656.

⁴⁹ Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1500-1800* vol. 1 (Glasgow, 1997), p. 55. Susan Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: the Cultural Worlds of the Verneys, 1660-1720* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 114, 124.

sample correspondence makes no reference to this practice, but Joseph Banks (the elder) left £2,000 for the purchase of an estate for the two youngest grandsons of his second marriage.⁵⁰

It was important that raising a daughter's or younger son's portion should not jeopardise the heir's interests, place too heavy a financial burden on an estate, or threaten estate integrity and the continuity of succession.⁵¹ Before 1720, portions often took the form of life-time annuities which were based on rent charges on estate lands. This meant that younger sons were a continuing drain on estate resources. After 1720 they usually received a one-off lump-sum in place of the annuity, payable either at an agreed age or when the father died.⁵² John Isham (1659-1746), a second son was a prosperous London lawyer who in 1725 was still receiving his £220 p.a. annuity as a wealthy sixty-five-year-old.⁵³ The transition from annuities to lump-sums was eased by the availability of relatively cheap mortgages. Lump-sum payments helped maintain estate integrity and allowed younger sons to live in towns and follow an independent career in trade or the professions.

Unless a first marriage was childless, few resources were left to provide for the children of a second marriage, especially if a settlement from a previous marriage was still in force.⁵⁴ Occasionally, unsettled land or specially purchased land could be reserved for the eldest son of a second marriage. John Mortimer's three marriages illustrate this. His first marriage was childless, allowing him to make generous provision for the children of his second marriage, but he lacked the resources to do this for children of his third marriage.⁵⁵ A remarrying father had to balance fairness to his children with the principles of primogeniture.

⁵⁰ Hall (ed.), *The Banks Letters*, p. 249. The will of Joseph Banks (the elder). Appendix 4: An Act for vesting the settled estates of the late Joseph Banks the elder. Trumbach, *The Egalitarian Family*, p. 41.

⁵¹ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, pp. 234, 235. Trumbach, *The Egalitarian Family*, p. 41, 73.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵³ NRO, IL467 *Isham Papers*. An agreement between Sir Justinian Isham and his brother John Isham to redeem John's annuity, 28 August, 1725.

⁵⁴ Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, p. 14. Whyman, *Sociability and Power*, p. 142.

⁵⁵ LRO, DE107/26, *Mortimer Papers*. An abstract of Mr Mortimer's settlements (nd.). DE107/45, Elizabeth Mortimer to Cromwell Mortimer, 4 March, 1728. DE107/42, The last will of John Mortimer of Toppinghoe Hall, 2 June, 1736.

Ideally, fathers wanted independent younger sons and married daughters, but a younger son might have to wait until middle age before receiving his portion and the freedom to marry. Even so, the easiest way for a younger son to maintain gentry status was by making a 'good' marriage.⁵⁶ Several advantageous marriages occurred in the eighteenth century Hacket, Congreve and Isham families. Edmund Isham's father advised him to marry a rich widow in control of her own fortune, 'the lucky fate of many a younger brother'. Edmund's prospects were limited because his father, having 'so many children to provide for' and having 'settled my whole Estate upon my eldest son', could not support him financially. He reminded Edmund that 'a younger brother with a family' needed sufficient income to live upon'. The high-status Ishams illustrate difficulties facing many younger sons and daughters. Forty-year-old Edmund needed financial support from his father to marry but, as a second son, was advised not expect more than his fair share.⁵⁷

Mortgages were usually raised in the London money market but, as shown in the Isham accounts, wealthy gentlemen might lend money privately on mortgage to their friends. Sir Justinian lent several thousand pounds of his daughter-in-law's portion as a mortgage to a gentleman from Sutton Coldfield who was a friend and neighbour of Lisle Hacket. The change from land to money-based provision helped preserve estate integrity but reduced the matrimonial prospects of other children by limiting disposable resources. Annuities in place of land increased dependence on the estate but were usually insufficient to support a wife and family. Marriage to a wealthy heiress or widow was not possible for all. Second sons sometimes had a slight advantage over their siblings, but children of second marriages could experience difficulties, especially if an earlier settlement was still in force. It was not only younger sons that needed to be provided for. Daughters presented considerable challenges to a family's financial resources and marital strategies. The following sections show how the sample families resolved these issues.

(v) 'Setting up' sons

For lesser gentry younger sons, a career was necessary to provide income, retain status and make a good marriage. Some marriage settlements allowed part of a

⁵⁶ Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture*, p. 53.

⁵⁷ NRO, IC2141, *Isham Correspondence*. Sir Justinian Isham to his son Edmund, at Doctors Commons, 2 August, 1729.

designated portion to be used to pay for training and entry fees for employment. The Whiston-Plaistow settlement allowed trustees to use part of a portion 'for the preferring, placing out or advancing ... [of] children ... to trades or in marriage'.⁵⁸ The upper ranks of the professions were socially acceptable, but entry needed influential connections. Since a junior trading partnership in mid eighteenth century London cost £5,000, it was often beyond the reach of the squirearchy.⁵⁹ The rapid expansion of public service after 1690 provided acceptable professional alternatives, but entry usually also required the support of a patron. Tom Congreve's marriage was criticised, among other reasons, because his wife's family lacked the influence to advance his military career.⁶⁰

The church, army or navy were cheaper and easier to enter than trade and the professions but required sponsorship.⁶¹ Of these the church, was the safest but least financially rewarding. This career path was followed by several Hacket and Congreve younger sons. The squirearchy regarded law and medicine as suitable professions for younger sons and some Hacket second sons practiced as lawyers. Medical training, which cost about £100, was accessible to the lesser gentry but was sometimes of doubtful respectability.⁶² Cromwell Mortimer, Claver Morris of Wells and the Witherings, father and son, trained as doctors although William junior does not seem to have practised. Doctors and clerics were treated as gentlemen by courtesy and several made good marriages.⁶³

Gentry sons entering trade or the professions usually settled in urban areas where they easily integrated into urban society, since many merchants had gentry backgrounds through birth or marriage.⁶⁴ The move to towns in search of employment coincided with a general drift of the lesser gentry into urban areas in

⁵⁸ LRO, DG11/971, *Conant Papers*. Marriage agreement between William Whiston the younger and Mary Plaistow, 20 August, 1735.

⁵⁹ Nick Rogers, 'Money, Land and Lineage: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London', in Peter Borsay (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1688-1820* (Harlow, 1990), p. 278. (First appeared in *Social History*, 4:3, 1979),

⁶⁰ SRO, D1057/M/13/5, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve to Richard Congreve, 1 January, 1739.

⁶¹ Mary Abbott, *Family Ties: English Families 1540-1920* (London, 1993), p. 52.

⁶² Nick Rogers, 'Money, Land and Lineage', p. 278.

⁶³ Edmund Hobbhouse (ed.), *The Diary of a West Country Physician 1684-1726*, (Rochester, 1934). BRO, MS3164, *The Withering Letters*, vol. 2, letter 28. LRO, DE107/45, *Mortimer Papers*. Elizabeth Mortimer to Cromwell Mortimer, 4 March, 1728.

⁶⁴ Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in Provincial Towns 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989), p. 230.

search of a more leisured life style.⁶⁵ The Withering letters and Dudley Ryder's diary show that urban and rural gentry intermingled in urban social activities.⁶⁶ Ryder described a ball attended by a wide social mix to which he was only admitted because he 'appeared like a gentleman'.⁶⁷ The urban environment allowed younger sons independence, the opportunity to support themselves, interact socially with a wide range of people and meet potential partners.

Setting younger sons up in a trade or profession was the most practical help a squire could give to his younger sons. Entering respectable employment was expensive but often proved a beneficial use of a portion. Some younger sons married comfortably; a few made good marriages which enhanced their gentry status; others found marriage undesirable or impossible; but some marriages were socially inferior and were the start of a downward social spiral.

(vi) **Daughters' portions**

Finance was the key to a 'good' marriage and the key to finance was a portion. Portions were paid in different ways but squires, especially in the seventeenth century, preferred to make a monetary lump-sum payment followed by instalments if necessary, payable at agreed dates or significant milestones, like the birth of a child.⁶⁸ A father might add to a previously agreed amount, but limited resources meant squires could not often do this. Lisle Hacket noted in his will that he was unable to add to his daughter's marriage portion.⁶⁹ Thomas Barker bequeathed £1,000 to his married daughter in addition to her portion and Mary Haggitt's father promised to increase her £500 portion if her sisters received a larger portion.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, p. 7. Rosemary Sweet, *The English Town, 1680-1840* (London, 1999), p. 193.

⁶⁶ BRO, MS3164/vol. 2, letter 28, *The Withering Letters*. John Royston to William Withering senior, 29 May, 1766. MS3164/vol. 1, letter 5. Mr Douglas to William Withering, 28 October, 1797. MS3164/vol. 2, letter 31. C. Short to Miss Withering, 28 October, 1798. MS3164/vol. 1/1, Letter 25. Charlotte Botfield to her brother, William Withering, 5 December, 1819.

⁶⁷ Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder*, p. 127, 29 October, 1715.

⁶⁸ Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (London, 1989), p. 194. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, p. 117. Bonfield, *Marriage Settlements*, p. 108. Trumbach, *The Egalitarian Family*, p. 70.

⁶⁹ SRO (Lc), B/C/11, Lisle Hacket's will, 1727. See chapter 8, pp. 220, 229.

⁷⁰ LRO, DG11/1028, *The Conant Papers*. Probate copy of Thomas Barker's will, November 7, 1787. DG11/978. Marriage settlement of Thomas Barker and Mary Haggitt, September 28, 1786.

The sum finally paid to a groom might be affected by the terms of the parental marriage contract, family circumstance, a father's affection for an individual child, the number of children to be provided for, 'compensation' for a daughter's personal defects and 'status compensation'. Theoretically, an eldest daughter was entitled to the same size portion as her mother, but this would be reduced if there was more than one daughter, since the agreed sum had to be equally divided between them all.⁷¹ In 1636, Ann Adderly's marriage portion was £1,500. The contract specified that if she had one daughter her husband's estate should raise £1,000, rising to £1,500 if there were two or more daughters.⁷² Francis Leigh's settlement allocated £1,500 for up to three daughters and £2,000 if more than three survived.⁷³ This sum was to be equally divided between all surviving daughters.

Portions for gentry daughters usually ranged between £500 and £1,000 in the early seventeenth century but had increased threefold by 1700. Squirearchy daughters were at the lower end of this range.⁷⁴ Nominally, portions represented one year's estate income. They remained stable throughout the eighteenth century but started to rise after 1800.⁷⁵ Barker portions exceeded these figures in the seventeenth century but were much lower in the eighteenth century. Anne Congreve's £800 portion was raised by her brothers' generosity to £2,000. In contrast, in the 1720s, the Isham daughters, members of one of the wealthiest Northamptonshire families, were only entitled to £2,000 each as fixed by their parent's marriage contract of 1683.⁷⁶

Daughters were potential brides. Agreeing bridal provision was a key element in the marriage negotiations, which were more concerned with finance than with the feelings of the couple or their personal relationship.⁷⁷ A bride's father was

⁷¹ Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, pp. 108-109.

⁷² BRO, MS917/862, *The Adderley Papers*. Marriage articles between Robert Arden of Park Hall and Charles Adderley of Lea Marston, Warwickshire, 15 November, 1636.

⁷³ LRO, DG11/968, *Conant Papers*. Marriage settlement between Francis Leigh of Ireland and Elizabeth Barker of Lyndon, 11 June, 1686.

⁷⁴ Diane O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester and New York, 2000), pp. 191, 193.

⁷⁵ Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, pp. 16, 78, 128, 139.

⁷⁶ SRO, D1057/M/1/9/5, *Congreve Papers*. Richard (?) Congreve from Shrewsbury to Mrs Clavering, 28/29 December, 1747 (Copy). LRO, DG11/958-979, *Conant Papers*. Marriage settlements, including: DG11/968, Francis Leigh and Elizabeth Barker, 11 June, 1686 (portion £1,500); DG11/978, Samuel Barker and Mary Haggitt, 28 September, 1786 (portion £500).

⁷⁷ Jacqueline Eales, *Women in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (London, 1998), p. 64. Cissie Fairchild, *Women in Early Modern Europe 1500-1700* (London, 2007), p. 64.

investing in his daughter's future and had to determine his own financial commitment, protect the future welfare of his daughter and her children and ensure that her wealth was not frittered away by a spendthrift son-in-law. He also had to ensure that promised benefits were backed by sufficient inalienable securities. Negotiations became increasingly important and complex as traditional dower rights were replaced by jointures. These, which were described by Ruth Perry as 'the great disinheritance', gave a widow greater security than dower rights, but were financially less generous.⁷⁸ Agreed financial provisions could be a continuing source of conflict if payments were disputed or missed.⁷⁹ Once specified in the marriage contract a portion, especially if it appeared in the document before the land settlement, was legally binding and had to be paid. The portion represented wealth transferred to a new family and was an irretrievable loss of capital to an estate. Some contracts, like Anne Congreve's and Mary Ann Birch's, contained reversionary clauses should the marriage fail to produce children.

A bride's father usually aimed to achieve a satisfactory balance between portion and jointure.⁸⁰ The jointure was based on the portion and represented the interest that might have accrued had the portion been invested rather than given to a bride.⁸¹ It was essential that a portion brought a meaningful return on investment in terms of jointure, enhanced status, useful connections, or helpful patronage.⁸² In the early eighteenth century, changes in the portion-jointure ratio encouraged demands for larger portions.⁸³ A large portion might attract a suitable bridegroom and publicly demonstrated the status and reputation of the bride's family.

If a daughter died before her portion fell due, the amount might be divided between her surviving siblings, but this was not always the case. After Kitty Congreve's death in 1740, her portion reverted to the estate and was not

⁷⁸ Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture 1748-1818* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 38-76.

⁷⁹ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, pp. 63-65. Alan MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300-1840*, (Oxford, 1987), pp. 282-283. Susan Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England* (Cambridge, USA, 1990), pp. 60, 84. O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, p. 223.

⁸⁰ Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, pp. 8, 150.

⁸¹ O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, p. 192.

⁸² MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, p. 270. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, pp. 64, 106.

⁸³ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 194.

distributed between her brothers and sister.⁸⁴ If an only son pre-deceased his father, a daughter's portion might be increased to show her enhanced status and improved marital prospects, especially if the estate itself was to be inherited by a collateral heir. When John Hacket died in 1718 his sister's portion was increased to over £10,000, enabling her to make a high-status marriage.⁸⁵

Portions were usually raised against the family estate. Before 1700 they might be paid from savings or by the sale of assets, but with the adoption of the strict settlement and the availability of cheaper forms of credit they were usually funded through borrowing rather than capital alienation. Mortgages deferred expense, spreading payments over longer periods.⁸⁶ As more of an estate was settled making more land inalienable, it became more difficult to raise money through sales. Sometimes, an annual rent charge on a portion of land might be set aside in a marriage contract to fund future portions, or to cover interest payments on deferred portions. Land might be gifted to a husband's family in lieu of a monetary portion as happened in the marriage of Andrew Hacket I and Dorcas Fullwood. A trust might manage part of an estate, investing income until it was required to pay a portion. This approach was adopted in the Conant-Brown marriage settlement of 1817.⁸⁷ Differences in how portions were paid are illustrated by the sample families. In 1655 Abel Barker received a sum in cash from his future father-in-law and was told to bring a bag and collect it 'at 7 o'clock ... [when] I desire you will ... tell the money'.⁸⁸ The Ishams had to accept payment of Mary Hacket's portion in instalments, spread over several years. Richard Congreve only received interest payments on Mary Ann's portion until her father's death.⁸⁹

Fixing the form of payment and the payment schedule was a vital part of marriage negotiations. The groom's family usually wanted a lump-sum at or just before the marriage, but the bride's family could not always provide this. The Hacket-Isham

⁸⁴ SRO, D1057/M/I/3/38, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve from Dublin to his brother [Richard?], 13 December, 1747.

⁸⁵ Tripartite agreement of 1718, mentioned in the will of Lisle Hacket, SRO, (Lc) B/C/11, 24 October, 1727.

⁸⁶ Bonfield, *Marriage Settlements*, pp. 105, 112. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and The Estates System*, pp. 117-119.

⁸⁷ LRO, DG11/979, *Conant Papers*. Marriage settlement between John Edward Conant and Catherine Brown, 3 December, 1817.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, DG11/4, letter 42. Alexander Noel to Abel Barker, September, 1655.

⁸⁹ BRO, MS3810/199/6, *Meath-Barker Collection*. Copy of a letter from George Birch to Richard Congreve at Iscoyd in reply to his proposal, 29 May, 1801.

settlement was delayed and almost ended because Lisle could not make immediate payment and had to rely on mortgages arranged for him by the Ishams.⁹⁰ Staged or deferred payments, with annual interest paid on the capital amount, was the method usually preferred by a bride's family.⁹¹ Inability to settle terms, or failure to meet agreed instalments, could lead to conflict, ill-feeling and occasionally legal action.⁹²

Portions were effectively portable fortunes making it easier for daughters to be geographically mobile. When she accepted her 'dowry' a daughter renounced all further legal claims against her father's estate. The size of a portion, often the subject of public speculation, confirmed a girl's social standing and influenced the offers she received and the status of the husband to whom she might aspire. Most squire's daughters had relatively small portions which gave them limited purchasing power in the marriage-market and, unless other factors increased her attraction, restricted her choice of potential suitors. Many were unlikely to attract high-status proposals. Dowry inflation meant that some young women with small portions had to defer marriage until later in life to allow their parents time to accumulate funds to increase portion size. Alternatively, a girl might accept a less prestigious offer or choose to remain single.⁹³

(vii) Heiresses

Daughters were usually financially better off if they had no brothers to inherit their father's property. An entailed estate would pass to a male of a collateral branch, but surviving daughters could inherit un-entailed land and personal wealth. Common law rules provided for an estate to pass undivided to an eldest son but to be shared equally between daughters should they inherit, subject to any restrictions imposed by their father in his will. An owner, like Thomas Savage,

⁹⁰ NRO, IC2459, *Isham Correspondence*. Sir Justinian Isham to his son Justinian, 12 June, 1725. IC2461, Sir Justinian to Justinian, 5 July, 1725. IC1859, Lisle Hacket to Sir Justinian, 10 August, 1725. IC1897, Sir Justinian to Justinian, 4 February, 1727.

⁹¹ O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, p. 203. Margaret R. Hunter, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (California, 1996), p. 153.

⁹² Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, pp. 122, 124-125.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 63. MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, p. 276. Bridget Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1989), p. 186. O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, p. 212. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, p. 64.

might avoid equal partition by leaving an un-entailed estate to the husband of a favoured daughter, so excluding other daughters from their inheritance.⁹⁴

Today, 'heiress' is often understood to refer to a single wealthy woman, sole heir to a large estate. Eileen Spring argued that the different inheritance rules for sons and daughters in the eighteenth century makes this concept inaccurate. In families without sons, partible inheritance made all surviving daughters 'heiresses' a situation which applied just as much to a squire's small estate as to the larger estates of the wealthier gentry.⁹⁵ An heiress over 21 had full legal control of her fortune, unless her freedom was restricted by trust arrangements. Her property would then become her husband's unless it was reserved to 'her own sole use'. Once she and her husband died, unless she had a child to inherit, her estate would normally revert to her own natal kin.⁹⁶

Habakkuk and Bonfield both highlighted 1660-1750 as a period of difficulty in male population regeneration with a correspondingly higher than normal proportion of heiresses.⁹⁷ Failure of male heirs in collateral branches meant a male line could die out completely as happened to the Lisles in the 1660s and the Barkers in the early nineteenth century. Under such circumstances, patrimonies were usually divided between surviving daughters, and thus threatened the principle of estate integrity. Estates often passed into the ownership of other families when an heiress married. Stone estimated that one third of land was transmitted through females in the early eighteenth century. After 1750, an improved male survival rate led to a reduction in the number of heiresses.⁹⁸

There were several minor heiresses in the sample families. Mary Niccol of Pentrefelyn was a joint-heiress with her sister in 1719, when she married William Congreve. Elizabeth Byrche was technically joint-heiress with her sisters of the Elmly Castle estate, although her father had originally left the estate to his son-in-law. Mary Scott of Little Aston, wife of Andrew Hacket II, and her cousin Jane

⁹⁴ See p.134 for details of the Savage-Byrche inheritance.

⁹⁵ Eileen Spring, *Law, Land and Family: Aristocratic Inheritance in England 1300-1800* (Chapel Hill and London, 1993), pp. 9-10.

⁹⁶ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 43. Trumbach, *The Egalitarian Family*, p. 83. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, p. 171.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 171, 220. Bonfield, *Marriage Settlements*, p. 95.

⁹⁸ Lawrence Stone and Jeanne Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (abridged version, Oxford, 1986), p. 73.

Scott of Great Barr, were both heiresses. Elizabeth Anne Beynon wife of Andrew Hacket III and her mother were successively heiresses of Spratton in Northamptonshire. Charlotte Stawell was an heiress when she married Ralph Congreve in 1752. In the 1660s John Lisle's Warwickshire property was equally divided between his three daughters, one of whom married Andrew Hacket and gave him the Moxhull portion of her father's estate.

Heiresses were usually desirable commodities in the marriage market, especially if they were 'of age' and had a large fortune. Their attraction increased as debt grew on many estates through the mounting costs of mortgages, jointures and portions. The injection of 'new' money from marrying an heiress, was often the only way to avoid bankruptcy. Heiresses from the merchant and professional classes were particularly desirable as they could trade wealth in exchange for improved social status. Landowners with serious financial problems might 'buy' an heiress by offering a higher than normal jointure, so gaining immediate relief at future cost.⁹⁹

An heiress's wealth could take different forms, including money, land or stocks and be derived from different sources, such as aunts, uncles, grandparents, godparents and childless brothers as well as from parents. If an heiress's lands were at a distance from her husband estate it might be sensible to sell them to raise money to offset debts or invest in a more suitably located property. Sir Justinian Isham expressed concern that a portion offered to him was in land not money since it 'makes it uncertain, and pretty difficult to know the real value of it, being in a distant country'. He intended, if the negotiation succeeded, to sell the land defray his debts and buy land in Northamptonshire. Eventually, the negotiations collapsed over failure to reach a satisfactory financial agreement.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

The squirearchy found that providing for younger children, whether by will, marriage settlement, or gift was complicated. They had to balance the needs and

⁹⁹ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 75. Rebecca Probert, *Marriage, Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 212. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, pp. 171-172. Whyman, *Sociability and Power*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁰ NRO, IC2145, *Isham Correspondence*, 12 May, 1718 and IC2146, May 6, 1719, Sir Justinian Isham to his son Justinian.

interests of: individual children against those of their estates; heirs against those of younger children; sons against daughters; current expenditure against future costs; estate integrity and patrilineal inheritance against fairness and equality. Underlying these issues for the lesser gentry was the certainty that finite resources made it almost impossible to satisfy all interests.

Most parents had specific aims: for eldest sons, they wanted a 'good' marriage to enhance estate wealth and secure the succession; for daughters, a 'good' marriage, at the lowest cost to the estate; for younger sons, to establish them in a trade or profession so that they were self-supporting and were no longer a burden on the estate. Different aims led to different levels of provision. Eldest sons were guaranteed succession to the family estate and were therefore better prospects in the marriage-market than their brothers and sisters. Apart from maintenance and education, and perhaps an annual allowance, the main costs of providing for an eldest son came at marriage, which brought the future ongoing cost to an estate of the jointure. This was intended to support the new couple until they inherited the estate and eventually provide income for a widow should she survive her husband. Provision for other children took the form of a portion, which was their share of family wealth. Portions were often payable at age 21, or for daughters at marriage. A younger son's portion often paid for training or entry into a profession, but a daughter's portion was a bargaining counter in the marriage-market. Initially portions were bequests in a father's will, but by the eighteenth century they were more normally specified in the parents' marriage settlement. This replaced uncertainty with certainty and allowed a father to know the future costs to his estate.

Squires, with limited resources, had to make provision for their children but also preserve estate integrity. Many parents, wishing to give generous support to younger children, did not want to defraud their eldest son of his inheritance. The resulting differential provision affected a child's marital prospects, since the proportion of family wealth reserved for the eldest son was considerably greater than that given to other children. The eldest son's social status was secured but younger sons might be unable to retain gentry status if they had a small portion and low status employment. A portion might give a younger son a start in life but his future depended on his own efforts and the possible good fortune in securing a wealthy wife. Employment was generally more important for younger sons than

marriage, causing them to defer marriage to later in life than their oldest brother or their sisters. Daughters generally had to choose between marriage and remaining single. Failure to attract a husband meant a life-time of dependence and increasing poverty for many squirearchy daughters. When marrying daughters, fathers had to consider their long-term interests and ensure their independence and security in widowhood.

Marriage and marriage-making cannot be separated from provision made by parents for their children. Lesser gentry, as a social group with ambition and status but limited resources, inevitably used the provision it made to meet different aims. Eldest sons usually had good marital prospects. Younger sons were in a less certain and more disadvantaged position. Parents were usually more concerned with the early disposal of daughters in marriage than with the marriages of younger sons, whose marriages often therefore received less attention, support and encouragement. The next two chapters show how squirearchy parents used the provision they made for their children to pursue effective marriage-making strategies for daughters and to enable younger sons to become self-sufficient and self-supporting.

Chapter Six: Strategies for younger sons

Introduction

The financial position of younger sons was largely dictated by primogeniture which meant they did not receive the same provision as older brothers who were destined to inherit the family's estates and wealth. Consequently, gentry younger sons often could not compete effectively in an increasingly expensive marriage-market. Limited family resources made this a real issue for squirearchy younger sons who had relatively small portions. This made it almost impossible to purchase entry into the higher ranks of trade and the professions or to compete for 'good' marriages.

Demographic changes in the early eighteenth century reduced the number of younger sons in the sample families. This may have been because several eldest sons in earlier generations married heiresses from families with a history of producing girls rather than boys and so were less likely to produce. Sons of their own to secure the succession. The shortage of sons in the sample families may therefore have been a genetic consequence of 'successful' marriages with brides having a propensity to produce females rather than males.

The sources show a decrease in the size of the sample families after 1680, reflected most clearly in a reduced number of younger sons surviving to marriageable age. The evidence is patchy but indicates declining nuptiality rates and later age at first marriage for younger sons. However, far from following the expected downward social spiral, many younger sons in the sample maintained social status and even accumulated property through marriage.¹ The demography of younger sons in the sample families broadly matches the national pattern as defined by historians.²

An ideal lesser gentry family was one with sufficient sons to continue the family name but not so many that parents were unable to make adequate provision for them all.³ Squirearchy younger sons were financially disadvantaged in the

¹ H. J. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650-1950* (Oxford, 1994), p. 166.

² Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (abridged edition, London, 1979), pp. 42, 242-243.

³ Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (abridged edition, Oxford, 1986), p. 120.

eighteenth century when compared to their older brothers. The adoption of the strict settlement caused a deterioration in their expected financial position, seriously affecting their prospects of marriage. The strict settlement progressively reduced the amount of land available for alienation, meaning that it was increasingly difficult to make generous provision for younger sons. The traditional view is that disparity of provision created rivalry and hostility between an older brother and his siblings, but this does not seem to have happened in the sample families, except when remarriage led to tension between half-siblings.⁴ Several of the younger sons in the sample inherited the family estate after the childless death of an older brother, but two families ended through lack of younger sons to form cadet branches.

Some younger sons in the sample families had difficulty in securing brides. This led then to a higher age at first marriage than for either their older brothers or sisters. The marriages of younger sons may have been of less importance than those of their older brothers for estate prosperity but their marriages did matter since it was always possible for them to inherit through force of circumstance. This chapter will show that, despite apparent disadvantages, a number of younger sons did marry well and so retained gentry status. Family and friends played an important role in suggesting potential partners for younger sons as well as for heirs. Many younger sons in the sample married the daughters of neighbours or near relatives but, contrary to the national pattern, few married wives of lower social status than themselves. Several married more successfully than their position in the family hierarchy might have suggested was likely or possible.

The number and proportion of younger sons who were life-long bachelors increased towards the end of the seventeenth century, both nationally and in the sample. Many had to choose between marriage to social and economic inferiors or remaining celibate. The national increase in the number of gentry bachelors provoked concern about national prosperity. Parents of heiresses feared that the increase in the proportion of single men threatened the rise of fortune hunters, who were traditionally associated with gentry younger sons. Such fears were emphasised by the easy availability of legal clandestine marriages, until they were ended by the 1753 Marriage Act. This Act increased elopement and created resentment among some younger sons who saw it as a further restriction on their marital opportunities.

⁴ Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* (London, 1994), pp. 51, 86-87.

Even though life-long bachelor numbers increased, there is little direct evidence in the sample of fortune hunters, clandestine marriages or elopement.

In the seventeenth century finance was a major influence in gentry marriage-making, helping to determine age at first marriage and the social and economic status of possible partners. Although many younger sons were poorly endowed they were often allowed greater freedom than their sisters or elder brothers in choice of bride. Those younger sons who settled in towns benefitted from the urban environment and new forms of sociability which allowed them to meet eligible young women.⁵ Dudley Ryder provides evidence to support this claim, but there is little direct corroborative support in the sample correspondence. However, the frequency of geographically endogamous relationships and inter-family unions in the sample of families raises some doubt about the influence of urban sociability on marriage-making for this particular selection of younger sons.

1. Demographic matters⁶

The decrease in the number and proportion of younger sons in the selected Midland families between 1600 and 1820 broadly reflects the national pattern. The main sources for demographic information are family trees, wills, and letters but these are sometimes incomplete or unclear. The Congreve show that genealogical records were sometimes compiled from personal recollections rather than written accounts.⁷ Habakkuk claimed that families needed to know about distant relatives to include them as possible heirs. Family trees, compiled to keep track of possible lines of inheritance, proved to be important for the Barkers in 1707 and, more significantly, for the Congreves in the 1770s.⁸ William Congreve of Shrewsbury, having altered his will to include an Irish cadet branch, explained to a distant relative that 'I have undoubted records which show that you are descended from John, second brother to ... my great grandfather'.⁹ Genealogical collections were mainly concerned with lines of male descent so that the status of some females and younger sons or children who died young were sometimes omitted. Most family trees show trends in

⁵ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, pp. 60, 67.

⁶ See Appendix 1 for family trees.

⁷ SRO, D1057/S, *Congreve Papers*. Notes and letters collected in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries giving details of the family's genealogical record.

⁸ Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, p. 31.

⁹ SRO, D1057/S/17, *Congreve Papers*, no. 2 wrapper. Undated letter from William Congreve of Shrewsbury to John Congreve of Mount Congreve.

family size, the reduction in the number and proportion of younger sons, declining nuptiality rates and failures of male heirs in the senior line. These sources, supplemented with information from wills, help to create a broad picture of family structure.

Concern in most families about the falling number of younger sons, was as much about the succession as about finance. Lack of younger sons, especially in the eighteenth century could create succession crises leading to inheritance by cadet branches. Declining nuptiality and increased celibacy among younger sons resulted in a long-term reduction in the number of available cadet branches which could help secure the succession. Even though family size fell it continued to be important to have a 'reserve' younger son. The number of male births decreased in each of the sample families, resulting in a gender imbalance between 1670 and 1750. Each successive generation saw fewer children born to the sample between 1600 and the early eighteenth century. After 1720 family size remained smaller than it had been previously and showed a significant reduction in the birth and survival of younger sons and a noticeable increase in the number of younger sons who remained single.¹⁰ The sample shows that life-long celibacy in these families was comparable to the national picture. It is unclear whether this was through choice, lack of opportunity, death of a loved partner, or economic circumstance. Sample size means there is insufficient evidence to show that the declining nuptiality among squirearchy younger sons was affected by the adoption of the strict settlement.¹¹

Evidence in the sample about younger sons' age at first marriage or the geographical origin or status of their wives is patchy. However, it does support claims that younger sons who married usually did so later in life than their older brothers. It seems that squirearchy parents did not put the same pressure on younger sons to marry as they did on their heirs. Dudley Ryder repeatedly showed that limited financial expectations meant he must defer marriage until he was well-established in life.¹²

¹⁰ Susan Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: the Cultural World of the Verneys, 1660-1720* (Oxford, 1999), p. 144. Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700* (London, 1984), p. 238. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 42, 242.

¹¹ Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?* p. 71.

¹² William Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder, 1715-1716* (London, 1939), p. 251, 5 June, p. 271, 1 July, pp. 326-327, 30 August, and 12 September, (all 1716).

Nationally, the marriages of younger sons took place later, and more frequently crossed social and geographical divides, than those of their sisters or older brothers.¹³ This pattern is not completely supported by the sample. Abel Barker married a baronet's daughter while his older brother was alive, but unmarried. Augustine Barker married a cousin, the daughter of a long-established Northamptonshire minor landed family, before the death of his bachelor older brother Samuel. Andrew Hackett's marriage to a minor Warwickshire heiress occurred about fifteen years after his older brother's first marriage. Richard Congreve an eighth son married his first wife, the widow of a Staffordshire landowner, the year before his oldest brother married. He married his second wife, who was a minor Welsh heiress, when he was 62.¹⁴ Apart from Abel Barker these younger sons all married within their own social strata. There are no examples in the sample of younger sons marrying below gentry status. Even Hagger Lowe, a London tradesman, married the daughter of a Leicester merchant. Almost two-thirds of younger sons in the sample lived within twenty miles of their future brides.

Age at first marriage for twelve younger sons in the sample can be identified from family trees. The mean age at first marriage for these is 32.5 which is slightly lower than the national mean of about 35. (The corresponding national mean age for daughters is in the mid-twenties).¹⁵ However, if only marriages occurring after 1690 are considered, the mean rises to 35 and so exactly matches the national pattern. The demographic information about younger sons is limited but shows that changes occurred. The key changes were a decrease in the number of younger sons being born and surviving to adulthood and a decline in younger son nuptiality.

2. Family relationships

Primogeniture was an important influence on the marriage-making strategies of the landed gentry.¹⁶ The familial position of younger sons and brothers was often anomalous. Inheritance based on the male line meant that additional sons were

¹³ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 65. Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1500-1800*, vol. 1 (Glasgow, 1997), p. 106. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, p. 166.

¹⁴ See family trees in Appendix 1.

¹⁵ Mary Abbott, *Family Ties: English Families 1540-1920* (London and New York, 1993), p. 56. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 42.

¹⁶ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, p. 51. See chapter 4, pp. 99-100 for a fuller discussion of the importance of primogeniture.

required as 'spare heirs', but at the same time surplus sons were an expensive burden. Joseph Banks was reminded by a relative that 'an encumbrance of a great many brothers and sisters is no small matter'.¹⁷ The education and maintenance of younger sons was an essential but irrecoverable cost.¹⁸

The importance of a 'reserve' heir is shown in the sample families. Squirearchy families committed to male lineal inheritance often saw a younger son or brother succeeding to an estate. Twice the Barker line was preserved by a second son replacing a childless or unmarried older brother. Abel replaced his elder brother in 1647 and in the cadet branch Augustine inherited from his brother in 1683. As his only son had died in 1718, Lisle Hacket was replaced at Moxhull by his younger brother Andrew I. William Congreve, a third son, inherited in 1729 after his two older brothers had died. In 1779, the Congreve estate passed to Richard I, his parents' eighth son. His own second son, Richard II, succeeded his older brother William in 1843. Cromwell Mortimer, a third son, inherited in 1752 after the childless deaths of his two older brothers. Failure to produce sons could complicate inheritance, especially if repeated over successive generations. This happened to the Barkers in 1843 when the line ended because three successive generations had failed to produce younger sons to establish cadet lines.¹⁹ A similar failure of sons is reflected by the number of minor heiresses who married into the sample families.

Younger squirearchy sons often enjoyed greater practical advantages than their sisters. They were usually educated as gentlemen and prepared for suitable employment while second sons might be privileged as reserve heirs.²⁰ However, their marriage prospects were less favourable than those of an older brother or of sisters. Many parents were more concerned with setting up younger sons in a career so that they could be self-supporting than in arranging their marriages, which might prove expensive. Few squires had sufficient disposable wealth to 'invest' in 'buying' a wife of appropriate status for a younger son, except perhaps for a second son.²¹

¹⁷ J. W. F. Hall (ed.), *The Letters and Papers of the Banks Family of Revesby Abbey 1704-1760* Lincoln Record Society, (Lincoln, 1952), p. 3, Letter 3. The Reverend William Steer to Joseph Banks, 29 June, 1710.

¹⁸ Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 87.

¹⁹ See above p. 99.

²⁰ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, p. 86.

²¹ Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, pp. 146, 156. G. E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1963), p. 29. See pp. 137-139 for 'setting up' and providing for younger sons.

Family relations, especially between heirs and younger brothers, could be adversely affected by the differential treatment they received. The unequal distribution of wealth could generate resentment since the heir received a disproportionately large share of the family fortune and other children often only received the equivalent of one year's estate income.²² In 1710 *The Tatler* argued that settlements and portions unfairly removed a father's right to discriminate between his children. The writer suggested that when a man made a marriage settlement he was effectively saying

In full and perfect health ... [and] mind, not knowing which of my children will prove better or worse, I give to my first born ... the bulk of my estate and leave one year's purchase only to each of my younger children, whether they shall be brave or beautiful, modest or honourable ... I hereby promise to employ my judgement no further in the distribution of my worldly goods.²³

The strict settlement contributed to the tension between older and younger sons, especially if children of two marriages were involved. Settlements made it impossible for lesser gentry parents to provide equally for all their offspring.²⁴ This proved to be a problem for John Mortimer's children, who quarrelled over the terms of the different settlements he had made. Most of his wealth was committed to the children of his second marriage leaving little for the children of the third marriage. The bitterness was such that in his will he ignored the two children of his second marriage and the eldest son of his third, leaving all that he could to his three youngest children. Property had to be sold to pay for these bequests, but as John's widow noted in a letter to her son Cromwell, the sale required 'the consent of S.M. [Samuel Mortimer] which you may be sure he will never do'.²⁵

Jane Austen hinted at sibling rivalry in *Sense and Sensibility*. Robert Ferrars, a second son, was his mother's favourite. She made him her heir in place of his brother Edward, whose engagement to Lucy Steele offended her. Robert repeatedly demonstrated condescending contempt for Edward and happily displaced him, at first as the proposed husband of the wealthy Miss Morton and then of Lucy Steele,

²² Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 42.

²³ *The Tatler*, No. 223, 9 September, 1710. [accessed through 17th-18th Century Burney Collection, 21.11.2016]

²⁴ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, pp. 51, 87.

²⁵ LRO, DE107/45, *The Mortimer Papers*. Elizabeth Mortimer to her son Cromwell, 4 March, 1728.

Edward's fiancée. Austen implied there was jealousy and resentment on the part of the younger brother because of Edward's privileged position as eldest son, while he, the younger son, was forced to rely on his mother's good will.²⁶

Evidence from the Barker and Congreve correspondence shows that sibling rivalry was not always an issue between younger brothers and the heir. Sir Abel and his younger brother Thomas maintained very close links, jointly purchased the Lyndon estate and together built Lyndon Hall. Close relationships existed between the Congreve brothers in the 1740s, shown in their regular correspondence when widely dispersed by military postings or trading missions. William, the head of the family, regularly sought advice from Charles and Richard and delegated the management of his affairs to Richard, his youngest brother. The tone of these letters shows a close, trusting and often warm relationship. They seem to have been less close to their sister Anne, especially when embroiled in her marriage negotiations. William criticised her selfishness and her lack of concern at the expense her settlement imposed on her brothers. He wrote 'I intend to be firm [to preserve] the future peace and harmony of our family, which ... has been disturbed ... on my sister's account'.²⁷

Dudley Ryder enjoyed an excellent relationship with his father and had good relations with his brothers. His father often discussed family matters with him. Dudley wrote, '[We] talked ... He was now very much at a loss for money and could not tell what to do upon that account'. Dudley said his father showed him 'an account of his whole estate ... [and] he advised with me about brother William's affair and seemed to be in great perplexity what to do'.²⁸

Good relations between family members meant that parents, siblings and other relatives frequently offered advice about courtship and marriage. Though widely dispersed, the Lowes were a close-knit family who corresponded regularly. Few of Jeffrey Lowe's letters have survived, but it is evident he took interest in his siblings' activities and regularly offered or was asked for advice. In 1810, Hagger, telling him of his proposed marriage, said he would 'be glad to receive any hints or advice ...

²⁶ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (London, 1811, London, 1996), pp. 208, 246-247.

²⁷ SRO, D1057/M/1/3/33, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve from Dublin to his brother Richard, 11 February, 1747.

²⁸ Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder*, pp. 326, 369-370, 12 September and 27 November, 1716.

which thou may apprehend likely to conduce to my advantage'.²⁹ The Williamsons also corresponded regularly. Both Tidy and Talbot identified possible brides for Edmund, encouraged his courtship and suggested the qualities to look for in a wife.³⁰ Dudley Ryder's relatives regularly counselled him about courtship and tried to discourage undesirable relationships. Mr Ryder criticised Mrs Marshall as 'a very clumsy woman' and refused to provide financial support if Dudley married her before he was established in his career.³¹ Nicholas Blundell advised his younger brother in Virginia to 'consider well on [marriage] and be sure of something considerable before you enter into matrimony'. Later he wrote to Richard's widow 'I hope you will be so kind not to settle anything from [your son] which ought to be his by right ... if [you] marry again'.³² Here Nicholas implicitly recognised his lack of authority but also the responsibility he felt for his nephew.

A second son, as 'reserve' heir, was often treated differently to other younger sons. This was more apparent in the sample in the seventeenth than the eighteenth century. Abel Barker, a second son, received considerably more property from his father than his younger brother Thomas. Andrew Hacket I was given a small estate in Lincolnshire when he married, but his younger brother John simply received a benefice.³³ Sometimes second sons, like John Addyes Hacket, Frances Benyon Hacket or William Banks were made heirs of maternal uncles or received land brought by their mother as part of her portion. This gave them some advantage in the marriage market and qualified them, as minor gentry, enabling them to propose to women of comparable social status.

Younger squirearchy sons were usually forced by their financial situation to make their own way in the world. Credulous, in *Sir Patient Fancy* jokingly complained that 'my father ... left me a small younger brother's portion'. His message was that

²⁹ WRO, CR2926/7, *The Lowe Correspondence*. Hagger Lowe from Southwark to his brother J. B. L., 9th of 3rd month, 1810.

³⁰ F. J. Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters 1748-1765* Bedford Historical Record Society, (Streatley, 1954), various letters.

³¹ Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder*, pp. 287, 326, 12 September and 7 October, 1716.

³² Margaret Blundell (ed.), *Blundell's Diary and Letter Book, 1702-1728* (Liverpool, 1952), p. 45. Nicholas Blundell to his brother Richard, in Virginia, 2 September, 1704 and p. 48, Nicholas to Richard Blundell's widow, (nd).

³³ LRO, DG11/995, *Conant Papers*, Probate copy of Abel Barker's will, dated 26 March, 1637. PROTNA, Prob11/508/332, The will of Sir Andrew Hacket, May 1709.

younger sons expected and were entitled to far less from their parents than an heir.³⁴ To retain gentry status younger sons had either to marry well, inherit property, or establish themselves in the upper levels of public service, trade or the professions. Gustavus Hacket, the younger brother of Bishop John Hacket followed his father's trade as a tailor and became a member of the London Merchant Taylors, which established him as a member of London's 'big' bourgeoisie. Some, like Francis Congreve, were successful overseas traders, while others like Dudley Ryder became successful lawyers and politicians. In the sample Augustine Barker and Cromwell Mortimer inherited their family estates after their older brother's death; William Congreve of Shrewsbury and John Addyes Hacket both inherited estates after the death of a relative. Ralph Congreve's wife settled her Aldermaston estate on him after her death. However, many younger sons in the sample do not seem to be reflect the national pattern, since few made poor matches and none married social inferiors.

The position of many squirearchy younger sons was uncertain and at times precarious. Needed to secure lineal succession they were an expensive and irrecoverable financial burden. Those in the sample appear generally to have maintained good relations with their fathers and with older brothers, but conflict was most likely to develop following remarriage, when a father had commitments to two different families. Those who married usually retained gentry status and sometimes accumulated wealth and property. Second sons were sometimes privileged more than their younger brothers. Younger sons, even when adults, were subject to the advice and guidance of parents and older brothers. A successful marriage remained important as the easiest way to retain or enhance gentry status.

3. Finding partners

As previously shown, younger sons were considerably less well-placed to take advantage of the marriage-market than their older brothers. They were generally less able to compete for wealthy wives, although some of those in the sample did secure 'good' marriages. Younger sons of the squirearchy who married did so for various reasons, including the desire for a companion and to secure their financial

³⁴ Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy* (London, 1676), in Kathryn Rogers (ed.) *The Meridian Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth Century Plays by Women* (London, 1994), p. 50, Act 2, scene 2.

and social position. Family members often helped identify potential brides and conducted negotiations. Several younger sons in the sample married relatives or neighbours whom they probably knew well. Evidence in the sample challenges the view that many younger sons were compelled to choose brides from lower social strata and fails to show that their marriages were often geographically exogamous.

Younger sons' matrimonial prospects were affected and shaped by finance. In 1763, *The Universal Museum* complained that parents gave 'the whole estate to the eldest male branch, [so that] the younger ones become disabled to marry'.³⁵ Without sound finances it was difficult to attract a suitable bride and establish a separate home. Dudley Ryder was concerned about his own marriage prospects. He knew that an early marriage would harm his prospects unless he could secure a wealthy wife. In June 1716, fearing that his behaviour might have implied a proposal he wrote,

My circumstances were not proper at all for matrimony at present. If [Mrs Matthews] has but a small fortune it would ruin me to marry her, keep me low in the world and prevent my rise. And if she has a considerable fortune ... I cannot suppose my father can or will give me enough to answer [her] £2,000 fortune without the addition of a business or employment, but here comes in the balance of my love and inclination to her, and I did not find that so strong as to be an equivalent for all the rest.³⁶

Later, reiterating his desire to marry, he stressed the imprudence of such a step.

As I am in no business it would be madness for me to go to marry under a considerable fortune. I could indeed myself be contented with a little and so agreeable a wife as her, but I don't see how it is possible for me with what my father will give me and her fortune, which I don't find is likely to be above £1,000, to maintain as genteelly as she has hitherto lived and will expect still if she marries.³⁷

³⁵ *The Universal Museum or Gentleman and Ladies Polite Magazine of History and Literature for 1762*, volume 2, issue 2. [accessed through Eighteenth Century Journals, 22.11.2016]

³⁶ Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder*, p. 251, 5 June, 1716.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 271, 11 July, 1716.

Love or passion, however powerful, could not compensate for lack of employment or fortune. Many lesser gentry younger sons were forced to defer marriage until they were well-established in employment and could afford to support a wife and family. Hopes of an early 'good', that is a financially and socially sound, marriage, when wealth was a dominant element in marriage-making, usually depended on the generosity of parental provision.

This difficulty is highlighted in fiction. Jenny Jessamy's friend was forced into an unhappy marriage after her father, 'a younger son, [with] no other dependence than a post in one of the public offices ... [had] lived up to the height of his income' leaving her without a fortune.³⁸ Mrs Harley, widow of a destitute West Indian merchant, told Emma Courtney that 'his two younger sons and three daughters [were] left wholly unprovided for'.³⁹ Most fathers wanted to deal fairly with their younger children but could not because of limited resources. It was always difficult for them to calculate how much of an estate's wealth should be set aside for younger children, without imposing too great a burden on the estate or impoverishing the heir.⁴⁰

Living in London was ideal for mixing with society and meeting a variety of young women. Twenty-five-year-old Dudley Ryder easily met many potential brides that he wanted to marry, but knew that his father could not, or would not, provide the portion he needed to attract and support a suitable wife. After a family meeting to discuss his brother's marriage he noted his father's difficulty in raising the necessary portion 'he not having money enough at command that he must either sell some of his houses or give [William] some of them'.⁴¹

Younger sons, resident in Midland towns, could benefit from similar opportunities as Ryder. In one sense they were more privileged than their brothers who were posted overseas as traders or served in the armed forces. Richard Congreve, as bishop's chaplain, was based in Worcester and had easy access to a varied social life compared to his brothers: Francis was a merchant based in Cairo, William a soldier in Minorca, and Ralph, a merchant seaman. Richard's opportunities to meet eligible young women were much greater than theirs. The sample correspondence indicates

³⁸ Eliza Haywood, *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (ed.), John Richetti, in *Eighteenth Century Novels by Women* (Kentucky, 2005), p. 118.

³⁹ Mary Hays, *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (London, 1759, London, 1987), p. 52.

⁴⁰ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, pp. 60, 87, 88.

⁴¹ Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder*, p. 293, 12 August, 1716.

different ways in which future brides were met but none specifically refer to the marriage-market of assemblies, parties or the social season. Supporting evidence can however be found in the diaries and correspondence of the Williamsons, Dudley Ryder, Abigail Gawthorn, Syllas Neville or the Wynne sisters and in the rapidly growing eighteenth century genre of courtship fiction.

Richard Congreve's first marriage seems to have been based on sympathy, friendship and self-interest which developed as he supported the widow of his close friend William Byrche in her bereavement. Byrche had been Chancellor to the bishop of Worcester and owner of Leacroft near Cannock. Early in 1742, shortly after Byrche's death, Richard expressed admiration for how 'poor Mrs Byrche bears this great misfortune'.⁴² Over the next few months he grew increasingly concerned that her 'uninterrupted sorrow must needs injure her health' and urged her to take greater care of her own well-being for the sake of her children.⁴³ At first his letters give no indication of anything other than friendship and sympathy.⁴⁴ Yet by March 1745, almost three years after Byrche died, they were married, and he had taken up the Leacroft benefice. This was probably in Mrs Byrche's gift. A friend from Shropshire, surprised to hear that they were married, wrote that Richard 'spoke of her without the prejudice or passion of a lover'. Her first husband's family were not enthusiastic about the marriage. John Byrche, her brother-in-law, congratulated them, but in the most lukewarm terms.⁴⁵

The reasons for this marriage are not explained, but Richard's situation may hold the key. He was aged 28 when Elizabeth Byrche was widowed and had four older brothers ahead of him in the line of succession. At least two of them were actively pursuing marriage. It seemed unlikely that he would ever inherit the Congreve property and only had his income as a parish priest and the expectation of a small portion of £150, payable from his mother's jointure after her death. Mrs Byrche

⁴² SRO, D1057/M/17a, *Congreve Papers*, p. 41. Richard Congreve from Worcester to William Congreve in Minorca, 15 February, 1742.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, D1057/M/17a, p. 45. Richard Congreve from Shrewsbury to Bishop Hough at Worcester, 3 March, 1742. D1057/M/17a, p. 44. Richard Congreve to Mrs Byrche, 25 March, 1742.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, D1057/M/17a, p. 48, Richard Congreve to William Congreve, 20 June, 1742. D1057/M/17a, p.56, Richard Congreve to William Congreve, 4 August, 1742. D1057/M/17a, p. 58, Richard Congreve to William Congreve, 24 August, 1742.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, D1057/M/13/15, R. Hind from Christ Church to Richard Congreve, 4 March, 1745. D1057/M/16/2, Ralph Congreve from London to Richard Congreve, 5 March, 1745. D1057/M/13/16, W. Adams in Shropshire to Richard Congreve, 7 March, 1745. D1057/M/15/2, John Byrche from Birberry to Miss Byrche, 8 February, 1745.

apparently was devastated by her husband's death but had received a large monetary bequest after her father's death in 1742 and had control of the Leacroft estate and income during her son's minority. She and Richard seem to have had no plans to marry when she returned to Leacroft, but it is possible that she wanted a protector, companion and step-father for her three children.⁴⁶ Richard, who was available and a friend of her late husband's, probably seemed a safe option. He may have seen the opportunity to improve his status by marrying a wealthy widow and occupying her country estate.

Some marriages were organised through third parties and it is not always clear whether a couple had met before negotiations began, despite close geographical proximity. In 1646, Abel Barker, heir presumptive to his elder brother, married a wife chosen for him by his mother. Abel does not appear to have contacted Anne Burton personally until almost six months after negotiations began. There is no evidence in surviving correspondence of strong feelings between the couple. This marriage was probably more about creating useful political and social connections than about romantic or personal attachment. It may be significant that though seven years younger than her, he was heir to a sickly childless brother and therefore potentially an attractive marriage prospect.⁴⁷

Some younger sons' marriages were with families to whom they were related by affinity or consanguinity. The sixth son of John Congreve (1636-1663) and Mary Niccol married his mother's relative, Catherine, in 1718. Catherine's brother married Anne Sneyd of Keele, a neighbour and distant relative of the Congreves. Charles Walter Congreve never married but in 1742 had been negotiating marriage with a Miss Fitzherbert, a descendant of his great-grandmother's family.⁴⁸ A similar pattern existed in the Barker family. Augustine, Samuel Barker's second son, married his distant cousin, Thomasin Tryst, the great-great-granddaughter his own great-grandfather. John Edward Conant, eldest son of Sarah Barker's niece, married

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, D1057/M/I/17a pp. 47-50. Richard Congreve to William, 20 June 1742.

⁴⁷ LRO, DG11/4, *Conant Papers*, letter 40. Elizabeth Barker to Sir Thomas Burton, 1645. Letter 41, Sir Thomas Burton to Elizabeth Barker, 26 February 1646. Letter 42, Elizabeth Barker to Sir Thomas Burton in London, 2 April, 1646. Letter 43, Abel Barker to Mrs Anne Burton in London, 25 June, 1646.

⁴⁸ SRO, D1057/S/17/15, *Congreve Papers*, genealogical note about Niccol family. D1057/S/17/29, note on family genealogy. D1057/S/17/30, the lineage of William Congreve of Aldermaston. D1057/S/17/56, letter from Henry Heylin of Pentrefelin, Montgomeryshire. D1057/M/I/3/28, William Congreve from Minorca to Richard Congreve, 20 October, 1742.

Sarah's great-granddaughter Catherine Brown, in 1817. Andrew Hacket II married Mary Scott of Little Aston and their second son, John, married her cousin, Jane Scott of Great Barr. Robert Clavering's first wife was Richard Congreve's sister while his second wife was Richard's step-daughter.⁴⁹

Shared religious belief and personal attraction was another basis for marriage. Hagger Lowe, a second son and tradesman living in Southwark, married Tabitha Burgess from Leicester in 1811. Both were Quakers and their two families knew each other and were possibly related.⁵⁰ As members of the Quaker community they probably knew each other from attending the annual Quaker meeting, despite the distance between their homes. Hagger had secretly admired Tabitha for several years, courted her for a long time and had once been rejected by her because of her illness. His poor economic circumstances and her poor health caused him to delay a second proposal, but they did eventually marry.⁵¹ This marriage was based on personal attraction, prior acquaintance and shared faith. They were of comparable social and economic status and both families welcomed the marriage.

The sample correspondence says little about the qualities that younger sons looked for in wives, but Edmund Williamson's correspondents outlined the characteristics that they regarded as essential. Tidy Russell thought that her brother needed a young, obedient and biddable wife. She praised a recently remarried friend whose young wife had no fortune and thanked 'God that he is master of his own house, which he was not before'. She commended Susannah Hanmer as 'an excellent manager ... [who] has the command of everything [except fortune] and manages everything'.⁵²

Dudley Ryder told his wife, whom he married when he was 44,

⁴⁹ See family trees, Appendix 1,

⁵⁰ WRO, CR2926/31, *The Lowe Correspondence*. Anna Lowe from Stanwell Mills to Jeffrey Bevington Lowe, 5th of 2nd month, 1813. CR2926/29, Anna Lowe from Pooley Street to Jeffrey Bevington Lowe, 30th of 12th month, 1810.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, CR2926/7. Hagger Lowe from Southwark to his brother Jeffrey Bevington Lowe, 9th of 3rd month, 1810.

⁵² Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters*. pp. 26, 32-33. Tidy Russel to Edmund Williamson, December, 1757.

I look on matrimony ... as a partnership wherein our very passions and affections, our hopes and fears, our inclinations and aversions, all our good and ill qualities are brought into one common stock.⁵³

Edmund himself said he wanted 'an agreeable woman for a wife' but later thought it essential to have a wife whose 'temper ... [is] meek, humble and modest'.⁵⁴ Individuals had their own separate ideals, but these extracts suggest that obedience and submission were highly valued. Tidy Russell clearly cherished birth and some fortune, whereas Ryder was more interested in companionship and a pleasant character, although as shown previously, he also thought a good fortune was essential.

Younger sons met their wives in various ways and at different locations but family ties were often important when searching for marriage partners. Most younger sons in the sample married women from their own locality, so it is probable that they knew their future wives through family connections and social activities long before marriage was considered. Apart from Francis Raynsford and Hester Isham, the sample correspondence does not provide direct evidence to support this view, but it seems probable that proximity and familial relationships played a significant role in partner selection.

Families and friends were as involved in identifying young women, arranging introductions, and investigating their social and economic background for younger sons as they were for heirs. This was certainly the experience of Edmund Williamson who wanted a second wife but was usually content to leave matters in the hands of his brother and sister rather than take the initiative himself. They recommended suitable young women, including Susannah Hanmer. She had already made her own enquiries about Williamson after she had seen him at the Bletchley Assembly. A mutual London friend recommended another candidate, and Tidy strongly recommended Mary Tipping, because of her youth, respectable birth and education. Mary was 19 and Edmund 47 when they married.⁵⁵ There is no

⁵³ Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder*, p. 45. Extract from a letter to his wife (nd).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 55. Diary entries for 30 June and 14 July, 1715.

⁵⁵ Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters 1748-1765*, pp. 32-33. Tidy Russell to Edmund Williamson, 19 September, 1758; pp. 34-35, Tidy Russell to Edmund Williamson, 17 October, 1758; p. 59, Talbot Williamson to Edmund Williamson, January 1760; pp. 53-54, Tidy Russell to Edmund Williamson, 22 July, 1760.

indication that it was a match based on affection, fortune or prior acquaintance more than on convenience.

There was no guarantee that a marriage would result once a potential partner was identified. Edmund was refused by Susannah Hanmer because of her 'indifference, or rather reluctance, to change [her] condition' and her desire for mutual regard in a marriage. Edmund had presumably failed to demonstrate this. She was then aged 34 with a fortune of only £1,000 and little real prospect of more. Even though her age meant that her marriage prospects were rapidly reducing she refused an offer which must have been financially and socially attractive. According to family tradition as recorded in Sarah Barker's memoir, Abel Barker's younger brother Thomas 'had thoughts of marrying [a neighbour] ... but took a disgust at seeing the lady wash her hands awkwardly and broke off the match'.⁵⁶ The failure of this projected marriage must have had more serious reasons than Sarah suggested. Perhaps she rejected Thomas, a prosperous bachelor, and he offered this explanation to the family to preserve his pride and reputation. Charles Walter Congreve, archdeacon of Armagh, aged 35 and heir presumptive to the Congreve estates, was also a potentially attractive marriage prospect. His proposed marriage to Miss Fitzherbert did not occur, probably because her recently dead father left her in 'circumstances [which] were much embarrassed'. No other reason than financial difficulties are suggested by the correspondence to explain this disappointment.⁵⁷

Some younger sons, despite their financially disadvantaged position, did marry profitably and retain gentry status. The easiest way to achieve this was through marriage to an heiress or wealthy widow.⁵⁸ This course was followed by several of the Congreve younger sons. One younger son and two younger grandsons of John Congreve and Mary Niccol, would have expected under normal circumstances to be landless. They each gained property and retained status through marriage. William, John's sixth son, gained property in London and North Wales through his marriage to Catherine Niccol, joint heiress of a 'Levant merchant'. Ralph Congreve inherited Aldermaston after the death of his wife, Lady Stawell. Richard Congreve's marriage

⁵⁶ LRO, DG11/1, *Conant Papers*, letter 148a. Memorandum probably compiled in 1745 by Sarah Barker.

⁵⁷ SRO, D1057/M/1/3/28, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve from Minorca to Richard Congreve, 20 October, 1742.

⁵⁸ B. A. Holderness, 'Widows in Pre-Industrial Society: An Essay upon their Economic Functions', in R. M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Lifecycle* (London, 1984), pp. 428.

to Elizabeth Byrche increased his income and status and gave him control of Leacroft while his step-son was a minor. His second marriage in 1776 brought him property in North Wales, even though he was not yet the Congreve heir.

Younger sons of the squirearchy were often poorly placed for marriage-making. They could easily meet prospective brides but were often unable to match the fortune required by the parents of a desirable prospective bride, at least until later in life. Younger sons in the sample who married generally did so later than their older brothers, but often chose women from their own social group and locality. Several married into families with whom they already had strong links. Some younger sons in the sample did not marry but remained life-long bachelors. It is not clear from the sources whether this was from choice or necessity. The available evidence throws some light on what younger sons looked for in brides but there is some indication that good birth, a comfortable fortune and a pleasant submissive character were regarded as desirable.

4. Bachelors and fortune hunters

In the early eighteenth century, the sample families saw a decline in the nuptiality of younger sons and an increase in their mean age at first marriage, resulting in an increase in long-term or life-long bachelors. The sample reflects this national pattern. Contemporary writers argued that action was required to reverse this undesirable trend. Writers of advice literature and fiction suggested that many younger sons were fortune hunters, seeking to improve their financial and social status by seducing and eloping with young heiresses. Many parents shared this concern, fearing that it was encouraged by the ease of arranging perfectly legal clandestine marriages.

Attempts in the early part of the century to close this legal loophole culminated in the 1753 Marriage Act which required the consent of parents or guardians for the marriage of minors. Critics of the act, including younger sons, felt that it was an unreasonable attempt to limit their marital opportunities. Fiction writers suggested that the Act encouraged elopement to Scotland or France. There is no evidence from the sample families to suggest that eloping increased. It is possible that some marriages, especially of Congreve younger sons, might be described as fortune

hunting. This may explain why several took pains to emphasise that they were not motivated by financial gain.

Attitudes to single men and women differed in the early eighteenth century. Single women were increasingly derided as 'old maids' but comments about single men were usually mild and rarely negative.⁵⁹ Male celibacy was acceptable but marriage was actively encouraged, partly through fear that population decline would reduce England's economic and military competitiveness. In 1710, *The Tatler* was concerned that 'restraints on matrimony take away the advantage we should otherwise have over other countries'. The writer believed that encouraging marriage 'would contribute to filling the nation' more effectively than foreign immigration.⁶⁰ Many bachelors were probably younger sons, unable to marry because of their financial and economic circumstances.⁶¹ Henry Fielding's *Covent Garden Journal* of 1752 claimed that only heirs could afford to marry, arguing that

If elder brothers only are able to marry what becomes of the interest of the public which is so greatly concerned in this matter, that the wisest of legislators have thought proper to encourage marriage.⁶²

Fielding's contemporary and rival Samuel Richardson explained why bachelor numbers had increased. In *Sir Charles Grandison*. Harriet Bryan said to a friend

I believe there are more bachelors now in England, by many thousands than were a few years ago: and ... will every year increase. The luxury of the age will account a good deal for this; and the turn our sex take in undomesticating themselves for a good deal more.⁶³

A decade later *The Universal Museum* argued that since younger sons were given smaller portions than their older brothers they were effectively priced out of the marriage-market for their own social class but prevented by social prejudices from

⁵⁹ Susan Lanser, 'Singular Politics: The Rise of the British Nation and the Production of the Old Maid', in Judith Bennett and Amy Froide (eds.), *Single Women in the European Past 1250-1800* (Philadelphia, 1998), p. 306.

⁶⁰ *The Tatler*, no. 223, Sunday 9 September to Tuesday 12 September, 1710. [Burney]

⁶¹ Abbott, *Family Ties*, p. 56. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 40.

⁶² *The Covent Garden Journal*, no. 57, Saturday 1 August, 1752, p. 66. [accessed through Eighteenth Century Journals, 21.12.2016]

⁶³ Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison*, p. 231, book 2, chapter 2.

marrying women of lower status, forcing many who would have liked to marry to remain single.⁶⁴ Dudley Ryder's attitude to the competing attractions of marriage and celibacy was ambivalent.

The sorrows and cares and burdens to which [matrimony] exposes a man don't seem to be sufficiently balanced by the joys and pleasures one can expect from it. ... I find a strong inclination towards it ... from a natural tendency ... to think of a pretty creature concerned in me, being my most intimate friend [and] constant companion ... [to] take care of me. ... [But] why should I think of [marriage] when it would expose us both to want?⁶⁵

His other concern was that if he remained celibate he would be the last of his line. He concluded that celibacy was less desirable than marriage, even though marriage had its disadvantages.

The miseries and inconveniences that attended [matrimony] were much greater than the advantages of it [but] ... I could not suppose myself capable of being completely happy without it. I cannot be easy to think that my life shall terminate with myself.⁶⁶

Sylas Neville (1741-1840), a single Norfolk gentleman, often considered marriage but preferred to remain single even though he complained about the miserable 'situation of a bachelor ... deprived of those real joys which a virtuous and well-educated wife affords'.⁶⁷ Both writers recognised that marriage offered companionship, comfort, and a form of immortality through children, but it could also lead to unbearable difficulties. Financial problems combined with marriage could prevent social and material progress.

These comments offer a tentative explanation for the number of Barker children who remained single in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The Barker's cadet branch experienced financial difficulties caused in part by lengthy jointures and debt. The wives of those heirs who married only had small dowries so that their

⁶⁴ *The Universal Museum for 1763*, vol. 2, issue 2. [Eighteenth Century Journals]

⁶⁵ Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder*, pp. 309-310, 30 August, 1716.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224, April 20, 1716.

⁶⁷ Basil Cozens-Hardy (ed.), *The Diary of Sylas Neville*, pp. 85-86, 22 November, 1770.

children in turn also received small portions, making it difficult for them to compete in an increasingly expensive marriage-market. After 1720, John Congreve's children paid the price of a bankrupted and resettled estate with reduced and end-loaded portions, amounting to only £150 each for younger sons and £500 each for their two sisters, payable when their mother died. They were not transferable if a child died before the portion fell due, so were not shared out between the survivors. Unsurprisingly, only two out of five sons and one out of two daughters married.

Employment prospects for younger sons of the lesser gentry were more uncertain than for those of the wealthy since their parents lacked the resources or contacts needed to set them up in the higher ranks of the professions or trade. This further limited their opportunities to make good marriages.⁶⁸ The desire to retain gentry status through marriage may explain why some younger sons were prepared to marry older women, especially widows, provided they had a substantial fortune.⁶⁹ Significantly, William, Richard and Ralph Congreve, each of whom was older than the norm when they married, chose to marry widows.

The desire of younger sons to make a good marriage was often of concern to the wealthy parents of daughters, who feared the threat from fortune hunters. This was a major influence behind the 1753 Marriage Act, which was passed to end clandestine, or 'private', marriages and reassert parental control.⁷⁰ John Shebbeare wrote *The Marriage Act* in 1754 as a direct attack on the new law. In it he argued that the Act repressed the rights and freedom of young people and enabled fathers to force unwelcome marriages on their children. One character, justifying his elopement with an heiress, said 'This Marriage Bill will have very fatal effects ... it has had some already, from what I know of the matter.'⁷¹ In another chapter Shebbeare described an impoverished gentleman who 'determined to marry some lady of fortune, which might ... enable him to support the honour of his family... With this intent, he addressed and married a maiden lady of great fortune'.⁷² Talbot Williamson showed a very real concern about fortune hunters. He urged Edmund to marry and have a son to inherit the family estate, arguing that otherwise Edmund's

⁶⁸ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, pp. 25-26.

⁶⁹ Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?* p. 165.

⁷⁰ Rebecca Probert, *Marriage, Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 210, 267.

⁷¹ John Shebbeare, *The Marriage Act* (London, 1754, reprinted New York, 1974), vol. 1, p. 173, chapter 29.

⁷² *Ibid.*, volume 2, p. 191, chapter 64.

daughter would be 'esteemed a fortune, and therefore likely to be sought after ... and so away for Scotland in spite of the Marriage Act'.⁷³ He identified several common parental fears: that a daughter was ruled by emotions and would behave irrationally; that heiresses were vulnerable to fortune hunters; and that young women in love could elope, despite the Marriage Act.

Fiction frequently provided detailed descriptions of clandestine marriages and showed why they were attractive to fortune-hunters and eloping couples but opposed by fathers. Novelists often explored problems associated with clandestine marriages. The question of how to establish the legitimacy of a clandestine marriage is a central theme in *Evelina*, whose mother

rashly, and without a witness, consented to a private marriage ... [her husband] infamously burnt the certificate of their marriage and denied that they had ever been united! She endeavoured to procure proofs of her marriage - but in vain.⁷⁴

In 1753, Haywood described how easily such marriages could be arranged. A young man went to a 'clergyman, who having licences already by him ... promised to bring a friend with him, who should officiate in giving the lady's hand', but the lady said she was already married because

Captain La Val, persuaded me ... to go with him to Mayfair chapel, - where a man in a black coat read something over us, - it was the marriage ceremony I think; ... [Now] the business is to get the foolish marriage dissolved; which I think may easily be done, especially as there were no witnesses.⁷⁵

A father might disinherit a son who married secretly and without consent. Roderick Random's father, a younger son, 'fell in love with a poor relation ... whom he privately espoused' without his father's knowledge or consent. He was disinherited, expelled from the family home and threatened with 'an account of the expense I

⁷³ Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters*, p. 59. Talbot Williamson to Edmund, January 1760.

⁷⁴ Frances Burney, *Evelina or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (London, 1778, Oxford, 2002), p. 16.

⁷⁵ Haywood, *Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy*, pp. 12-17.

have been at in your education, with a view of being reimbursed'.⁷⁶ Later, attempting to repair his fortunes by marrying a lady of fortune he was advised to

assume the character of a wealthy Squire, as your common fortune-hunters do, by which many a poor lady is cheated into matrimony and ... sees ...herself reduced to misery and despair.⁷⁷

In *Belinda*, Clarence Harvey described how his ward's mother 'was carried off ... when she was scarcely sixteen, by a wretch, who, after privately marrying her, would not own his marriage ... and has never been heard of since'.⁷⁸

Fiction reflects real life. In 1718, eighteen-year-old Betsy Morris of Wells married clandestinely. Her father attempted, unsuccessfully, to prosecute the officiating clergyman 'for his irregularly marrying my daughter ... with a licence that was invalid in the Cathedral church'. This marriage to an impoverished fortune hunter, though irregular, was legally binding even though she was underage.⁷⁹ In 1772, John Martin eloped to Scotland with seventeen-year-old Mary Gurney and married her legally under Scottish law, even though her guardian refused his consent and she was underage. On their return, she was reconciled to her guardian, but he refused to release her fortune to her husband until she was 21.⁸⁰

The correspondence of the sample families is silent about elopement, clandestine marriages and fortune hunters, apart from a single reference in the Withering letters and possibly one in the Mortimer correspondence. Withering's friend Miss Campbell, a young woman of little fortune, loved a Mr Bodham who 'persuaded Miss C to a private marriage'. After their marriage Mr Bodham's father, who had previously refused his consent, happily welcomed them both into his home.⁸¹ Staunton Degge, the younger son of a second marriage and step-brother to a

⁷⁶ Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (London, 1748, Oxford, 1981), pp. 1-2.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁷⁸ Burney, *Evelina*, pp. 16-17. Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (London, 1801, Oxford, 2002), p. 366.

⁷⁹ Edmund Hobhouse (ed.). *The Diary of a West Country Physician 1684-1726* (Rochester 1934), pp. 66-72, December 1718 - October 1719.

⁸⁰ Christine Viallis and Kay Collins (eds.), *A Georgian Parson: The Reverend John Martin of Naseby* Northampton Record Office, (Northampton, 2004), pp. 18-24.

⁸¹ BRO, MS3164/vol1/1, *The Withering Letters*, letter 65. Mary Leslie Grierson from Edinburgh to William Withering at the Larches, received April 23, 1800.

notorious spendthrift who was certified as insane, was probably a fortune hunter. He proposed to Miss Sanders, Elizabeth Mortimer's niece, but was refused. Her father was warned by a friend that Staunton was 'a half-brother of Simon Degge', and that there was 'talk of a brother of Simon's falling into the same condition as himself'. Mr Sanders was advised to 'ascertain [for] yourself about a point which is undoubtedly of the utmost consequence'. This may explain why the proposal was rejected.⁸²

Financial pressures and changing attitudes to marriage help explain the rise of bachelordom among younger sons in the early eighteenth century, a view supported by writers of fiction. The diarists Dudley Ryder and Syllas Neville debated the relative merits of marriage and the single state, but whereas Neville rejected marriage, Ryder felt that it offered better prospects than celibacy. Both men recognised that a poor financial base was a barrier to early marriage and could trap a couple in a downward social and financial spiral. Difficult family finances may explain why some Barker, Mortimer and Congreve younger sons failed to marry, although others enjoyed the advantages and benefits of a 'good' marriage, which could restore finances and status. Many landowners with marriageable daughters felt threatened by fortune-hunters, who were often younger sons, aiming to improve their standing in society by marrying a 'fortune'. Clandestine marriages before 1753 and eloping to Scotland or France afterwards fuelled such concerns. However, the lack of supporting evidence in the sample may imply that these fears, as depicted in fiction, may have been exaggerated.

Conclusion

The rather anomalous position of many younger sons influenced their marital prospects. They were needed as potential replacement heirs, but the costs of education, maintenance and 'setting up' in life represented an irrecoverable loss of family wealth. Those squirearchy parents committed to primogeniture usually lacked the resources to provide adequately for younger sons so that it was often more difficult for them than their eldest brothers or sisters to attract a wife. However, they could associate socially with people of comparable social standing. Several younger sons in the sample managed, despite their economic disadvantages, to achieve

⁸² LRO, DE107/83, *Mortimer Papers*. Staunton Degge to Miss Sanders in Derby, October 1745. DE107/85, J. Howe to Mr Sanders, 9 July, 1745.

good marriages. Others, thanks to the deaths of older brothers, did unexpectedly inherit estates and so retained gentry status. Claims that primogeniture and differential provision for sons produced resentment and ill-feeling between siblings are not supported in the sample. In most cases the correspondence shows a close relationship existed between younger and older brothers and between younger sons and their fathers.

The demography of the sample is broadly comparable to the national pattern, as family size decreased and adult longevity increased in the early eighteenth century. The sample also shows a noticeable gender imbalance in favour of daughters, resulting from the reduction in the proportion of male births, leading to a decrease in the number of younger sons. At the same time, the proportion of younger sons who remained life-long bachelors increased. Those younger sons who married had a higher mean age at first marriage than the national norm for older sons. Decreasing numbers of married younger sons had long-term consequences for family survival through lack of heirs.

An important, possibly life-changing, source of income for many younger sons was a legacy from a relative. Some, usually second sons like John Addyes Hackett, inherited estates from childless relatives.⁸³ The promise of an inheritance could transform a younger son's marital prospects. However, the inevitable delay in receipt between a promise being made and the death of a testator might force a man to marry. Expectations might be ended by an unexpected birth which displaced a hopeful heir, or by a change of mind from the testator. This happened after Richard Congreve's second marriage when the birth of his son frustrated the expectations of the cadet line.

Squirearchy parents were usually more interested in giving their younger sons a good start in life than they were in arranging their marriages. Wills and settlements, especially in the eighteenth century, made provision for preparing sons for a career in trade, the professions, or public service. Income from a younger son's portion, usually fixed as the equivalent of one year's income from the family estate was usually insufficient to support marriage and a family so that it had to be supplemented with profitable employment. Once set up, a younger son could gain

⁸³ See chapter 5, pp. 127, 133-135 for a discussion of younger sons inheriting from relatives.

independence and the estate would be freed of continuing financial costs. However, this inevitably delayed age at first marriage until a son was well-enough established to support the costs of a family.

Pressures to delay marriage were considerable, but since many younger sons moved to urban environments they could benefit from the facilities and meet eligible young women. The extent to which members from the sample families benefitted from such facilities is unclear. Some probably met women to whom they were attracted but, as with Dudley Ryder, could not pursue their interest for economic reasons. Others married well, sometimes to women they knew as neighbours or the sisters of friends. Family and friends often helped to identify potential brides. The marriages of younger sons in the sample families were sometimes with brides who were older than their husbands. Such brides often brought small estates, enabling their husbands to retain gentry status. There is no example in the sample of a younger son whose marriage took him on a downward social spiral.

The proportion of younger sons in the sample who remained life-long bachelors was greater in the early eighteenth than in the seventeenth century. There is insufficient evidence in the sample to explain this change, but it did coincide in several of the families with periods of economic difficulty. Several long-term bachelors married minor heiresses later in life. There is no indication that this was contrary to the wishes of the bride's relatives, but it is noticeable that some of the grooms stressed that they were not influenced in their decision by the wealth of their bride. As far as the correspondence shows, none of the younger sons in the sample eloped.

The marriages of younger sons in the sample are not as well-documented as those of their sisters or older brothers. This may be because they often occurred later in life when the sons had their own independent households and were no longer the direct responsibility of the head of the family. It may be because their marriages were of less significance to other family members than the marriages of heirs or daughters. It may be that records have not been maintained in the main family archives. As with the marriages of other family members, such evidence as there is shows clearly that, irrespective of emotional engagement, finance remained a dominant influence in determining whether, when, or to whom a marriage might take place. The marriages of daughters received rather more parental attention than those of younger sons and are generally better documented in the sample

correspondence. Parental strategies, as they involved daughters, are considered in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Strategies for daughters

Introduction

Making marriages for daughters presented difficulties and challenges for the squirearchy. The problems and pressures faced by lesser gentry daughters have left little direct evidence in the correspondence of the sample families, but they are a constant theme in prose fiction. In a patriarchal society, many gentry families welcomed sons more eagerly than daughters, but the marriages of daughters were more important than those of younger sons because they had a greater impact on family fortunes, estate finances and political and social connections. The first section of this chapter examines demographic changes in the late seventeenth century as they affected the marriageability of lesser gentry daughters, questioning how far national patterns are reflected in the sample families. Some families with several daughters experienced declining nuptiality, probably because of economic limitations which made them less competitive in the overcrowded marriage-market.

Evidence from the sample shows that daughters had a high-level of geographical and social endogamy in the seventeenth century, with husbands often drawn from within a thirty-mile radius of their homes. Grooms were usually selected and approved by parents and many were known personally to the family. In the eighteenth century this pattern changed. Some marriages continued to be parentally arranged, but others developed from personal acquaintance. Husbands usually came from further afield but most of the sources are silent about how couples first met.

This chapter will examine some of the challenges faced by parents as marriage-makers and the difficulties squires experienced when trying to arrange 'good' marriages for their daughters. Lack of financial resources and small portions made it hard for squirearchy daughters to attract men of comparable status, so that many felt it better to remain single than to marry a social inferior. This leads into a consideration of changes in the way that husbands were selected and the importance of consent. Most daughters in the sample showed filial obedience but some insisted on their own choice in face of family hostility. There are no obvious examples of familial coercion although this was a constant concern of many eighteenth century writers. There is evidence of an increase in the number of life-

time single women which may have resulted from personal choice, the pressure of individual circumstance, or the competition of an over-crowded market.

Attitudes to daughters were often dictated by family needs and circumstances. Girls were usually under greater parental control than sons. This was partly because they were usually educated at home, but primarily because they and their marriages were dependent on parental financial support and goodwill. Females were thought incapable of making rational judgements and to be too easily influenced by their emotions, so that many adults believed that young females needed careful oversight and guidance in significant matters like marriage.¹ A consequence of their time at home under parental supervision was that daughters often developed strong relationships with their parents and siblings. Their strongest relationships were usually with mothers and sisters but they could be close to their fathers even though relationships with fathers could become fraught and a source of conflict when dealing with the prospect of marriage.² The experience of daughters was usually very different to their brothers. For sons, the main parental objective was to prepare them to be self-supporting but for girls it was to make a good marriage. Education and training were designed to enhance their marriage prospects by developing the socially valued skills of music, art, dancing and 'conversation' and to prepare them to be dutiful wives and mothers.³

Many parents hoped that daughters would have contented marriages, but their main interests were material. Fathers who invested a substantial part of their wealth in a daughter's marriage expected a suitable return from the groom's family. The nature of provision made for daughters, which was examined in chapter 6, shows that the principal driver in marriage-making was a girl's portion. A father who favoured a proposed marriage might increase the size of his daughter's portion or give her an

¹ Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700* (London, 1984), p. 70. Bridget Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1989), p. 186.

² Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* (London, 1994), pp. 89-90. Cissie Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700* (London, 2007), p. 98. H. J. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650-1950* (Oxford, 1994), p. 136.

³ Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, p. 89. Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe*, p. 47. Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1500-1800*, vol. 1 (Glasgow, 1997), pp. 65, 118. Jacqueline Eales, *Women in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (London, 1998), p. 60. Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 66.

additional sum in his will, but if a daughter chose to marry against his advice he could withhold or delay payments.⁴

Not all fathers regarded daughters as a burden or the failure to produce sons a disaster, even if it meant the estate passing to a collateral branch of the family. In the later seventeenth century, writers and many parents came to accept that it was wrong to coerce a daughter into marriage against her will, although some girls were persuaded or bullied into marriage with a distasteful husband chosen by parents.⁵

Parents might oppose a daughter's choice of partner on grounds of social and financial parity or reputation. Broad equality of fortune was preferred as a guarantee that like was matched with like. It was believed that disparity of fortune could lead to disagreement, discomfort and disrepute, so careful evaluation of a potential partner's financial and social status was essential before proposals were formally accepted and serious negotiations began. Similarity of fortune and status were thought to be the easiest way to ensure marital homogamy.⁶ Anne Catherine Handyside's marriage to Tom Congreve in the 1740s was opposed because, although of equal status, she came from a poor and disreputable family. The Congreves opposed Rebecca Elmstone's marriage to Tom's son William, because her family was poor and socially inferior but, more significantly, because her reputation was ruined by her pre-marital pregnancy.⁷

The ultimate sanction was that parents could withhold economic support and refuse to recognise a marriage. Threats to impose sanctions were frequently made but it is

⁴ Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, p. 118. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, pp. 63, 136, 157. Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (London, 1989), p. 187.

⁵ Alan MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300-1840* (Oxford, 1987), p. 62. Mary Abbott, *Family Ties: English Families 1540-1920* (London and New York, 1993), p. 57. Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe*, p. 63.

⁶ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 194. Diana O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester and New York, 2000), p. 221. Richard M. Smith, 'Some Issues Concerning Families and Their Property in Rural England 1250-1800', in R. M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Lifecycle*, (London, 1984), p. 2.

⁷ SRO, D1057/M/I/3/5, Congreve Papers. William Congreve to his brother Richard, 1 January, 1739. D1057/M/I/17A (p. 21-22), Richard Congreve to his brother Francis in Cairo, 5 June, 1740. D1057/M/H/13/1, William Congreve (Shrewsbury) to Captain William Congreve (Woolwich), 16 January, 1776. D1057/S/17/61, letters from William Congreve of Shrewsbury to John Congreve of Mount Congreve: letter 3, June 1773; letter 4, 24 December, 1773; letter 7, 6 October, 1775.

unclear how many of these were carried out or sustained.⁸ Gentry families were prepared from the late seventeenth century to arrange for their sons to marry into wealthy urban gentry families, but higher status families were often reluctant to allow the same opportunity to their daughters until later in the eighteenth century. Some squirearchy parents were prepared to let their daughters marry lower social status husbands if their marriages had fewer long-term consequences for the family than those of their sons.⁹

1. Demographic matters

This section considers demographic information about daughters and sisters in the sample families and examines how far their experience reflected or differed from the national pattern. Issues discussed include varying rates of nuptiality, increases in spinsterhood, and the changing gender balance in families.

Historians have identified four key population movements affecting the gentry between 1680 and 1750: a noticeable imbalance in the sex ratio; rising life-time celibacy among middle and lesser gentry heirs; an increased rate of marriage between gentry and the mercantile families; and a downward trend in the age of females at first marriage.¹⁰ The cumulative effect of these trends significantly affected the matrimonial prospects of gentry females. In late seventeenth century Lichfield for every 83 men there were 100 women.¹¹ The decreasing number of potential gentry husbands and increasing competition from surplus females, including the wealthy daughters of urban gentry, disadvantaged lesser gentry females with limited resources. Many were driven reluctantly to accept a life-long single state.¹² Increased competition helped reduce the age at first marriage for

⁸ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 187. MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, p. 256. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, p. 106. Abbott, *Family Ties*, p. 56.

⁹ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 187.

¹⁰ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (abridged edition, London, 1979), pp. 38, 40.

¹¹ Peter Clark and Paul Slack, *English Towns in Transition, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 1976), p. 88.

¹² Susan Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys, 1660-1720* (Oxford, 1999), p. 128. O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, p. 192. John Rule, *Albion's People: English Society, 1714-1815* (London and New York, 1992), p. 51. Lawrence Stone and Jeanne Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (abridged version, Oxford, 1986), p. 22.

lesser gentry daughters, especially those with small fortunes. Many women who could marry did so early, to avoid missing their opportunity.¹³

The structure of families can be traced through their family trees. These were maintained by some families who wanted to establish, often spurious, claims to gentility, to show links to great families, or claim the right to bear arms. Some were maintained because of interest in genealogy and family origins, but more significantly they were important to establish and confirm lines of succession. This information was essential when estates were entailed and inheritance depended on primogeniture so that if a senior line died out it was possible to identify the 'right heir'. Whatever the reason for keeping them, the reliability of this information depended on the strength and continuity of individual family archives and sometimes personal recollections.¹⁴ A very detailed genealogical record for the Ishams is contained in the Northamptonshire *Victoria County History*. The Barkers and Congreves collected and maintained genealogical records for various purposes.¹⁵ Some families, like the Hackets, may have assembled such materials but, through accident and time, these have disappeared. The existence of a Hacket family tree in Bracken's nineteenth century history of Sutton Coldfield implies that an official document once existed.¹⁶ In the absence of complete family trees it is usually possible to reconstruct records from account books, correspondence, diaries and legal documents. A selection of family trees for the principal families and several minor families appears in Appendix 1. These can only provide quantitative evidence, since they do not explain why marriages were made or what relationships existed between families.¹⁷

These family trees show that family size decreased in the later seventeenth century and remained relatively small throughout the eighteenth century. They show that some of the sample families experienced gender imbalance and had a

¹³ Earle *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 184.

¹⁴ Based on materials compiled by family members, these family trees may contain the errors and omissions of the original compilers. Where possible these have been rectified from other sources.

¹⁵ LRO, DG11/1, *Conant Papers*. Letter 148a, an account of Barker marriages written (supposedly) by Sarah Whiston in c.1745. SRO, D1057/S, *Congreve Papers*. Assorted correspondence and draft family trees collated during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

¹⁶ L. Bracken, *The History of the Forest and Chase of Sutton Coldfield* (London, 1860).

¹⁷ Oswald Baron (ed.), *The Victoria History of the County of Northamptonshire: Genealogical Volume. Northamptonshire Families* (London, 1906).

preponderance of daughters. There is a marked contrast between the number and proportion of seventeenth century females who reached marriageable age and married with figures for eighteenth century females which show that, many remained single. The family trees show that squirearchy nuptiality declined after 1680, with daughters, the main losers, sometimes experiencing lower nuptiality rates than their brothers. The family trees do suggest that the sample families conform to the national pattern in terms of gender imbalance, declining nuptiality rates among females and increased life-long female celibacy.¹⁸

The proportion of adult females who were single was higher in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries than it had been previously. Amy Froide claimed that between 1250 and 1700 the proportion of 'not married' females ranged between 10% and 20%, but by 1700 had reached 30% of the adult female population, to which should be added a further 20% who were widows.¹⁹ This change is partly explained by the natal gender imbalance but another possible cause was the greater susceptibility of boys to fatal childhood illnesses. The family trees show that the number of boys noted as dying before reaching marriageable age was greater after 1680 than previously, although this might be attributed to changes in the way records were preserved. The lack of available males may be explained by fatalities in the French wars, higher adult male mortality, migration overseas, and foreign postings in the army, navy or for trade.²⁰ Irrespective of cause, many contemporaries feared that the growing number of never-married and independent women was a threat to the patriarchal system which was based on female subordination to male authority.²¹

Increased celibacy among gentry females may have resulted from a deliberate decision or been the involuntary consequence of dowry inflation, which priced some young women out of the marriage-market.²² Contemporary writers, concerned by increasing celibacy, argued that single men and widowers should be encouraged to marry.²³ Some, including members of the government, thought the solution was to

¹⁸ See assorted family trees, Appendix 1.

¹⁹ Judith Bennett and Amy M. Froide, 'A Singular Past', in Judith Bennett and Amy M. Froide (eds.), *Single Women in the European Past 1250-1800* (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 2, 5. Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Single Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), p. 3.

²⁰ O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, p. 192.

²¹ Bennet and Froide, 'A Singular Past', p. 2.

²² Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 66.

²³ MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, p. 150.

force men to marry by taxing bachelors and childless widowers.²⁴ Others suggested giving dowries to less wealthy gentry daughters to improve their appeal in the marriage-market.²⁵ Some, like Mary Astell, thought the problem of surplus women could be dealt with by establishing 'protestant nunneries' for those unwilling or unable to marry.²⁶

The Tatler argued that demands for large jointures and portions made marriage too expensive and forced many males to remain celibate. It claimed that 'the main considerations (which make beauty and merit cease to be the objects of love and courtship) ... [are] jointures and settlements'.²⁷ A later issue argued that 'jointures and settlements ... are ... the greatest impediment to entering [matrimony]. ... Making matrimony cheap and easy' would encourage men to produce legitimate children'.²⁸ Fifty years later greedy parents were blamed for making financial demands which frightened off suitors and condemned some daughters to life-long celibacy.

We see so many women... living single ... because they could not better themselves by marriage; while bachelors ... would marry on conditions that were merely reasonable. The much complained of celibacy of our days, I am fully convinced, is greatly to be attributed to the partial selfishness of parents.²⁹

The belief that finance caused much female celibacy can be inferred from the Barker and Congreve archives. In the early eighteenth century, the Barker estate was heavily in debt. Marriage settlements and wills show that eighteenth century Barker wives had much smaller portions than their predecessors, but they received comparatively generous jointures. Debt and limited income from 'new money' meant

²⁴ See chapter 1, pp. 37-38; chapter 4, p.106; chapter 6, pp. 149, 166, 168-169 for more on legislative attempts to encourage marriage.

²⁵ *The Country Gentleman*, No 43, Friday 5 August, 1726. [accessed through Eighteenth Century Journals, 19.12.2016]

²⁶ *The Tatler*, no. 32, June 1709. [accessed through 17th-18th Century Burney Collection, 18.12.2016] Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest* (London, 3rd edition, 1696), part 1. [accessed through EEBO, 18.12.2016]

²⁷ *The Tatler*, No.195, Thursday 6 July to Saturday 8 July, 1710. [Burney]

²⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 223, Saturday 9 September to Tuesday 12 September, 1710. [Burney]

²⁹ 'On the Folly of Parents with Respect to the Marriage of their Children', in *The Universal Museum or Gentlemen and Ladies Polite Magazine of History and Literature for 1763*, volume 2, Issue 2. [accessed through Eighteenth Century Journals, 16.12.2016]

the Barkers could only afford small portions for their daughters.³⁰ Relatively small portions reduced their ability to attract realistic offers so that most eighteenth century Barker females remained unmarried. Financial difficulties may explain the Congreves very low marriage rate in the mid eighteenth century. After bankruptcy and resettlement of the estate in 1731 Congreve younger children in the senior line had portions so small that they were totally inadequate in the existing marriage market.³¹

In England, marriage for most status groups was delayed until they reached the mid-twenties, with an age differential between husband and wife of less than three years.³² The mean age at first marriage for gentry women between 1550 and 1700 was almost 27 years. After 1720 the mean fell steadily, reaching 23.4 years by the early nineteenth century. A relatively high median age meant that young people could make a better, more informed choice of partner than those who married earlier while in their teens.³³ The marriages of teenage daughters is probably evidence that their parents were controlling and influencing their choice of husband which suggests that such marriages were made in the interest of family rather than for personal or romantic reasons.³⁴ The prospects of marriage for older females over thirty were small and became negligible with the onset of the menopause.

Evidence for age at first marriage in the sample families is limited and presents an inconclusive picture. Most available information is about the marital age of sons and their wives so that it is difficult to make firm conclusions about the age at marriage of daughters and their husbands. The ages of Barker women who married in the eighteenth century were usually below the national mean, but the average age of the small number of Congreves who married was considerably higher.³⁵ In the early nineteenth century J. B. Lowe's three sisters were each in their mid-twenties when they married, as was Charlotte Botfield (née Withering). It is not possible to make a meaningful generalisation from these figures because of their incompleteness and the small size of the sample.

³⁰ See chapter 6, pp. 167-168 and chapter 8, pp. 223-224.

³¹ SRO, D1057/M/1/9/5, *Congreve Papers*. Richard Congreve in Shrewsbury to Mrs Clavering, 28/29 December, 1747.

³² Bennett and Froide, 'A Singular Past', p. 5.

³³ Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 40, 214. John Rule, *Albion's People: English Society, 1714-1815* (London and New York, 1992), p. 3.

³⁴ O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, p. 165.

³⁵ See family trees, Appendix 1.

National demographic changes were largely replicated among the sample of West Midland squirearchy families in terms of family size, gender imbalance, age at first marriage and declining nuptiality among daughters. The relatively large proportion of life-long single women meant there were few collateral female lines to guarantee estate succession if male lines died out. The gender imbalance, seen particularly in the Barker and Congreve lines, may have had genetic causes because of the tendency to marry heiresses from families with a poor history of producing sons. The failure of many daughters to marry can probably be attributed in part to financial difficulties.

Shifting social attitudes and demographic changes after 1680 profoundly affected gentry marriage-making strategies. Lacking the wealth and resources of their wealthier neighbours, the prospect of achieving satisfactory marriages, especially for families with several daughters, must have been daunting. Competition from urban gentry daughters, the general surplus of gentry females, and the difficulty of providing adequate portions from limited resources, destined many squirearchy daughters to life-long celibacy. The ongoing costs of maintaining unmarried daughters drained estate resources. It became increasingly difficult to offer generous jointures to attract wives with large portions which could be used to restore finances. Families with only one or two daughters were generally in a healthier financial position than those with several girls to dispose of.³⁶

2. Finding Husbands

In the seventeenth century, it was generally assumed that women should and would marry, a concept reinforced by the patriarchal principle which held that women needed the protection, guidance and supervision of men. This was especially true in marriage because it shaped the material and social well-being of a family.³⁷ Gentry fathers were thought to be responsible for selecting an appropriate husband for their daughters and, assisted by lawyers, negotiating a suitable marriage settlement. Attitudes began to change in the early eighteenth century as young gentlewomen were permitted more say in the choice of a potential partner.³⁸ The

³⁶ Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, p. 110.

³⁷ Bennett and Froide, 'A Singular Past', p. 13. R. B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage in England, 1500-1850* (London, 1995), p. xvi.

³⁸ Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, pp. 174-175, 179.

contrast is shown in the marriages of Mary Noel (1655), Mary Hacket (1725) and Anne Congreve (1747). The first two marriages were arranged by parents before either girl had met their future husbands. Anne Congreve, an older woman, chose Robert Clavering and insisted on marrying him despite considerable family opposition.³⁹

Finding a suitable husband involved different and sometimes conflicting aims, which varied between families and over time. It was usually necessary to balance the interests and wishes of a daughter against the needs and resources of the family and estate.⁴⁰ Few fathers willingly imposed an unhappy marriage on a daughter, but most believed that affection and esteem should develop during marriage and not necessarily precede it.⁴¹ Ideally, parents wanted an outcome acceptable to both families whilst maximising the social and financial benefits for their own kinship. This was an important driver when Lisle Hacket arranged his daughter's marriage to a baronet's son and imposed a heavy mortgage debt on the Moxhull estate and his successors. Pursuing social status meant avoiding socially or economically unfavourable marriages.⁴²

Some urban gentry satisfied their social aspirations by marrying daughters to landed gentry. Two Niccol daughters, children of London merchants, and Abigail Harewood, daughter of a Shrewsbury grocer, married three Congreve sons and achieved lasting gentry status through marriage. These families drew their wealth and status from trade and not from the small estates each owned on the Welsh border.⁴³ Most urban gentry generally did not accumulate sufficient surplus wealth to spend on a

³⁹ LRO, DG11/4, *Conant Papers*, letter 224. Abel Barker to Sir Geoffrey Palmer, 24 July, 1655. Letter 228, Abel Barker to Sir Geoffrey Palmer 23 August, 1655. SRO, D1057/M/I/9/12, *Congreve Papers*. Anne Congreve to her brother Richard, 'Friday night', January, 1748. D1057/M/I/9/9, letter from Rev. Richard Congreve from Shrewsbury to Robert Clavering, 16 January, 1748. NRO, IC1853, *Isham Correspondence*. Sir Justinian Isham to Lisle Hacket, 28 January, 1725. IC2420, Sir Justinian Isham to his son Justinian, 28 January, 1725. IC2421, Sir Justinian Isham to Justinian, 13 March, 1725.

⁴⁰ See pp. 98-107, chapter 4, in which parental aims are discussed.

⁴¹ Joan Johnson, *The Gloucestershire Gentry*, (Gloucester, 1989), p.108.

⁴² Earle *The Making of the English Middle Class*, pp. 189-190. Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture*, (London, 1995), p. 53.

⁴³ See Congreve and Niccol family trees, Appendix 1b and 1f. SRO, D1057/S/17/1, *Congreve Papers*. Letter containing genealogical note, dated 7 November, probably from William Congreve of Aldermaston to his brother Richard at Burton. D1057/S/17/29, undated genealogical note about Niccol family. D1057/S/17/30, undated note about the lineage of William Congreve of Aldermaston. D1057/S/17/56, letter from Henry Heylyn of Pentrefelyn about family links with the Niccols.

large estate until later in life, so that the vicarious status they gained from a daughter's marriage might prove more satisfying and attainable than estate purchase. It was sometimes easier and cheaper to 'purchase' social status with a large portion for a daughter than to establish themselves with a landed estate.⁴⁴

Daughters provided a useful mechanism for making and consolidating connections with other influential families.⁴⁵ This probably explains why Abel Barker, a reluctant supporter of parliament, twice married daughters of minor Royalist aristocrats, so building potentially valuable links with influential Royalist families should there be a Restoration. Similarly, the two Royalist fathers gained potentially useful familial links with a parliamentary official. A century later Lord Leigh may have married his daughter to Andrew Hacket III to build up influence in North Warwickshire, where Leigh already owned property. The Greene, Scott and Trist family trees show that the marriages of daughters could create a nexus of potentially valuable family connections.⁴⁶ An important criticism of Ann Catherine Handyside's marriage to Tom Congreve was that her family lacked the influence to help Tom's career.⁴⁷

A central issue for most gentry marriages was the financial settlement, even when other factors such as personal choice and affection were considered.⁴⁸ George Birch immediately agreed, in principle that his daughter could marry Richard Congreve, but delayed the marriage for seven months while his lawyers resolved financial issues and decided how Congreve's affairs could be rearranged to guarantee Mary Ann's financial security.⁴⁹ A similar situation occurred when Joseph Banks was negotiating with Colonel Talbot. Banks was happy with the suitor but uncertain about his finances. Agreement was eventually reached on the financial terms but negotiations then collapsed because of the couple's personal incompatibility.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in Provincial Towns 1660-1670* (Oxford, 1989), p. 248. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, p. 201. MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, p. 134.

⁴⁵ Eales, *Women in Early Modern England*, pp. 52, 64. G. E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1963), p. 29.

⁴⁶ See Greene, Scott and Trist family trees, Appendix 1g.

⁴⁷ SRO, D1057/M/1/3/5, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve in Minorca to his brother Richard, 1 January, 1739.

⁴⁸ See chapter 5. pp. 130-133, 139-143 for a discussion of financial provision made for daughters.

⁴⁹ BRO, 3810/199, *Meath-Barker Collection*. Correspondence about marriage negotiations between Mary Ann Birch and Richard Congreve, 1801.

⁵⁰ J. W. F Hall (ed.), *The Letters and Papers of the Banks Family of Revesby Abbey, 1704-1760* Lincoln Record Society, vol. 45, (Lincoln, 1952), pp. 1-18, letters 1-22.

Some marriages were designed to protect and preserve the patrimony while supporting the principle of male inheritance. This was important for families which only had daughters and an estate entailed on a collateral male. Some mothers encouraged a child to marry a maternal cousin, as happened with John Addyes Hacket, to maintain links with her family's estate in the absence of a direct male heir.⁵¹ Similarly, an owner's daughter might be encouraged to marry her cousin, the putative heir, to preserve the semblance of continuity in the senior line. Such marriages ensured that a daughter and her children retained some of the family inheritance. None of the four marriages between cousins in the sample helped preserve inheritance or maintain the family name.⁵² In *Pride and Prejudice*, a minor but important sub-plot was Mrs Bennet's scheme to marry a daughter to Mr Collins, her husband's legal heir, to maintain estate continuity.⁵³

Parents generally knew what they wanted from a suitor. The real problem, especially for the squirearchy, was how to identify suitable men who met their criteria.⁵⁴ London had long been a magnet for wealthy gentry males. It was the seat of parliament, the centre of the legal system and the hub of business. In London, fathers could exchange information about possible marriage candidates and start informal negotiations. Seventeenth century wives, like Mary Barker and Elizabeth Isham, rarely accompanied their husbands to London. Changes in this behaviour occurred after the 1680s because of reduced political conflict and longer, more regular sessions of parliament.⁵⁵ Wives, who now often accompanied their husbands to London, wanted entertainment and occupation, and so helped the development of the 'London Season' and its emergence as an effective marriage market.⁵⁶

The lesser gentry, however, rarely visited London and, having little involvement in county affairs, infrequently left the immediate environment of their own homes or parishes. In the seventeenth century a limited social life encouraged geographically

⁵¹ Ralph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth Century England* (New York, 1978), p. 19. MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, p. 149.

⁵² See Barker, Congreve, Niccol, Trist and Scott family trees, Appendix 1a, 1b, 1f and 1g.

⁵³ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London, 1817, BBC edition, 1995), pp. 56-60, chapter 13.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of urban sociability see chapter 1, pp. 27-28.

⁵⁵ Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, p. 238.

⁵⁶ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, pp. 29, 65. Nick Rogers, 'Money, Land and Lineage: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London', in Peter Borsay (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1688-1820* (Harlow, 1990), pp. 268-290. (First printed in *Social History*, 4:3, 1979, pp. 437-454.)

marital endogamy. Lesser gentry daughters were often restricted to rural society with a narrow social circle based around their homes, relatives, the nearest town and 'carriage' neighbours. Parents decided who they would entertain and therefore chose which eligible young men their daughters might meet and befriend. Knowledge of potential suitors was usually restricted to local gentry and parentally selected and approved 'friends' – often the children of acquaintances.⁵⁷ So, for example, the five Isham daughters spent much of their time with the Raynsford's of neighbouring Brixworth, and together visited balls and race meetings in Northampton and Daventry. Hester, the only one of the five to marry chose Francis Raynsford her childhood friend and first love.⁵⁸ When she was growing up Mary Hacket mixed socially with her cousins, the Bridgemans of nearby Castle Bromwich Hall, and maintained contact with them throughout her married life. Friendships with neighbours remained important, even when supplemented by new forms of sociability. In the early nineteenth century Anna Gawthorn met a wide circle of friends at assemblies, concerts and race-meetings, but the core of her friends, and her unsuccessful suitors, came from her own immediate neighbourhood.

Local friendships formed an important element in many novels. Harriet Bryan, in *Sir Charles Grandison*, had a strong circle of intimates and admirers centred on her home village, before she went to London and became involved with a wider range of social activities. Similarly, Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy were neighbours and close friends so that their parents, 'always called [them] cousins. [They] had lived with each other in the most perfect friendship. ... The affection they began in infancy, grew up with their years.'⁵⁹ Jane Austen's novels, particularly *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* show that local friendships were an important part of the social life of lesser gentry daughters in the early nineteenth century.

A daughter's limited experience in the early period was very different to her brothers, who might develop wider relationships through boarding school, the Universities or Inns of Court. For example, Lisle, John and Andrew Hacket attended Cambridge and the Inns of Court, but his daughter Mary was educated at home. Brothers might

⁵⁷ Alan Everitt, 'Country, County and Town: Patterns of Regional Evolution in England', in Peter Borsay, (ed.), *The Eighteenth-Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1688-1820* (Harlow, 1990), p. 85. (Originally in TRHS. 5th series 29, 1979, pp. 268-292.)

⁵⁸ NRO, IC2144, *Isham Correspondence*. Susannah Isham to her brother, discussing the family's friendship with the Raynsford family, 5 July, 1720.

⁵⁹ Eliza Haywood, *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (London, 1753), (ed.) John Richetti, *Eighteenth Century Novels by Women* (Kentucky, 2005), pp. 8-9.

bring friends home and introduce them to their sisters, as Richard Congreve did with Robert Clavering. The growth and expansion of urban facilities and public sociability in the early eighteenth century helped transform the lives of young gentry women.⁶⁰

Written in 1761, but set around 1700, *The Memoires of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, contrasted the social freedom of Sheridan's contemporary readers with the limitations faced by young women in earlier times and their vulnerability to seduction through inexperience. She showed Sidney Bidulph to be excited by her brother's return from foreign travel with a handsome friend. Complaining of her small social sphere in the country, Sidney hoped that her brother's return meant 'our circle of acquaintance will be a good deal enlarged. There is no pleasure in society, without a proper mixture of well-bred sensible people of both sexes'.⁶¹

After 1680 important changes occurred in provincial sociability to imitate those taking place in London. Developing leisure towns, like Stourbridge, Shrewsbury and Lichfield, began to offer an increasingly wide range of consumer, social and leisure facilities deliberately aimed at attracting the local gentry.⁶² These facilities brought relatively large numbers of young people together in an environment where relationships could develop.⁶³ Members of the squirearchy acquired town houses in which they could live in greater comfort during the winter, only retreating to their country estates when the season was over. In the 1730s Andrew Hacket II built a town house in Sutton Coldfield, only five miles from Moxhull, and eight miles from Lichfield. In the 1740s the Congreves settled in Shrewsbury. By the 1740s well established regional centres acted as local marriage markets.⁶⁴

Much of the new urban provision was female-oriented, enabling young women to emerge into a broader social life.⁶⁵ Men already had their own exclusive focus in coffee houses and clubs but were 'invited' to share the female world with its focus

⁶⁰ Abbott, *Family Ties*, p. 121. Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 74. Everitt, 'Country, County and Town', p. 85. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, p. 163.

⁶¹ Frances Sheridan, *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (London 1761, London, 1987), p. 12.

⁶² Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, p. 29, 139-140.

⁶³ Rosemary Sweet, *The English Town, 1680-1840* (London, 1999), p. 234. Helen Berry, 'Creating Polite Space: The Organization and Social Function of the Newcastle Assembly Rooms', in Helen Berry and Jeremy Gregory (eds.), *Creating and Consuming Culture in North East England* (Ashgate, 2004), pp. 120-140.

⁶⁴ Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?* p. 31.

⁶⁵ Berry, 'Creating Polite Space', p. 135.

of Assemblies, shops and pleasure grounds. Young women were allowed greater freedom and an autonomy which allowed them to meet a wider range of men in a more neutral and relaxed environment than the country house.⁶⁶ In the early nineteenth century the popularity of public sociability declined amongst the wealthier gentry who withdrew from Assemblies and socially heterogeneous gatherings to focus on more private and exclusive activities such as dinner parties.⁶⁷ This partial withdrawal of the wealthy gentry is illustrated by Jane Austen in *Persuasion*. Although the Elliots visited the Baths and Assembly Rooms their preferred social activities were private dinner parties and concerts.⁶⁸ Public sociability continued to be important for the squirearchy, as testified in the Gawthern and Wynne Diaries.

Public activities were usually available to a wide social mix within the rules of each individual facility or location. Here, social distinctions were blurred by a shared social life.⁶⁹ The main qualifications for admittance were to dress and behave like a gentleman or gentlewoman and have the resources to pay the entrance fee.⁷⁰ Abigail Gawthern recorded regular attendance at Assemblies, theatre, race meetings and other social functions. She listed the mixed company present and recorded 'a very full room ... [many families from the country attended] for a ball in the Nottingham Assembly Room, in 1782. An entry for 1806 listed several aristocrats 'at the assembly [in], a very full room'. An entry for 1809 recorded that she was 'at the assembly in the evening, about 400 there, all so well dressed, did not see half the company'. People she listed included merchants, tradesmen, military officers, doctors, lawyers and a few aristocrats.⁷¹ The development of regional leisure towns with their range of social facilities brought together both landed and urban gentry in a relaxed atmosphere which obscured social boundaries and created a broader social mix from which suitable partners might be found.⁷² The extent to which a

⁶⁶ Peter Borsay, 'Politeness and Elegance; The Cultural Refashioning of Eighteenth Century York', in M. Hallet and J. Rendall (eds.), *Eighteenth Century York: Culture, Space and Society* (York, 2003), p. 9. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 213-214.

⁶⁷ Berry, 'Creating Polite Space', pp. 138, 140.

⁶⁸ Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (London 1818, London, 1994).

⁶⁹ Abbott, *Family Ties*, pp. 71, 76.

⁷⁰ William Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder, 1715-1716* (London, 1939), p. 127, Saturday 29 October, 1715.

⁷¹ Adrian Henstock (ed.), *The Diary of Abigail Gawthern of Nottingham 1751-1810* (Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire, 1980), p. 40, 8 October, 1782, p. 124, 17 September, 1806, p. 145, 6 October, 1809.

⁷² Borsay, 'Politeness and Elegance', pp. 2, 3, 7. Whyman, *Sociability and Power*, p. 124.

young woman might benefit from the more relaxed environment of the new public sociability depended on the rules of each facility and the attitude of a girl's parents.⁷³

During the later seventeenth century squirearchy marriages were generally both socially and geographically endogamous, but the development of London and provincial leisure towns in the eighteenth century saw an increase in both geographical and social exogamy facilitated by improvements in transport, public sociability and changing social attitudes to marriage with wealthier merchant or professional families.⁷⁴ Assemblies and social activities served as information exchanges, allowing parents, relatives and children to become aware of potential partners and make enquiries about fortunes, family background and future prospects.⁷⁵ This was what Tidy Russell did when she looked for a bride for her brother at the Newport Assembly.⁷⁶

The expansion of public sociability and the increased freedom allowed to young people coincided with and may have contributed to the decline in parentally arranged marriages and the development of personal choice of partners. The late seventeenth century demographic dip may have driven the development of new mechanisms which allowed girls and their parents to find husbands in a competitive market. Whilst wealthier landowners were still focused on parity of wealth and status, the lesser gentry were more prepared to allow greater independence of choice and accept marriages with men from a slightly lower social stratum.⁷⁷

3. Marriage-making

Younger sons could choose from a variety of occupations suited to their social status, but squirearchy daughters had few realistically viable alternatives to marriage. The historical fate of Agnes Porter and Agnes Weeton, and that anticipated by the fictional Jane Fairfax in *Emma*, was to become a governess. In

⁷³ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 192.

⁷⁴ Heal and Holmes, 'The Gentry', pp. 67-68. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 51. Rogers, 'Money, land and Lineage', p. 280.

⁷⁵ Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, p. 117.

⁷⁶ F. J. Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters 1748-1765* Bedford Historical Record Society, (Streatley, 1954, pp. 34-35, Tidy Russell to her brother Edmund, 17 October, 1758.

⁷⁷ Trumbach, *The Egalitarian Family*, p. 97. J. R. Rosenheim, *The Emergence of a Ruling Order: English Landed Society 1650-1750* (London and New York, 1998), p. 24. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, p. 228. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 213.

Emma Courtney, Haywood described an impoverished young woman who ‘attended a family in the humble office of companion or chief attendant to the lady’.⁷⁸ Almost all parents faced the problem of how to dispose of daughters. It was exacerbated in families which, like those of Samuel Barker and Sir Justinian Isham, had several female children.

Eighteenth century writers regularly discussed how to ‘dispose’ of daughters, often arguing that the marriage-making process could easily be reduced by some parents to a commercial transaction. Sir Patient Fancy said his intention for his daughter was to ‘dispose of her before I die’.⁷⁹ Mrs Sealand, in *The Conscious Lovers*, opened negotiations with a suitor by saying, ‘we will talk then of business’, and later to her daughter ‘I am disposing of you above yourself in every way’.⁸⁰ Amena, in *Love in Excess*, refused a proposal from a suitor, because ‘only my father has the power of disposing of [me]’.⁸¹ Mrs Vere’s mother ‘meant to dispose of her daughter in marriage’. Mr Vere, accepting this, ‘hoped she would not think of putting any force’ on the girl.⁸²

A writer in *The Tatler* described ‘a fine woman ... set up by way of auction’ and of a father who ‘has a daughter to sell’.⁸³ ‘Mr Bickerstaff’ said

[When I] consider the generality of your sex as to their disposal of themselves in marriage, or their parents doing it for them without their own approbation. I cannot but look on all such matches as the most impudent prostitution.⁸⁴

The issue of disposing of daughters was just as potent later in the century. A correspondent wrote to *The Mirror* about two daughters whose mother aimed to ‘get her girls well married’ and, for this purpose, had trusted entirely to [their] external

⁷⁸ Jane Austen, *Emma* (London, 1815, London, 1992), pp. 122-127, chapter 20. Mary Hays, *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (London, 1759, London, 1987), p. 113.

⁷⁹ Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy* (1676), in Kathryn Rogers (ed.), *The Meridian Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth Century Plays by Women* (London, 1994), p. 46. Act 2, scene 2.

⁸⁰ Sir Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), in Ricardo Quintana (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Plays* (New York, 1952), p. 148, Act 3.

⁸¹ Eliza Haywood, *Love in Excess or The Fatal Enquiry* (London, 1720), (ed.) David Oakleaf, (Ontario, 1996), p. 52.

⁸² Sheridan, *Sidney Bidulph*, p. 60.

⁸³ *The Tatler no. 199*, Saturday 15 July to Tuesday 18 July, 1710. [accessed through 17th-18th Century Burney Collection, 21.12.2016]

⁸⁴ *Ibid. no. 91*, Sunday 5 November to Tuesday 8 November, 1709. [Burney]

accomplishments ... and those little arts [used] to trap the amorous and unwary'.⁸⁵ Another writer described the pressure placed on her 'solely on one subject: the disposal of my person in marriage. ... I was equally the slave of my mother's hopes and fears'. To achieve her objective the mother paraded her daughter at balls, parties, public walks and hunting parties, while protecting her against the attention of undesirable suitors.⁸⁶ Despite the attention given in literary material to the disposal of daughters, there is, apart from one letter written by Abel Barker, little evidence in the sample correspondence of such thoughts. He rejected an offer for his sister because 'my mother ... hath disposed of her thoughts some other way'.⁸⁷ Undoubtedly though, other parents or elder brothers in the sample, irrespective of any feelings of affection, shared the view that their prime responsibility for daughters or sisters was to dispose of them safely in marriage.

The problem of how to dispose of daughters was intensified by the religious changes of the previous century. Convents had traditionally offered depositaries for surplus females, but this was no longer an option in Protestant England.⁸⁸ Mrs M. told Jenny Jessamy that she was a penniless orphan who had not 'known what would have become of [her]' until an aunt took her in.⁸⁹ Unwanted females were less of a problem for Catholic gentry like the Throckmortons of Warwickshire, the Blundells of Lancashire or the Turvilles of Leicestershire. Those Catholic gentry who could afford to do so, sent surplus daughters to European convents.⁹⁰ Awareness of this problem was sufficient for some writers to propose the establishment of 'Protestant nunneries' to receive the unwanted daughters of the gentry.⁹¹

Another major concern was the question of coverture, by which a woman's legal identity was subsumed into that of her husband when she married. Defoe's heroine Roxana rejected marriage because 'a wife must give up all she has' to her husband and must 'thenceforth be under his authority ... The laws of matrimony put the power

⁸⁵ *The Mirror*, volume 2, no. 67, 28 December, 1779. [accessed through 17th-18th Century Burney Collection, 21.12.2016]

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, no 81, Tuesday, 15 February, 1780. [Burney]

⁸⁷ LRO, DG11/4, *Conant Papers*, letter 48. From Abel Barker to Mr Wm Sherman at Leicester, 24 December, 1646.

⁸⁸ Froide, *Never Married*, p. 157.

⁸⁹ Haywood, *Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy*, p. 118.

⁹⁰ Geoffrey Scott, *The Throckmortons at Home and Abroad, 1680-1800*, in Peter Marshall and Geoffrey Scott (eds.), *Catholic Gentry in English Society: The Throckmortons of Coughton*, (Farnham, 2009), pp. 178, 190. LRO, DG39 *Turville Papers*.

⁹¹ *The Tatler*, no. 32, June 1709. [Burney]

into your hands ... and binds me, forsooth, to obey'.⁹² Financial aspects of coverture could be avoided by vesting money or property in trustees and reserving the income for a wife's 'sole use'. This device was used in several of the sample family settlements. Mary Plaistow's contract allowed her 'the Interest and proceeds [from land in trust] to her ... own use during her life, without account'.⁹³ Hans Mortimer, when negotiating marriage with a Miss Tilbe, proposed that her entire fortune be held 'in trust for [her] sole and separate use'.⁹⁴ The 1817 Conant-Brown settlement gave Catherine Brown the annual interest of stocks placed in trust 'for her own sole and separate use and benefit ... notwithstanding her intended coverture'.⁹⁵

Family size was critical for the squirearchy. It was essential to have at least one spare son, but equally desirable to avoid having too many daughters. *The Gentleman's Magazine* argued that gentlemen with several daughters 'who can't give about £1,000 or £1,500 a piece to their daughters ... [should] take care their daughters be taught the most useful arts and ...let them ... be put apprentice to genteel and easy trades'.⁹⁶ Too few children threatened family extinction, but raising portions for too many daughters could seriously damage family resources.⁹⁷ Dowry size, which often determined a girl's marital prospects, was often determined by the number of daughters in a family. Portions affected marriage strategies, the planning necessary to raise the required funds, and the prospects of any young woman in the marriage market.⁹⁸ Squires could not always make provision for their daughters as they wished. Lack of resources could trap young women in relative poverty and reduce their competitiveness in the increasingly overcrowded marriage market.

Societal norms meant that young women played no official part in partner-selection, although it was generally accepted that they could reject an offer. Proposals were made for them and to them, but not by them as Lord Halifax' explained:

⁹² Daniel Defoe, *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* (London, 1724, London, 1982), pp. 170, 183, 190-191.

⁹³ LRO, DG11/971, *Conant Papers*. Marriage settlement between William Whiston the younger and Mary Plaistow, 20 August, 1735.

⁹⁴ LRO, DE 107/102, *Mortimer Papers*. Heads of Settlement, April 1799 on the proposed marriage of Hans Sanders Mortimer with Miss Tilbe.

⁹⁵ LRO, DG11/979, *Conant Papers*. Conant-Brown marriage agreement, 3 December, 1817.

⁹⁶ 'Education of Women for Careers', pp. 525-526, in E. A. Reitan (ed.), *The Best of the Gentleman's Magazine, 1731-1754* (New York, 1987), pp. 154-156, October 1739.

⁹⁷ Whyman, *Sociability and Power*, p. 129.

⁹⁸ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, pp. 66-67. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, pp. 65, 107.

One of the disadvantages belonging to your sex [is] 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. ... That the supposition of yours being the weaker sex, having without doubt a good foundation, makes it reasonable to subject it to the masculine domination.⁹⁹

The Universal Museum complained that too many parents by setting their sights too high, reduced their daughters' marital prospects. The writer thought 'the scheme of most parents [is] to make bargains for the security of their fortunes [rather] than the happiness of their children'.¹⁰⁰ Proposals were usually directed to parents or guardians for their assent and girls were expected simply to accept or reject them. Halifax argued that daughters should not 'refuse when their parents recommend, [even] though their inward consent may not entirely go along with it'.¹⁰¹

Wrightson argued that many squirearchy children were allowed greater decision-making freedom than Halifax suggested was appropriate for the greater gentry. Less wealth and property were involved which made marriage-making at this social level more a personal than a family affair.¹⁰² Evidence from the Barker correspondence suggests that in the mid seventeenth century Abel Barker's sisters and daughters accepted without question the marriages he arranged for them. Anne Congreve's rejection of family advice and insistence on her own choice in 1747 has already been noted.¹⁰³ In the early nineteenth century the three Lowe sisters did not seek approval from their father or their elder brother when they decided to marry men with whom they had already developed relationships.¹⁰⁴ In the sample families and the published source material there are examples of daughters who rejected suitors

⁹⁹ George Saville, Marquis of Halifax, *The Ladies New Year's Gift: or Advice to a Daughter* (London, 1688), p. 18. [accessed through EEBO, 07.08.2016]

¹⁰⁰ 'On the Folly of Parents', volume 2, issue 2, 1762.

¹⁰¹ Halifax, *The Ladies New Year's Gift*, pp. 17-19. [EEBO]

¹⁰² Wrightson, *English Society*, pp. 72-73.

¹⁰³ See above p. 184.

¹⁰⁴ SRO, D1057/M/I/9/12, *Congreve Papers*. Anne Congreve to her brother Richard, Friday night, December 1747. WRO, CR2926/1, *Lowe Correspondence*. Hagger Lowe to J. B. L., 6th month, 1803 concerning possible marriage of their brother John. CR2926/11, Hagger Lowe to J. B. L., 8th of 5th month, 1811 informing brother of his own impending marriage. CR2926/51, Deborah Lowe to J. B. L. informing him that his sister Anna is about to marry. CR2926/36/1, Anna Lowe to J. B. L. giving news of her marriage, 4th of 12th month, 1816. CR2926/46, Anna Lowe to J. B. L. with news of Deborah's marriage, 5th of 4th month, 1823.

chosen for them or who proposed to them. Between 1802 and 1810 Anna Gawthern enjoyed an active social life in which she received and rejected several proposals.¹⁰⁵ The doctrine of consent was an important feature of marriage-making. The prevailing Christian belief was that 'consent makes a marriage'. It was a legal requirement that both parties willingly and freely consented to marry and a socially accepted 'fact' that parental consent was desirable, if not essential, for a marriage to take place. Hardwicke's Marriage Act made parental consent a requirement for the marriages of minors, although apparently this was not always observed. In 1811 Mrs Congreve learned about the unusual case of a Miss Beale's marriage, in which 'the banns were published in the Church, she not being of age nor having any trustee to give consent'.¹⁰⁶ This was completely at variance with the law and should, presumably, have invalidated the marriage. The importance placed on consent is reflected in the sample correspondence. William Congreve informed his brother of 'my obligation to heaven for having ... gained [Mrs Eyre's] consent to make me happy'.¹⁰⁷ Deborah Lowe wrote of a friend who 'will in due time enter the matrimonial state with Anne Buxton of Weymouth. I understand he has not had much difficulty in gaining her consent'. Deborah thought the girl had consented too easily and would have been better served by a show of reluctance.¹⁰⁸

Potential tension existed when a couple wished to marry but a father or guardian refused his consent. This tension may explain the increased popularity of clandestine marriages and elopement. Until 1753 a clandestine or secret marriage was a legal method of circumventing parental opposition. After that date, under age couples in England who wished to marry without parental agreement had the option of eloping to Scotland or France or marrying illegally.¹⁰⁹ In the 1770s John Martin eloped with a 16-year-old heiress when her guardian refused to let them marry. In contrast, eighteen-year-old Betty Morris married perfectly legally but clandestinely in church in 1718 without her father's consent.¹¹⁰ In 1800 William Withering learned

¹⁰⁵ Adrian Henstock (ed.), *The Diary of Abigail Gawthern*, p. 98, 14 November and 15 December; p. 106, 29 February, 1804; p. 237, 21 March, 1808.

¹⁰⁶ SRO, D1057/M/O/7/2, *Congreve Papers*. E. Baughy from Ludlow to Mrs Congreve at Shrewsbury, 21 February, 1811.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, D1057/M/I/3/39. William Congreve from Dublin to Richard Congreve, 23 December, 1747.

¹⁰⁸ WRO, CR2926/52, *Lowe Correspondence*. Deborah Lowe to her brother Jeffrey Bevington Lowe, 12th of 5th month, 1816.

¹⁰⁹ Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe*, p. 58.

¹¹⁰ Christine Viallis and Kay Collins (eds.), *A Georgian Parson: The Reverend John Martin of Naseby* Northampton Record Office, (Northampton, 2004), pp. 18-19. Edmund

that 'his old flame Miss Campbell' had married. Her husband, 'being fearful his father would not give his consent, persuaded Miss C to a private marriage. Accordingly, they ... were united without the knowledge of Mrs Campbell'. Mr Bodham senior approved of the marriage when he heard of it and welcomed the young couple into his home.¹¹¹

Parental consent was not a problem in arranged marriages, but became increasingly significant when young people were allowed to choose their own partners. Consent could be withheld by parents just as daughters could refuse an offer of marriage. Many daughters still wanted parental consent, even though they could legally marry without it. Abel Barker rejected an offer for an unmarried sister, saying she was 'unwilling to entertain that motion'.¹¹² His widowed sister asked Abel to approve her decision to marry her husband's step-brother, only to ignore his opposition.¹¹³ Richard Congreve would not give 'approbation and assistance' to Robert Clavering's proposal until Mrs Clavering consented.¹¹⁴ The unmarried William Stout as head of his family assumed the authority to advise his nieces on their marriages, recording in 1719 that his eldest niece 'contrary to my advice and without my consent ... married Thomas Hall. ... [I] resolved not to contribute to them'.¹¹⁵ Problems could arise if a daughter opposed a marriage favoured by her father.¹¹⁶ 'Mr Stonecourt' wrote in *The Universal Spectator* that 'non-compliance' with a father's wishes 'is not an act of undutifulness, but [of] self-preservation. Forcing a child to marry is contrary to reason, as well as the natural liberty of every creature'.¹¹⁷

Staunton Degge demonstrated serial failure to obtain parental consent to his proposals. The younger son of a Staffordshire family, recently settled in Derbyshire, he made several unsuccessful proposals for different girls. In 1741, a Mr Page

Hobhouse (ed.), *The Diary of a West Country Physician 1684-1726* (Rochester 1934), pp. 66-72.

¹¹¹ BRO, MS3164/vol.1/1, *The Withering Letters*. Letter 65. Mary Leslie Grierson from Edinburgh to William Withering at the Larches, received 23 April, 1800.

¹¹² LRO, DG11/4, *Conant Papers*, letter 69. Abel Barker to Sir Richard Wingfield at Tickencote in Rutland, 27 September, 1647.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, letter 86, Abel Barker to his widowed sister Mrs Elizabeth Goodman, 30 May, 1648.

¹¹⁴ SRO, D1057/M/1/9/5, *Congreve Papers*. Richard Congreve in Shrewsbury to Mrs Clavering, 28/29 December, 1747.

¹¹⁵ J. D. Marshall (ed.), *The Autobiography of William Stout of Lancaster* (Manchester, 1967), p. 178.

¹¹⁶ Sheridan, *Sidney Bidulph*, p. 60.

¹¹⁷ 'Parental Authority in Marriage', in *The Universal Spectator*, 7 April, 1733, pp. 177-178, in Reitan (ed.), *The Gentleman's Magazine*, p. 165.

acquainted him 'of the approbation of the lady and her mother. Thus, I am at last engaged for life to my no small satisfaction'.¹¹⁸ His happiness was clearly short-lived since, in early 1742, he proposed to Miss Sanders of Derbyshire whose guardian 'gave me ... a positive refusal; at the same time telling me, that [she] would soon be [her] own Mistress'.¹¹⁹ Later he applied directly to Miss Sanders, but the outcome is not recorded. Three years later he proposed to a Miss Howe and her father was advised to reject him because of his unreliable character.¹²⁰ In 1747 he was eventually accepted by a Miss Hanmer.

It was generally accepted that children should not be coerced into marriage, but parents with limited resources must have been tempted to 'persuade' their daughters into marriage to ease financial problems.¹²¹ The increasingly competitive nature of the early eighteenth century marriage-market made many squirearchy daughters with small fortunes vulnerable to moral pressures. Many writers argued that since proposals of marriage were so rare it was unwise to refuse an unattractive offer when the alternative was to remain a life-long single woman.¹²²

The frequency with which issues of compulsion and coercion were addressed in fiction suggests that it was a real issue for readers. In *Sir Patient Fancy*, Isabella complained that 'custom is unkind to our sex, not to allow us free choice; but we ... must be forced to endure the formal recommendation of a parent'.¹²³ In *Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* a young woman complained that her father had accepted a proposal for her from a wealthy but elderly suitor and was 'resolved ... to compel me to grant [my consent]'. Her father argued that this was reasonable, since a young woman needs to 'be guided by those who know how to think for her'.¹²⁴ Her unwanted suitor told her that if she continued to refuse his offer he would make 'use of such means as the laws allowed him, to compel her', because her father, having signed a contract and received payment, would be in breach of promise.¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ LRO, DE107/61, *Mortimer Papers*. Staunton Degge to his uncle, 22 October, 1741.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, DE107/83 Staunton Degge to Miss Sanders in Derby, October 1742.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, DE107/85, J. Howe to his uncle, 9 July, 1745.

¹²¹ Eales, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 64. Abbott, *English Families*, p. 57.

¹²² Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, p. 119.

¹²³ Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy*, p. 27, Act 1, scene 1.

¹²⁴ Haywood, *Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy*, p. 84.

¹²⁵ Sheridan, *Sidney Bidulph*, p. 66.

The sample provides no clear evidence of daughters who experienced direct coercion. There is some evidence to suggest that parents would listen to their daughters and allow them greater freedom of choice than in earlier times. Sir Thomas Burton, replying to Elizabeth Barker's proposal, wrote that he had confidence in his daughter and would give her freedom 'in this or in anything else that is fit'.¹²⁶ Blundell repeatedly told suitors and friends that 'my daughter is entirely left to her own choice'.¹²⁷ Joseph Banks refused to compel his daughter to accept a suitor against her will, saying 'either proceed, or if thou dislike [him] ... let him truly know thou cannot think of it. I leave it to thyself'.¹²⁸ Such comments imply that freedom to make a choice was not the norm and that despite accepting the principles of freedom of choice and vetoes, the use of coercion was not uncommon in some matrimonial negotiations.

Parents in the seventeenth century sample families arranged marriages for their daughters but allowed them greater involvement in the eighteenth century. Parental consent or approval was clearly important throughout the period and, as the Congreve-Birch negotiations show, parents could still exercise influence through their financial control.

4. Single women

Single women did not fit societal norms in a culture which saw marriage as essential for females.¹²⁹ The proportion of gentry women who were life-long single women increased towards the end of the seventeenth century and remained high for much of the eighteenth. Increased numbers of single women are present in several of the sample families. Diaries and correspondence do not explain this phenomenon, but economic circumstances were probably a significant causal factor.

The proportion of gentry females who reached 50 without marrying rose from ten percent in the sixteenth century to approximately twenty five percent between 1675

¹²⁶ LRO, DG11/4, *Conant Papers*, letter 41. Sir Thomas Burton from London to Elizabeth Barker at Hambleton, 26 February, 1646.

¹²⁷ Margaret Blundell (ed.), *Blundell's Diary and Letter Book, 1702-1728* (Liverpool, 1952), p. 227. Nicholas Blundell to Mr Strickland, 31 August, 1725.

¹²⁸ Hall (ed.), *The Banks Letters*, pp. 14-15, letter 18. Joseph Banks to his daughter Mary, 12 January, 1711.

¹²⁹ Bennett and Froide, 'A Singular Past', p. 1.

and 1799 and perhaps a fifth of all gentry women never married.¹³⁰ These figures require a distinction to be made between 'never married' or life-long single women and 'life-cycle' single women, who may have married later in life.¹³¹ The family trees show a similar pattern in the sample families, but lack of clear evidence can make it difficult to determine whether some daughters died before reaching marriageable age or whether their marriages have been omitted from correspondence and legal papers. The seventeenth century saw a consistently high rate of marriage for daughters, but this decreased rapidly in the eighteenth century. All nine Barker daughters in the seventeenth century senior line and two out of four daughters in the cadet branch married. In contrast, only one out of nine eighteenth century daughters married. There are no details for the seventeenth century Mortimers, but of John Mortimer's direct eighteenth century female descendants only three out of fourteen seem to have married. Bishop John Hacket had eight female descendants in the seventeenth century, all of whom married. Of his five eighteenth century female descendants in the male line only two married. A similar pattern is shown by the Congreves, although in the eighteenth century there were very few female descendants who reached marriageable age.

Contemporary writers were generally concerned about the increase in the number and proportion of single women, but some defended their right to choose to remain single. A writer in 1738 argued that marriage was necessary 'for the continuance of the species and to maintain morality' but deplored the fact that a 'good' marriage required a fortune. He asked,

What is to become of our poor daughters: ... Is their chastity to be rewarded with the comfortable appellation 'old maids'? Are they to pine away their lives in a useless, and ... disagreeable state without any opportunity of exerting their good qualities in the two principle female characteristics – that of wife and that of mother.¹³²

¹³⁰ Stone, *Family Sex and Marriage*, p. 38. Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe*, p. 62.

¹³¹ Froide, *Never Married*, p. 16. Amy M. Froide, 'Marital Status as a Category of Difference: Single Women and Widows in Early Modern Britain', in Bennett and Froide (eds.), *Single Women in the European Past*, p. 242.

¹³² *Common Sense or The Englishman's Journal*, Saturday 15 July, 1738, No. 76. [accessed through ECCOII, 16.12.2016]

The Gentleman's Magazine (1739) claimed that a young woman with little fortune who failed to find a husband would be 'obliged to live an old maid and die useless to her generation'.¹³³ Wetenhall Wilkes thought an enforced single state was unfortunate and that 'the pleasures and advantages of [marriage] are preferable to a single state'. He argued that single women developed a 'peevisish nature' and that 'superannuated virginity, occasioned by necessity or restraint from marriage, is an affliction too severe for any of the fair sex, because in these kingdoms it is a kind of imputed scandal'.¹³⁴ A letter from 'Old Maiden' in *The Flapper* objected to merciless criticism of the single state, claiming that the term was hurtful and showed contempt for unfortunate women who often lacked any alternative. She argued that lack of fortune meant many who wanted to marry were prevented from doing so.¹³⁵

Writers of courtship fiction presented similar views, arguing that the life-long single state was undesirable. Single women were regularly depicted as poor, ageing and peripheral to society. The well-meaning but rather silly Miss Bates, in *Emma*, is the archetypal single woman. Emma is happy to dispense charity to Miss Bates, but treats her as a joke, but Mr Knightley and the author believed that she deserved respect, understanding and sympathy for the difficulties that life had inflicted on her. An unstated message is that if she had married life would have been very different for her. Miss Bates is used in the novel as a warning to Jane Fairfax, and readers, that decline into genteel poverty is the lot of women who fail to secure a husband.¹³⁶

Most writers wished to teach their readers that marriage should be for love and not for purely material reasons or to escape the loneliness of the single state. Heroines often commented that they would prefer to remain unmarried rather than marry without love or happiness. Jenny Jessamy was resolved to remain single 'till she was as well assured ... that ... the man who was to be her husband [would] ... render [her] truly happy'.¹³⁷ Richardson's highly moralistic view of marriage was repeatedly expressed in *Sir Charles Grandison*. Harriet Bryan's uncle said that 'a woman out of wedlock is half useless to the end of her being' but 'that a woman who

¹³³ 'The Education of Women for Careers', 9 October, 1739, pp. 525-526, in Reitan (ed.), *The Best of the Gentleman's Magazine*, pp. 154-156.

¹³⁴ Wetenhall Wilkes, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Lady*, 1740, 8th edition 1766, pp. 184-186. [accessed through ECCOII, 19.12.2016]

¹³⁵ *The Flapper*, volume 1, no. 7, 1796, pp. 27-28. [accessed through Eighteenth Century Journals, 19.12.2016]

¹³⁶ Austen, *Emma*, p. 27, chapter 3 and p. 67, chapter 20.

¹³⁷ Haywood, *Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy*, p. 40.

... marries a profligate man, had, generally, much better remain single all her life'.¹³⁸ Lucy Selby asked whether 'If no proper match ever offers, must we take an improper one, to avoid the ridicule of a mere name? An unsupported state is better than an oppressed or miserable one'.¹³⁹ Mrs Reeves complained that many young women married out of desperation because 'the state of a single woman [is] so peculiarly unprovided and helpless. [How can] girls of slender fortune, if they have been genteelly brought up ... support themselves?'¹⁴⁰ The consensus of writers was that the status of an old maid was undesirable and should if possible be avoided. Negative attitudes increased as the century progressed. Many writers suggested that single women were in this state through force of circumstances rather than deliberate choice. There was some debate about whether the single state was preferable to a loveless marriage, but authors of romantic fiction usually argued against making a bad marriage just to avoid being single.

Economic factors were a significant reason for the failure of many women to marry. Dowry inflation created difficulties for many lesser gentry daughters. Fathers with small incomes found it difficult to meet increased demands for portions, especially if they had several daughters. This may explain why in the 1740s only one of Samuel Barker's daughters married. In 1742 Miss Fitzherbert's planned marriage with Charles Congreve was thwarted by her father's death in 'much embarrassed' circumstances. Portions, which seemed generous when fixed in parental marriage settlements, might lack the same purchasing power twenty years later. For many young squirearchy women the prospect of marrying beneath their own social status was unacceptable and they chose to remain single. In 1763 a writer argued that 'the much complained of celibacy of our days ... is greatly to be attributed to the partial selfishness of parents in greatly over-rating the pretensions of their children in marriage'.¹⁴¹

Parental longevity exacerbated economic difficulties. Many daughters had to wait longer to receive their portions. In theory, these were payable at age 21 or marriage

¹³⁸ Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* ed. Jocelyn Harris (London, 1972.), vol.1, p. 25. Harriet Bryan to Miss Selby, 28 January.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 7, chapter 42, p.401. Lucy Selby to Harriet Bryan, 3 April.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 355. Report of a discussion between Mrs Reeves and Sir Charles Grandison, 13 April.

¹⁴¹ 'On the Folly of Parents', in *The Universal Museum, or Gentlemen and Ladies Polite Magazine of History and Literature for 1763* vol. 2, no. 2, February, 1763. [accessed through Eighteenth Century Journals, 16.12.2016]

but often a father might only pay interest on the portion, reserving payment of the capital until his death. Faced with serious financial problems fathers and older brothers might deliberately discourage marriage to save having to fully fund a portion.¹⁴² Unmarried daughters living with widowed mothers in reduced circumstances often lacked the resources or opportunity to attract a suitable husband. Similarly, those who lacked portions might have to depend on the generosity of older brothers.¹⁴³

In 1758 Tidy Williamson recommended as a possible bride a single woman of 34. She lived with a widowed mother who 'loves her daughter, and all she can save is for her'. Tidy did not know whether the woman's brother, who had children of his own, would add to the girl's fortune to improve her marriage prospects.¹⁴⁴ Agnes Weeton's brother, her only relative, refused to support her socially or financially even though she had three times refused marriage offers in order to support him. Relatively poor and socially isolated, Agnes complained to a friend that she would probably never marry, saying 'You have little occasion to attribute my continuance in a single state to any other motive than a want of opportunity. ... It is not likely I ever shall [marry].'¹⁴⁵ She had already expressed despair at the prospect of being a life-long single woman: 'must I live as long as I do ... in this solitude – is there to be no hope?'¹⁴⁶ The restricted circumstances of a single life often made it difficult for young women to attend assemblies and other forms of public sociability to meet and attract prospective husbands. There is no direct evidence to suggest that unmarried women in the sample families experienced these limitations but it seems probable that some, especially the Barkers and the daughters of John Mortimer's third marriage, did.

Chances of marriage might be affected by other factors which often enforced the single state. An isolated location could restrict prospects of marriage, although this was rarely a problem in the well-populated Midland counties. Distance from a leisure

¹⁴² Froide, *Never Married*, p. 78.

¹⁴³ Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, p. 234. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (London, 1811, London, 1996), pp. 1-6, chapter 1.

¹⁴⁴ Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters*, pp. 33-34, Tidy Russell to her brother Edmund Williamson, 3 October, 1758.

¹⁴⁵ J. J. Bagley, (ed.), *Miss Weeton's Journal of a Governess vol. 1 1807-1811* (Oxford, 1936), p. 78. Agnes Weeton from Upholland to Miss Chorley, 1 April, 1808, p. 78.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37. A Retrospect, written by Agnes Weeton around 1809 about the events of 1803.

town or spa could limit opportunities to meet prospective suitors. Parents with limited resources who could not afford to visit appropriate leisure centres or who lived in areas with few eligible bachelors or widowers, might have difficulty in disposing of daughters.¹⁴⁷ Age was a serious obstacle. Marriage for women in their early thirties was becoming unlikely but was improbable once they reached their early forties and the ending of their fertile years.¹⁴⁸ Agnes Weeton, rather cattily commenting on the age of her brother's sister-in-law said, 'if she is in a hurry herself [to marry], she must not say "No" much longer'.¹⁴⁹ There were always exceptions. In *Sir Patient Fancy*, the elderly Lady Knowles argued that a sufficiently large fortune could remove age as a barrier to marriage. She claimed to 'have a fortune that can support [marriage], ... [It] might add a lustre to my eyes, charms to my person, and make me fair as Venus, young as Hebe'.¹⁵⁰ The marriages of 35-year-old Ann Burton, though somewhat unusual, seems to support Lady Knowles opinion.

Poor health and physical disability could be an obstacle to marriage, especially if it was thought a woman might not survive childbirth.¹⁵¹ This issue was illustrated in a letter from a young lady, published in *The Universal Spectator* of 1733. Her father had ordered her to marry someone whose 'person temper and morals' were to her 'utter aversion', but 'being of a tender constitution, I have resolved on a single life and refused several matches without [my father] being uneasy about it'.¹⁵² There is no direct evidence in the sample of women who failed to marry for health reasons, however, Mary Hacket seems to have experienced ill health throughout her married life, suffered a miscarriage in the early months of marriage, and paid several unsuccessful visits to Bath in search of a cure.¹⁵³ Anne Congreve also suffered ill-health in her early life, and like Mary Hacket visited Bath for her health. Her brother wrote in January 1739 'I am very glad sister Nanny has had an opportunity of trying

¹⁴⁷ Maryanne Kowalski, 'Single Women in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Demographic Perspective', in Bennett and Froide (eds.), *Single Women in the European Past*, pp. 54, 56.

¹⁴⁸ Froide 'Marital Status as a Category of Difference', p. 241.

¹⁴⁹ Bagley (ed.), *Miss Weeton's Journal*, Agnes Weeton to her brother Tom, 16 December, 1807.

¹⁵⁰ Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy*, p. 60, Act 3, scene 2.

¹⁵¹ Froide, *Never Married*, pp. 184-185.

¹⁵² 'Parental Authority in Marriage', in *The Universal Spectator and Weekly Journal* no. 235, 7 April, 1733. [<https://newspaperarchive.com/universal-spectator-and-weekly-journal-apr-07-1733-p-1/> accessed 20.11.2016]

¹⁵³ NRO, IC1976, *Isham Correspondence*. Vere Isham to her brother Justinian, 17 August, 1730.

the Bath and hope it has been to the benefit of her health'.¹⁵⁴ She was still experiencing problems in October 1741 when he wrote '[I] am heartily concerned at ye complaints in her stomach and desire if Bath is proper for her?'¹⁵⁵ It is possible that fears about health explain why neither of these women married earlier than they did.

Some women deliberately chose a celibate life. This may have been because of economic circumstances, but there was a growing sense of individuality and independence. Some women associated life-long celibacy with religiosity, and chose to devote themselves to good works rather than family and household life. Others were unable to marry because they had to support aging and infirm parents or married siblings.¹⁵⁶ The unfairness of coverture may have encouraged some to reject marriage, preferring the separate legal identity of *feme sole* to being subordinate to male authority.¹⁵⁷ The single state gave an adult woman autonomy, allowed her to control her own financial affairs, enjoy freedom from male authority and establish her own household. Some women chose not to marry because of a physical aversion while others feared the early mortality associated with child-birth. Others, like Rebecca Parselow, refused a marriage offer because they could not conclude a 'good deal' with a prospective husband, whether socially or economically.¹⁵⁸

Increased life-long female celibacy in the sample families during the early eighteenth century is not explained in the archives. It may have been a response to the demographic dip of the late seventeenth century which created a gender imbalance and a shortage of potential husbands, a matter of personal choice, or because younger sons could not afford to marry in a society experiencing portion and jointure inflation. Significantly, several of the sample families experienced severe economic difficulties in the early eighteenth century. The Congreves were bankrupt and forced to sell property, the Hackets had heavy mortgage debts incurred for Mary Hacket's marriage and the Barkers suffered three lengthy, expensive and concurrent jointure payments. Under these circumstances, it was probably impossible for them to raise

¹⁵⁴ SRO, D1057/M/I/3/5, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve in Minorca to his brother Richard, 1 January, 1739.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, D1057/M/I/3/22, William Congreve in Minorca to his brother Richard, 9 October, 1741.

¹⁵⁶ Froide, *Never Married*, pp. 183, 187-189.

¹⁵⁷ Hill, *Women, Work, and Sexual Politics*, p 121.

¹⁵⁸ See above Chapter 4, p. 119.

large competitive portions to facilitate marriage opportunities. This may explain why so few eighteenth century daughters in the sample married. There is no clear simple explanation of why gentry women remained single, but a combination of circumstances had a cumulative effect which, for some women, made marriage unlikely, improbable and then impossible.

Conclusion

The sample sources say little about marriage-making as it affected females mainly because the focus was on the marriage of the eldest son, but also because daughters who married left their natal family probably taking relevant documentation with them into their new family. This seems to be the case for Mary Hacket, details of whose marriage are reconstructed almost entirely from the Isham archive. Information about female marriages can be found in marriage contracts and wills which can be supplemented with primary evidence available in printed form, such as the diary of Abigail Gawthorn and *The Williamson Letters*. These contain considerably more information about daughters and marriage-making than the sample correspondence. There is usually less information about those daughters who remained single.

The family trees show that the sample families experienced the same demographic dip and gender imbalance described by historians as the national picture. Each family experienced declining nuptiality and increasing rates of celibacy after 1680. There appears to be a correlation in several of the families between economic difficulties and reduced female nuptiality, but there is insufficient evidence to establish a clear causal link. Evidence about the age of brides, especially those daughters who married out of the sample families, is limited, but does suggest that age at first marriage decreased during the eighteenth century.

In the seventeenth century the majority of marriages in the sample were both geographically and socially endogamous. In the eighteenth century there were fewer female marriages but they were more geographically dispersed. Eighteenth century Barker brides seem to be with men with whom they shared interests rather than ones who expected large fortunes. Several of the Congreve brides were met on military postings or through clerical appointments. There is little in the source material to show that daughters met their husbands through urban sociability.

There was a move away from the parentally arranged marriages prevalent in the seventeenth century towards greater personal choice of partner but there is insufficient evidence to claim that affection or romantic love were significant factors in female marriages in the sample. Those daughters who married usually welcomed parental approval even when they made their own choice of husband. There is no evidence to suggest that coercion was used in the sample families to encourage daughters to marry men they disliked, but the published sources show that daughters could veto choices.

The correspondence and legal documents show the important role played by finance in marriage-making. Portions were essential bargaining counters in negotiations and remained the key to attracting acceptable offers. Lack of finance and small portions were barriers to appropriate marriages, while failure to agree financial terms could end otherwise acceptable discussions. High adult mortality meant that many wives were left as widows at a relatively early age. Sometimes they might be prevented from remarrying, but some did make second marriages. Widows had rather different marriage-making strategies to single women, as shown in chapter 8.

Chapter 8: Strategies for widows and widowers

Introduction

Until the mid twentieth century, irrespective of status or wealth, widowhood was the great inevitability of marriage. The two main variables were when the break occurred and which partner survived. Widowhood made little significant social or legal difference for men, so that widower status is virtually invisible in the eighteenth century. Distinctions were rarely drawn between married men and widowers since many of the functions of a wife, such as parent, housekeeper, or household manager, were easily filled by paid substitutes for any widowers who chose not to remarry. A widower's life continued much as before until remarriage which, for many of them, followed shortly after bereavement. The situation was very different for widows who occupied an almost unique position in eighteenth century society. Widowhood gave women independent legal status, making them more 'visible' in pre-industrial society than other women, and placing them in their own separate category.¹

Remarriage, which affects families and wider society as well as the couple concerned, raises questions such as: how and why were widows different to other unmarried women in terms of status, finance and legal position; did the different legal position of widows, when compared to married women and young single women, influence decisions about remarriage; were the strategies of remarrying widows different to those of widowers; what were the consequences of remarriage for widows; what might deter a widow or widower from remarrying; what were public attitudes to remarriage and how did they change? Although legally free to marry there were some barriers which prevented some widows remarrying.

A husband's death gave a widow a radically different and separate legal existence. Under coverture a wife lost her individual 'self' and the right to own property or make contracts. As a widow, she could make her own decisions and enjoy an autonomy denied to married women. Providing her marriage settlement was sufficiently generous, she had financial independence, increased social freedom and a choice

¹ Margaret Pelling, 'Finding Widowers: Men without Women in English Towns Before 1700', in Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner (eds.), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London, 1999), p. 37.

of residential options.² Abigail Gawthern, as a widow, successfully managed her former husband's business affairs, to become a wealthy landowner and leading member of Nottinghamshire gentry society.³

Stone estimated that 15% of squirearchy marriages in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were remarriages for at least one partner, that a quarter of all gentry families were hybrid and that a third of gentry children had lost one parent before they reached 14.⁴ Barbara Todd claimed that the average length of marriage increased from 10 years in 1600 to about 20 by 1800, but identified a sharp decrease in remarriage after 1700. She said that remarriage was more common among younger widows, who had been married for less than ten years, than among older, longer married widows.⁵ In 1752 the author of *Maxims and Cautions for the Ladies* wrote 'not to be a widow while young, is not to be a widow to advantage'.⁶

Widows were, in theory, free agents who could decide how to dispose of themselves, but lesser gentry widows were often constrained by circumstances. A wealthy widow could live in reasonable comfort, but squirearchy widows, usually with relatively small incomes, lacked socially respectable opportunities for employment so that their position was financially weaker than widows of lesser social status who could work. Their only realistic options were reliance on the charity of family or friends, decline into genteel poverty, remarriage, or employment as a governess, paid companion or dress maker. Of the various social categories of widow those of the lesser gentry probably faced the greatest economic pressures to remarry but were often the least well-placed to attract suitable offers.

² Amy M. Froide, 'Marital Status as a Category of Difference: Single Women and Widows in Early Modern Britain', in Judith Bennett and Amy M. Froide (eds.), *Single Women in the European Past 1250-1800* (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 237-239. *Idem.*, *Never Married: Single Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 17-19.

³ Adrian Henstock (ed.), 'Introduction', *The Diary of Abigail Gawthern of Nottingham 1751-1810* Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire, (Nottingham 1980). *Idem.*, 'Abigail Gawthern', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

⁴ Lawrence Stone and Jeanne Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (abridged edition, Oxford, 1986), p. 58. Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage 1500-1800* (abridged edition, London, 1979), pp. 45-46.

⁵ Barbara Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow: A Stereotype Reconsidered', in Mary Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1991), pp. 60, 63, 65.

⁶ 'A Lady', *Maxims and Cautions for the Ladies. Being a Complete Economy for the Female Sex* (London, 1752), p. 62. [accessed through ECCOII, 20.10.2016]

Attitudes to widows changed during the period but attitudes to widowers do not seem to have done. Most people accepted that widowers should remarry, and sometimes attempts were made to encourage or compel this. In contrast, many believed that widows should remain single, a view which became stronger as the century progressed. In the early seventeenth century the remarriage of widows was quite common, but the proportions of those who remarried decreased, especially after 1750. This change may have been a response to changing attitudes or to changing circumstances which reduced the appeal of marriage for widows.

The new legal status of widows gave them a strong basis for living an independent life. Second marriages were only restricted legally by rules about affinity, but clauses in settlements and wills sometimes threatened loss of jointure following remarriage. Some widows used pre-nuptial contracts to protect their property-owning rights and retain financial independence rather than return to the limitations of coverture. A widow's remarriage might benefit her first husband's estate by ending jointure payments which could be crippling to estate finances. From a financial perspective, it was usually better for an estate if the husband survived since a widow's jointure drained resources. If a jointure was drawn for more than ten years the cost usually outweighed the initial benefit to an estate of a portion. A new wife's portion, however, might increase the wealth of a widower's estate.

Widowers faced few problems over when to remarry, some marrying within weeks of a spouse's death, but it was accepted that widows ought to wait for twelve months as a mark of respect for their husband and to show they were not carrying his child. Remarriages which involved existing children from either spouse could lead to difficult relationships between step-siblings, problems in providing for children of different marriages, and complications over inheritance. Marriages for widows with children offered security but, almost inevitably led to familial tensions. Remarriage strategies for widows often involved the desire for financial stability and survival. Some wanted company, companionship and practical support while others were influenced by their emotions. A widower might want a bride who could: be a mother for his young children; produce a son to inherit his estates; provide company, companionship and be sufficiently biddable to be moulded to his wishes; and satisfy his emotional and physical needs. Not all widowers remarried, sometimes this was through choice and sometimes through lack of opportunity. The once-married who sought remarriage were influenced by different motives, but the balance swung from

an emphasis on practical needs in the seventeenth century towards more social and emotional pressures in the mid eighteenth century, but finance continued to be an important influence.

Fiction mirrored ideas about remarriage as novels offered a composite view of real life.⁷ The mid eighteenth century saw a marked change in how prose fiction portrayed marriage and remarriage. Before then widows were depicted as grasping, immoral and materialistic, but after 1750 greater emphasis was placed on personal relationships and emotions than on practical issues. In the real world, a similar shift took place. Marriage-making ceased to be the exclusive preserve of family and friends but reflected greater individualism in choice. This change brought the bride and groom out of the shadows into centre stage.

1. Widowhood, widowers and widows

Throughout the long eighteenth century, at any one time, approximately 50% of adult women were unmarried, of whom perhaps a third were widows, but these were not a single coherent group. Amy Froide distinguished between the 'ever-married' and the 'never-married' to reflect the differing life-experiences of widows and unmarried women.⁸ Widows and single women both lived without husbands and, if over 21, were *femmes sole*. However, widows had experienced marriage and, unlike wives, could own property, incur debts, make contracts and live independent lives. Increasingly, society treated widows with contempt and called them 'old maids' or 'mutes'. By 1780 they had become almost socially invisible, other than in fiction and drama.⁹ Single women, over forty were viewed differently to younger single women, because they were thought unlikely to marry. This encouraged a distinction between 'life-cycle' and 'life-long' single women.¹⁰ Life-long single women were often treated as quasi-widows and allowed virtually the same level of independence in marked contrast to the treatment of younger single women.¹¹ In 1792, the governess Agnes

⁷ Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 5-8.

⁸ Froide, 'Marital Status', pp. 236-237. *Idem.*, *Never Married*, pp. 15-17.

⁹ B. A. Holderness, 'Widows in Pre-Industrial Society: An Essay upon their Economic Functions', in R. M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Lifestyle* (London, 1984), p. 424.

¹⁰ Judith Bennett and Amy M. Froide, 'A Singular past', in Bennett and Froide (eds.), *Single Women in the European Past*, pp. 2, 7, 15.

¹¹ Froide, 'Marital Status', pp. 238, 241. Froide, *Never Married*, p. 22. Bridget Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth Century England* (London, 1994), p. 221.

Porter suggested that a friend address her as 'Mrs Porter' because 'I am not yet an old woman, [but] ... rather too advanced in life for a Miss. ... Being styled Mrs will not spoil my marriage – I may be mistaken for a little jolly widow'.¹²

Gentry widows rarely had any opportunity for respectable paid employment but might be expected to manage their husband's estate if the new owner was a minor. Many squirearchy widows experienced severely constrained circumstances especially if, as a second wife like Elizabeth Mortimer, adequate provision had not been made for them when they married. A widow who needed support from her family might require parental approval before she could remarry, but those who were genuinely independent were described as 'at their own disposal'.¹³

Fiction often reflected the real-life plight of poor widows. In *Emma*, Jane Austen said Mrs Bates was 'the widow of a former vicar, ... a very old lady ... [who] lived with her single daughter in a very small way ... endeavouring to make a small income go as far as possible'.¹⁴ Many, especially clerical widows and second wives with inadequate jointures, faced a similar situation. Mrs Bates and her daughter, gentry by courtesy because of Mr Bates employment, had to rely on the social and economic charity of others. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Lady Dashwood, a person of higher social status, suffered similar difficulties as a second wife who lacked a legal settlement and was forced to depend on her step-son's good-will.¹⁵

Many early eighteenth century conduct writers and legislators distinguished between widowers with children and those without. Many of them believed that the former should remain single, but childless widowers and those without sons should remarry.¹⁶ In contrast, many believed that widows should remain single, although sometimes distinguishing between older and younger widows. Older widows should, they argued, devote themselves to charitable works, but younger widows ought to remarry to place a check on their physical passions. Various modern writers have claimed that attitudes to the remarriage of widows, though at best ambiguous, were

¹² Joanna Martin (ed.), *A Governess in the Age of Jane Austen: The Journals and Letters of Agnes Porter*, (London, 1998), p. 134. Agnes Porter to Lady Mary Fox-Strangeways, 7 April, 1792.

¹³ Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (London, 1989), p. 186.

¹⁴ Jane Austen, *Emma* (London, 1815, London, 1992), pp. 16-20, chapter 3

¹⁵ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (London 1815, London 1996), pp. 1-6, chapter 1.

¹⁶ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', p. 81.

more tolerant than in most continental societies. Religious beliefs and practices helped shape ideas about widowhood in this period and influenced the arguments of writers who promoted an idealised image of 'the widow', but did not provide a comparable representation of the model widower.¹⁷

Adverse observations about unmarried widows were made almost as frequently in letters and diaries as critical comments about remarriage. Agnes Weeton said an elderly widowed aunt had 'as much curiosity ... as ever any old maid in the country'. She later dismissed 'old maids' as 'a stock for everyone to laugh at'.¹⁸ Abigail Gawthorn recorded second marriages, especially when they involved a misalliance and made a point of recording significant age discrepancies. She noted that 'Sir Thomas Parkyns' who died aged 77, 'had been married to three wives; the first Miss Winstanley; the second his gardener's daughter; and the third ... governess to his [numerous] family'. Joseph Banks II's friends urged him to remarry only two months after the death of his first wife. They recommended as a suitable candidate a widow who was already looking for a second husband, less than twelve months after her first husband's death.¹⁹

Disparity of wealth and social status was often expected and accepted in second marriages, but status disparity did provoke concern because it was believed that a socially inferior spouse would not adjust to, or be accepted by, higher status people. There are many critical comments about gentry widowers who married governesses, the daughters of farmers and even family servants. In 1810 Agnes Weeton was aware of 'the sorrows that [a] person must undergo who marries above herself'. She advised a friend not to marry 'out of your own rank ... [because] married people have the greatest chance of being happy whose original rank was most

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66. Elizabeth Foyster, 'Marrying the Experienced Widow in Early Modern England: The Male Perception', in Cavallo and Warner (eds.), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, pp. 109-110.

¹⁸ Amy Louise Erickson, 'Property and Widowhood in England 1660-1840', in Cavallo and Warner (eds.), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, p. 161. J. J. Bagley (ed.), *Miss Weeton's Journal of a Governess* vol. 1, 1807-1811 (Oxford, 1936), pp. 85, 178. Agnes Weeton to her friend Miss Bolton, 8 May, 1808 and to her brother, 17 July, 1809.

¹⁹ Henstock (ed.), *The Diary of Abigail Gawthorn*, p. 61, 13 October, 1794, p. 68, 13 December, 1796, p. 61, August, 1796 and p. 122, 20 March, 1806. J. W. F. Hall (ed.), *The Letters and Papers of the Banks Family of Revesby Abbey, 1704-1760* Lincoln Record Society, vol. 45, (Lincoln, 1952), p. 52, letter 62. An anonymous correspondent to Joseph Banks II, 3 November, 1730.

nearly equal'.²⁰ The problem of socially unequal remarriage was shown when the widower Mr Pedder married 'his servant [a dairy maid]' and took her 'into retirement for a few years, until she becomes better fitted for the society he wishes hereafter to introduce her to'.²¹ The Pedder family refused to recognise this marriage or welcome Mrs Pedder into the family home.²² Financially disadvantaged widows sometimes felt forced to accept husbands of lower status to achieve security, a course of action which was probably slightly less unacceptable than if a single girl married her social inferior.²³ In theory, society disapproved of remarriage and condemned socially exogamous marriages but many such marriages occurred and were accepted.

This dichotomy in social attitudes towards widows and widowhood was reflected in advice literature and imaginative writing. In 1714, John Arbuthnot expressed the conventional view that the ideal widow was 'pious and charitable [and] did a great deal of good among her poor neighbours ... [She] had the character of a conscientious motherly woman'.²⁴ In 1755 a 'Lady' argued that widowhood need not be as difficult as some people claimed, suggesting that 'if all widows ... devoted themselves to piety and charity it would ... render the condition, not only supportable, but pleasant; and they would not need to make such ... disadvantageous escapes [by marrying], as many do'.²⁵ Hannah Cowley's attitude was similar. In *The Belles Stratagem* (1780) Touchwood told Mrs Racket, your 'air should be sedate, your Address grave, your deportment matronly ... an example to the young women.'²⁶

A 'Lady', echoing the views of many Puritan writers, supported the biblical argument that it was better for younger widows to remarry than to succumb to the temptations

²⁰ Bagley (ed.), *Miss Weeton's Journal*, p. 239. Agnes Weeton to Miss Winckley, 25 February, 1810.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 200-201, Agnes Weeton to her brother, 9 December, 1809.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 219-221, Agnes Weeton to Miss Chorley, 18 January, 1810, and pp. 241-242, Agnes Weeton to Miss Chorley, 14 March, 1810.

²³ Ralph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth Century England*, (New York, 1978), p. 98. Pelling, 'Finding Widowers', p. 45. Mary Abbott, *Family Ties: English Families 1540-1920* (London and New York, 1993), p. 68.

²⁴ John Arbuthnot, *A Postscript to John Bull, Containing the History of the Crown Inn, with the Death of the Widow* (London, 1714), p. 3. [accessed through ECCO, 18.08.2016]

²⁵ A Lady, *The Lady's Present to the Fair Sex: Being an Infallible Guide for their Happy Deportment Through Every Stage of Life* (London, 1755), pp. 171-172, 174. [accessed through ECCOII, 18.08.2016]

²⁶ Hannah Cowley, *The Belles Stratagem* (London, 1780), Act 3 Scene 1.

of immoral conduct, offered by the single life.²⁷ A heated pamphlet debate in the 1740s, sparked by 'True Penitent's' attack on remarriage, illustrated contrasting attitudes about whether remarriage was desirable or proper.²⁸ Thomas Dilworth argued that young widows should not be denied the opportunity to remarry. He claim that since all actions and decisions are guided by 'Divine Providence ... there can be no danger in [a man] marrying a young widow' since it was clearly what God wanted him to do.²⁹ Dilworth argued in support of remarriage for older widows on the same basis, because 'inclinations to matrimony, when they proceed from sound principles, cannot be sinful'.³⁰

Henry Fielding examined the question of remarriage in *Amelia* (1751) and appeared at first reading to condemn it. Mrs Bennet, a poor clergyman's widow left 'in very indifferent circumstances', argued

Our laws certainly allow [remarriage], and so, I think doth our religion.... I see but little difference between having two husbands at one time and at several times; ... if a woman hath lived with her first husband without having children I think it unpardonable in her to carry barrenness into a second family... If she hath children by her first husband, to give them a second father is still more unpardonable.³¹

Here Fielding was challenging the traditional view, not defending it. Later, he showed Mrs Bennet remarrying, enjoying a happy relationship and having a child by her second husband. His argument was that remarriage was desirable and should be encouraged, not condemned on the grounds of prejudice.

²⁷ A Lady, *The Lady's Present*, pp. 171-172, 174. [ECCOII]

²⁸ 'True Penitent', *The Folly, Sin and Danger of Marrying Widows, and Old Women in General, Demonstrated* (London, 1746). [accessed through ECCO] Thomas Dilworth, *An Advocate for the Ladies Concerning the Sacred State of Matrimony* (London, 1746). [accessed through ECCO, 08.08.2016] 'A Lady', *The Characters of Widows, and Old Women in General, Vindicated* (London, 1746). [accessed through ECCO, 08.08.2016] 'A Lady', *Maxims and Cautions*. [ECCO] Some of these views were based on an interpretation of the Apostle Paul in *I Timothy 5:3, 11 and 12*, 'younger widows ... learn to be gossips and busybodies ... I would prefer that the younger widows get married, have children, and take care of their homes' (*Good News Bible*).

²⁹ Dilworth, *An Advocate for the Ladies*, pp. 48, 66. [ECCO]

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52. [ECCO]

³¹ Henry Fielding, *Amelia* (first published, London, 1751, London, 1987), pp. 188, 256-257.

Public dislike of remarriage increased later in the eighteenth century as did the use of pejorative terms for unmarried women. Such terms were applied almost indiscriminately to older single women and widows and were often linked to suggestions that widowhood encouraged immorality.³² The strongest opposition usually came from: relatives of the potential husband or widow; relatives of the first wife; and children of previous marriages. Objections were usually focused on questions of inheritance and children's rights.³³ The types of questions asked included: who should have responsibility and authority for the children of either marriage; what were the social and financial relationships between children of consecutive marriages; would children of a first marriage be neglected in favour of those of the second; and what should be the relationship between a husband or wife and the children of a spouse's previous marriage?

Todd argued that women who had been widowed for a long time valued their independence and were reluctant to return to subordination. Independent widows directly challenged the concept of patriarchy which required female subordination.³⁴ The fictional Roxana said, 'I had no intention to be a wife again ... a wife is treated with indifference ... is looked upon, as but an upper-servant'.³⁵ In real life, Abigail Gawthorn preferred life as an independent manufacturer to remarriage.³⁶ A 'Lady' argued that a widow was unwise if, 'having tasted the freedom of widowhood, [she] gave it up in favour of remarriage. ... In the time of thy widowhood the choice of thy pleasure is in thyself; remember that it will not always be so' [after marriage].³⁷ A widow's independent authority was a real challenge to remarriage. Potential suitors, especially younger, poorer or socially inferior men, might be afraid that a wealthy widow would dominate their marriage. Edward Ward claimed that a man who married a 'rich and beautiful [widow] ... matches himself with a she-devil' and one who marries 'a widow and three children matches himself to four thieves'.³⁸ Age disparity was one reason that some remarriages were opposed, because of fears that it created incompatibility. The motives of older people of either sex who

³² Susan Lanser, 'Singular Politics: The Rise of the British Nation and the Production of the Old Maid', in Bennett and Froide (eds.), *Single Women in the European Past*, pp. 297 ff.

³³ See Chapter 5, pp. 133-137 which deal with provision for children of second marriages.

³⁴ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', pp. 75, 81. Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, p. 51. Foyster, 'Marrying the Experienced Widow', p. 112.

³⁵ Daniel Defoe, *Roxana or the Fortunate Mistress* (London, 1724, London, 1982), p. 170.

³⁶ Henstock (ed.), *The Diary of Abigail Gawthorn*.

³⁷ A Lady, *Maxims and Cautions*, pp. 74, 78. [ECCO]

³⁸ Edward Ward, *Female Policy Detected or The Arts of a Designing Woman Laid Open* (London, 1725), pp. 66-69. [accessed through ECCO, 09.08.2016]

married much younger partners were often questioned and their actions condemned. Some writers recognised that although an older widower's marriage to a young man might offer her comfort and security it could also promote discontent and jealousy. A concern repeatedly examined in fiction and drama was that when an older widower married a young bride it made her vulnerable to seduction.³⁹ Isabella in *Sir Patient Fancy* fearing that her father was 'drawn away by doting love' provoking the question from her cousin 'What the devil did he marry a young wife for?' The cousin concluded that it was 'to keep up his title of cuckold ... for she has beauty enough for temptation [and] cheating my uncle'.⁴⁰

Tidy Russell noted that 'Mr Burchet was last Friday married again to ... a titbit of 25. ... We prognosticate that [Captain Horne] will have a slice of the bride ere long'.⁴¹ William Congreve of Woolwich was concerned about his elderly uncle's recent marriage to a young wife, followed rapidly by the birth of a son, because it robbed him of a possible inheritance.⁴² Isaac Archer, for his own second marriage made in old age, chose 'one young in years ... and suitable to me on all occasions, though not mine equal'. His children and neighbours criticised the marriage, but he was content that 'God hath made up my breach [loss] in some degree'.⁴³ Agnes Weeton said her elderly cousin had married a young widow 'so the old fellow has got family and fortune' but she hoped 'he may have met with a termagant ... for his villainous treatment of his first wife'.⁴⁴

A frequently raised moral and spiritual issue was whether it was proper for widows to remarry. Bible teaching was that marriage was indissoluble and divorce, at least as it is understood today, was wrong. Therefore, any woman who remarried after a divorce entered an adulterous relationship. Some religious thinkers extended this simple belief to the after-life, meaning that death did not end the marriage bond and

³⁹ Foyster, 'Marrying the Experienced Widow', p. 112.

⁴⁰ Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy* (London, 1676), in Kathryn Rogers (ed.), *The Meridian Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth Century Plays by Women* (London, 1994), pp. 29, 39, Act 1, scene 1.

⁴¹ F. J. Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters 1748-1765* (Bedford Historical Record Society, 1954), p. 26. Tidy Russell to her brother Edmund Williamson, 13 December, 1757.

⁴² SRO, D1057/M/H/13/1 and D1057/M/H/13/5, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve of Shrewsbury to his nephew Captain William Congreve of Woolwich, 16 January, 1776 and 6 March, 1777.

⁴³ Mathew Storey (ed.), 'The Diary of Isaac Archer (1641-1700)' in *Two East Anglian Diaries, 1641-1729* (Bury St Edmunds, 1994), pp. 226-227

⁴⁴ Bagley (ed.), *Miss Weeton's Journal*, p. 193. Agnes Weeton to her brother, 2 October, 1809.

that a wife was eternally bound by coverture to her husband, making any remarriage 'an unchaste act'. Comparable opposition to remarriage was rarely directed at widowers.⁴⁵

Second marriages created complex relationships by linking different kin, including relations from previous marriages, with interests in a family or its estate.⁴⁶ In the early eighteenth century John Mortimer's three marriages gave the Cromwells, Tippings and Sanders an interest in Mortimer affairs.⁴⁷ A writer in 1747 argued that those remarrying must expect hostility because of the strains created by hybrid families with children from different marriages.⁴⁸ Another writer thought that a widow might use her control of her children's inheritance to 'make her a better prize to a second husband'.⁴⁹ The existence of children gave kin the right to see that wealth invested in a marriage was inherited by offspring of their blood, or reverted to the dead wife's natal family. Other questions that concerned the different kin included: which family had authority over children; how should conflicting inheritance claims be resolved; what should happen to a widow's jointure; how might family wealth be safeguarded against loss to a different kinship group; how should portions be funded for children of a second marriage; how were second marriages disadvantaged by existing settlements for previous marriages?

Marriage settlements defined the ultimate destination of dower and jointure and raised real fears that ownership and income from dower lands might be alienated through remarriage.⁵⁰ Ideally, such problems were resolved by a pre-nuptial settlement before the transfer of wealth was finalised. In 1666, when Jane Watts married Sir Thomas Beaumont, her personal wealth was represented by debts owed to her first husband. To safeguard her existing children's interests, she signed a pre-nuptial agreement, placing her property 'wholly and absolutely in the power and disposition of the said Jane Watts', thus excluding her new husband from 'in any

⁴⁵ Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, pp. 51-52. *Matthew* 19 verses 4-5 (NKJ version). 'Have you not read that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female. For this reason, ... the two will become one flesh? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God hath joined together, let not man separate.'

⁴⁶ Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, pp. 51-52.

⁴⁷ See Mortimer family tree, Appendix 1d.

⁴⁸ Anon, *Advice to a Widow* (London, 1747), pp. 4-5. [accessed through ECCO, 07.07.2016]

⁴⁹ A Lady, *The Lady's Present*, pp. 167-168. [ECCOII]

⁵⁰ Holderness, 'Widows in Pre-Industrial Society', pp. 131-132.

way intermeddling with it'.⁵¹ Richard Congreve's step-daughter feared she might be dispossessed in favour of younger step-siblings, but was reassured by her uncle that her mother 'has it still in her [own] power to make handsome additions to the fortune your father left you'.⁵²

Remarriage was not a simple choice for a widow. She had to balance benefits against loss of jointure income and independence. Once married, unless protected by a pre-nuptial contract, a widow lost independence, freedom of action, separate legal identity, finance, and control of her own property.

2. The benefits and costs of remarriage

There was no legal barrier to whether or when a widow might remarry. Between 1533 and 1540 the 'prohibited degrees' of marriage, based on Biblical rules, had been enshrined in English law. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries popular pressure unsuccessfully demanded clarification about rules of affinity.⁵³ The short-lived 1696 Marriage Act imposed a tax on childless widowers and bachelors to encourage them to marry and to raise much needed revenue to pay the escalating cost of war with France. The Act was also a response to concerns that gender imbalance, rising celibacy rates and declining nuptiality might weaken the country militarily and economically.⁵⁴ This legislation was probably the first time the term 'widower' was used in a legal document.⁵⁵ In 1696 and early 1697, Claver Morris, a Somerset physician, paid the widowers tax of 26 shillings, his first wife having died in 1689. Perhaps coincidentally, within weeks of paying the tax, he had married the widow, Elizabeth Jeans.⁵⁶

⁵¹ LRO, DG11/963a, *Conant Papers*. Pre-nuptial marriage settlement between Jane Watts and Sir Thomas Beaumont, 11 April, 1666.

⁵² SRO, D1057/M/1/15/2, *Congreve Papers*. John Byrche to Miss Jane Byrche, 8 February, 1745.

⁵³ Alan MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300-1840*, (Oxford, 1987), pp. 232, 235, 246. Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, pp. 19, 27. Sybil Wolfram, *In-laws and Out-laws: Kinship and Marriage in England* (London and Sydney, 1987), pp. 21-26.

⁵⁴ Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, 'Childless Men in Early Modern England', in Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (eds.), *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 163. Lanser, 'The Production of the Old Maid', pp. 306-307.

⁵⁵ Margaret Pelling, 'Finding Widowers', p. 39.

⁵⁶ Edmund Hobbouse (ed.), *The Diary of a West Country Physician (1684-1726)*, (Rochester, 1934), p. 149, 19 October, 1696 and 9 January, 1697. H. J. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650-1950* (Oxford, 1994), p. 88.

Planning for the needs of widows was integral to any marriage contract. Under common law a widow was entitled to dower, which was one third of her husband's property, or his entire estate if he died childless.⁵⁷ Dower was difficult to recover, could involve expensive litigation, was often the source of familial ill-feeling and could result in the loss of patrilineal property following a widow's remarriage.⁵⁸ To avoid these problems, husbands of all social strata began to use wills to prevent alienation of family property through remarriage.⁵⁹ Early wills usually dealt with estate succession and provision for wives but rarely limited a widow's freedom to remarry. Increasingly, during the seventeenth century penalties and restrictions were imposed should widows wish to remarry and, by the late seventeenth century, such restrictions were often transferred to appear in marriage settlements.⁶⁰ In 1603 Baldwin Barker bequeathed his wife a jointure and property 'so long as she remains a widow'; his eldest son Abel gave his wife a jointure of £100 p.a., land and a house rent free 'while she remained a widow'. In contrast, Abel's younger brother Samuel gave his wife her jointure 'until she should die'.⁶¹

Increasingly from the mid seventeenth century dower was replaced by a jointure. This was usually held for the joint lives of the couple and only reverted to the estate after both had died. Squirearchy jointures usually took the form of an annual payment guaranteed by a rent-charge on land vested in trustees. However, urban gentry were usually reluctant to tie-up working capital during their life-time and preferred to bequeath a fixed lump-sum payable after the testator's death. Urban jointures were usually fixed at between two and three times the bridal portion, but the landed gentry preferred an annual payment fixed as a ratio of the portion.

Jointure provision could be supplemented with additional gifts or bequests in a husband's will. In 1670, Abel Barker revised his wife's previously agreed jointure and gave her an increased income based on land vested in trustees. Surviving until 1710, she drained the estate for thirty-five years.⁶² Lisle Hacket left his wife Dorothy, in addition to her jointure, 'money on Mortgage bond or otherwise and all arrears of

⁵⁷ Erickson, 'Property and Widowhood', p. 152.

⁵⁸ Susan Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660-1833* (Cambridge, USA, 1990), pp. 9, 27ff.

⁵⁹ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', p. 72.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

⁶¹ LRO, DG11/989, *Conant Papers*. Baldwin Barker's will, 1603. DG11/995, Abel Barker's will, 1636. DG11/999, Samuel Barker's will, 1659.

⁶² *Ibid.*, DG11/1, letter 70 and DG11/1005 Sir Abel Barker's will, 1670 and 1679.

interest and arrears of rent ... and [my] entire personal estate', from which she was expected to pay the outstanding balance of her daughter's portion and redeem her husband's debts. Her jointure was a drain on the Moxhull estate for twenty years until her death in 1747, almost twenty years after Lisle died.⁶³ In his will her brother-in-law, Andrew Hacket I, simply reaffirmed his wife's jointure and gave her 'all interest which shall be due ... during the term of her natural life.'⁶⁴ Mary Isham, who survived her husband by ten years was given a lump sum of £500 in addition to her jointure of £800 p.a.⁶⁵ None of these husbands attempted to restrict their widow's freedom to remarry either in their marriage settlement or by will. Generous bequests and jointures, combined with a long widowhood, could create considerable estate debt. Land used to back a jointure usually reverted to the husband's estate after his widow's death or might be used to pay portions for her children. A widow who received a lump sum or a gift of unentailed land in addition to her jointure was free to bequeath it as she wished. This could make it a permanent loss to the estate, defeating the principle of estate integrity.⁶⁶

A jointure agreement reflected the relative bargaining strength of the two families. By 1700 bargaining power had shifted from the family of the bride to that of the groom, and was reflected in a less favourable portion-jointure ratio. Increased competition meant that fathers of daughters had to offer larger portions to attract an appropriate marriage proposal. The lower level of jointure that portions attracted reflected a reduced return on the bridal 'investment'.⁶⁷ A father might accept a less generous portion-jointure ratio to 'buy' a higher status marriage, as Lisle Hacket did when he accepted a jointure of only £800 p.a. for Mary in return for a £12,000 portion.⁶⁸ Hacket effectively 'bought' social advancement by accepting a less generous income for his daughter in her widowhood.⁶⁹ In 1659 George Vernon offered a £600 p.a. jointure in return for Mary Olney's £10,000 portion, at a ratio of

⁶³ SRO (Lc), B/C/11, the will of Lisle Hacket, 1729.

⁶⁴ PROTNA, PROB11/664/222, Andrew Hacket's will, 1734.

⁶⁵ NRO, IC2498, *Isham Correspondence*. Mary Isham to Sir Edmund Isham, 25 July, 1737. PROTNA, PROB11/683/55, Sir Justinian Isham's will, 6 May 1737.

⁶⁶ Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property*, pp. 3, 9, 27ff.

⁶⁷ Eileen Spring, *Law, Land and Family: Aristocratic Inheritance in England 1300-1800* (London, 1993), pp. 50-51.

⁶⁸ Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, pp. 122-134.

⁶⁹ NRO, IL1412, *Isham Papers*. The marriage settlement of Justinian Isham and Mary Hacket, 3 June, 1725.

1:16.⁷⁰ Conversely, prospective husbands, desperately needing funds, might offer a more generous jointure to attract a large portion. In effect, the portion purchased a deferred annuity, on the assumption that a wife would normally outlive her husband. A short widowhood benefited the husband's estate but a lengthy one could severely drain resources and even destroy an estates prosperity.⁷¹

Later settlements usually contained reversionary clauses which required partial repayment of a portion if a bride died childless or if her children failed to reach an agreed age. This could create serious financial challengers for a widower who wanted to remarry.⁷² The Brown-Conant and Clavering-Congreve settlements had reversionary clauses. In the latter, Mrs Congreve's £800 contribution was to 'return to her family again in case [Anne] should die without a child or yet her issue should die before the age of twelve years'. The Congreve-Clavering marriage negotiations almost collapsed over this issue.⁷³ Catherine Brown's settlement reserved £2,000 to her 'sole and separate use and benefit' in addition to her £5,000 portion. These sums were to be repaid if she was childless and predeceased her husband.⁷⁴ The financial difficulties created by reversionary clauses could be a powerful incentive for a widower to find a wealthy second bride.

Providing for a widow was a delicate balancing act. Her interests had to be balanced against the long-term costs to her husband's estate. Miscalculation could seriously affect either family's finances and lead to ruin and social decay.⁷⁵ This made negotiating the terms of a second marriage more complicated than a first marriage since it was necessary to take account of prior commitments, inheritance for existing children and the needs of future offspring. A critical issue concerned what should happen if the husband was childless when he died. The husband's kin usually

⁷⁰ Cherry Ann Knott, *George Vernon 1636-1702 'Who Built this House'* (Stroud, 2010), p. 192. NRO, IL1412, *Isham Papers*. The marriage settlement of Justinian Isham and Mary Hacket.

⁷¹ Cissie Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700* (London, 2007), p. 64.

⁷² Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* (London, 1994), p. 83.

⁷³ SRO, D1057/M/II:9/4;9/5, D1057/M/3/32, D1057/M/II:9/8-12, D1057/M/II/8/3 and D1057/M/II/3/33, *Congreve Papers*. The various aspects of the negotiations are detailed in a series of letters between Anne, her brothers, Mr Clavering and Mr Dovey, the Congreves lawyer.

⁷⁴ LRO, DG11/979, *Conant Papers*. Pre-nuptial marriage settlement between Edward Brown of Stamford and Edward Conant for the marriage of Catherine Brown and John Edward Conant.

⁷⁵ Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 167.

expected his 'right heirs' to inherit the entire estate, but the families of both widows might demand the reversion of any property or wealth they had contributed to the marriage. To avoid conflict and future litigation it was essential that questions of inheritance and future ownership were resolved before a marriage took place.⁷⁶

It was in the interest of an experienced widow to safeguard her own rights, and those of existing children and those of the new marriage, as well as her own claims against her new husband's estate, should he predecease her.⁷⁷ Pre-nuptial settlements were absolutely binding, especially regarding dower. As an unmarried woman, a widow could legally give consent to an agreement. A post-nuptial settlement was signed under coverture, and as a married woman, she could not sign a legally binding contract. A widow might renounce jointure terms agreed in a post-nuptial settlement and demand her dower rights, but could not renounce the freely agreed terms of a pre-nuptial contract.⁷⁸ In 1705, J. S. advised any man marrying a widow 'to enquire she has not made all over to her children ... or whether it is made so in trust for her own use'.⁷⁹ A widow could protect her property rights before marriage by vesting them in trustees and reserving the income specifically to their own personal and sole use. Jane Watts' pre-nuptial agreement (1666) set up a trust, to do this.⁸⁰ Widows could only hold personal property if it was legally vested before marriage since, under coverture, any monies or property not vested automatically became her husbands.⁸¹

Remarriage was not always of financial benefit to a widow since restrictive clauses might threaten the loss of jointure and accommodation if she remarried. Sometimes remarriage was not worth this loss.⁸² Charlotte Botfield had '£2,000 p.a. while she

⁷⁶ Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, pp. 54, 55.

⁷⁷ Foyster, 'Marrying the Experienced Widow', p. 114. Erickson, 'Property and Widowhood', pp. 146-7.

⁷⁸ Lloyd Bonfield, 'Marriage Settlements 1600-1740: Adoption of the Strict Settlement in Kent and Northamptonshire', in R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London, 1981), p. 106.

⁷⁹ J. S., *City and Country Recreation, or Wit and Merriment Rightly Calculated for the Pleasures and Advantages of Either Sex* (London, 1705), p. 22. [accessed through ECCO, 19.09.2016]

⁸⁰ LRO, DG11/963a and DG11/963b, *Conant Papers*. Marriage settlement between Jane Watts and Sir Thomas Beaumont and Trust agreement with Abel Barker, April 1666. See above pp. 216-217.

⁸¹ Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, pp. 198, 249. Staves, *Separate Property*, pp. 4, 9. Wolfram, *In-laws and Out-laws*, pp. 18-19. Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, pp. 83-85. Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, p. 81.

⁸² MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, p. 233.

continued his widow' but remarriage would be deemed as making 'a voluntary surrender of her husband's bounty'. This clause eventually prevented her proposed second marriage.⁸³ Catherine Wallis, Joseph Banks II's second wife, lost the 'dower and thirds' granted her under the terms of her first marriage settlement.⁸⁴

When a widower with children, like John Mortimer, remarried his new wife might have to rely on traditional dower rights and her husband's generosity rather than a fixed jointure, if the estate was already settled on children of the earlier marriage. Alternatively, a widow who remarried well might achieve a comfortable standard of living as compensation for loss of independence and jointure. Her new husband might, if childless, settle his fortune on her children, even though they were not his own. Similarly, a widow who was an heiress might make a generous settlement on her new husband. Lady Stawell, settled her entire estate on her new husband Ralph Congreve, and so disinherited her own natal kin. Her action turned a cadet branch of the Congreves into substantial landowners.⁸⁵

A remarrying widower could increase family and estate wealth, but a widow's jointure could be a long-term drain on resources. This was generally less of a problem after a long marriage, because an elderly widow was unlikely to survive her husband for many years. Jointure costs were compounded when an estate supported several dependent widows at the same time. Samuel Barker suffered financially because his small estate paid jointures for his grandmother (from 1683 until 1695), his mother Thomasin (from 1689 to her death in about 1750) and after inheriting Lyndon in 1707, Sir Abel's widow (until 1710). These ongoing expenses, added to his extravagant predecessor's debts, meant the estate did not recover until the 1750s. This may explain why he leased out the estate for twenty years, why only one of his six children married, and why he himself did not seriously consider marriage until he was thirty.⁸⁶ The Congreves' bankrupt estate suffered similarly.

⁸³ BRO, MS3164 vol. 1, letter 80, *The Withering Letters*. J.W. Griffiths to William Withering, 17 August, 1819.

⁸⁴ Hall (ed.), *The Banks Papers*, p. 129, letter 178. William Gylby to Mrs Catherine Wallis, 25 February, 1731.

⁸⁵ SRO, D1057/I/3/40, *Congreve Papers*. Ralph Congreve to his cousin Richard, 26 May, 1752.

⁸⁶ LRO, DG11/967, *Conant Papers*. Marriage settlement between Augustine Barker and Thomasin Tryst, December, 1685. DG11/1, letter 102. Reply of William Whiston to Samuel Barker's proposal for Sarah Whiston, 27 January, 1715. DG11/1, letter 103, Samuel Barker to Sarah Whiston, 19 January, 1715.

William's mother Abigail was widowed in 1729 but survived until 1752, drawing her jointure income for over twenty years.

Marriage contracts often implicitly accepted that a husband could remarry. The Tryst-Barker settlement of 1657 provided land 'for the use ... of the ... heirs of [Thomasin's] body. And for default of such issue then to ... [Thomas's] heirs and assigns for ever'. This clearly acknowledged that if his wife predeceased him he could have children by another wife, who would take their place in the line of succession.⁸⁷ Although rapid remarriage for widowers was acceptable, it was thought improper for widows. A satirical comment in 1710 criticised widows who 'follow their husbands weeping to the grave ... [and] lull their sorrows on a new lover's bosom ever the tomb be finished'.⁸⁸ A writer in 1752 suggested that decency required 'mourning for a long year'.⁸⁹ A Lady wrote in 1755 that 'common decency requires that there be a considerable interval between the parting with one husband and the choosing another'.⁹⁰ This was partly in case the widow was pregnant with her husband's child. Edmund Isham explained to his wife, who was eager to move into Lamport, that he had not evicted the newly widowed Mary Isham because he was waiting until 'assured [that] there was [no] reason to imagine she was with child'.⁹¹ In fiction Mr Arnold, Sidney Bidulph's husband, lost his inheritance after his sister-in-law's claim to be pregnant by her estranged husband was upheld.⁹²

Remarriage involved three different family groups and perhaps two or three different sets of children. Some second marriages were made by widowers in hope of producing children. Having children by a second marriage did not create problems if the husband's first marriage had been childless or if children had predeceased their mother, as when Anne Hacket, first wife of Andrew III, died. Problems could arise if there were surviving children from a previous marriage, as when John Mortimer married his third wife. A frequently expressed fear was that a father might favour the children of a second marriage at the expense of the first, especially if the

⁸⁷ LRO, DG11/961, *Conant Papers*. Marriage settlement between Thomas Tryst and Elizabeth Collin, April, 1657.

⁸⁸ *The Female Tatler*, no. 103, 13 March, 1700. [accessed through British Periodicals Collection, 11.08.2016]

⁸⁹ A Lady, *Maxims and Cautions*, p. 73. [ECCOII]

⁹⁰ A Lady, *The Lady's Present*, p. 175. [ECCOII]

⁹¹ NRO, IC2548, *Isham Correspondence*. Edmund Isham to his wife, 9 March, 1736.

⁹² Frances Sheridan, *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (London, 1761, London, 1987), pp. 95-96.

second marriage was based on personal choice and affection and the first had been arranged.⁹³ Children of two marriages were always potential sources of inter-family dispute which could lead to prolonged and expensive litigation.

A first wife's kin aimed to ensure that her children were neither disadvantaged nor disinherited and that children of a second marriage did not threaten legitimate estate succession.⁹⁴ If unsettled land, or property acquired during a first marriage, was used to provide for the children of a second, it could be interpreted as reducing the first family's entitlement.⁹⁵ To avoid disputes a remarrying husband might be required to deposit securities as a guarantee that his first wife's children would not be disadvantaged and that his second wife would be enabled to pay legacies and portions after his death.⁹⁶ Strict settlements reduced the amount of unsettled land available to provide for children of second marriages. This created difficulties for lesser gentry who could not buy additional property. As Jane Austen showed in *Sense and Sensibility*, the need to provide for children of two marriages could lead to conflict and contention.

Failure to make clear provision in a first settlement might exclude children of a second marriage from inheritance. Unclear terms might exclude younger children of a second marriage so that the estate passed instead to a cadet branch. The Leigh-Barker settlement reserved inheritance to 'sons begotten by Francis on the body of the said Elizabeth'. If Elizabeth had no sons to inherit then the estate would pass to any sons of Sir Thomas Barker and then to Abel's brother-in-law, William Parsons. The settlement did not leave room to include any children Francis might have by a second marriage.⁹⁷ Later settlements were usually worded more precisely to protect the rights of children of a second marriage.

For a widow with children remarriage offered financial security, but her chances of attracting a suitable husband might be harmed if she already had young children.

⁹³ Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, pp. 17, 55.

⁹⁴ Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, p. 14.

⁹⁵ MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love*, p. 233. Ingrid Tague, 'Aristocratic Women and Ideas of Family in the Early Eighteenth Century', in Berry and Foyster (eds.), *The Family in Early Modern England*, p. 192.

⁹⁶ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 321. Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, p. 250.

⁹⁷ LRO, DG11/968, *Conant Papers*. Marriage agreement between Francis Leigh and Elizabeth Barker, 11 June, 1686.

Few men were eager to accept financial and social responsibility for another man's children, although Samuel Barker did in his post-nuptial agreement with Elizabeth Wildbore, even though he had not gained financially or socially from the marriage.⁹⁸ When two existing families were united each parent would wish to protect the interests of their own offspring at the expense of those of the new spouse.⁹⁹

3. Remarriage strategies

For many squirearchy widows managing their property, protecting their children, the desire for companionship, comfort and physical satisfaction were major influences which encouraged remarriage, despite social opposition. Many eighteenth century writers suggested that the main pressure on widows to remarry was financial survival. Thomas Dilworth commended a poor widow with a young child who worked for 'a rich and single old gentleman ... [and won] her master's affections' because it enabled her to marry him and 'thereby make provision for herself and child'.¹⁰⁰

A widow's marital prospects were affected by her wealth, the number of children she had and any restrictions imposed on her in a previous marriage settlement.¹⁰¹ Few squirearchy widows could maintain the same living standard as when their husbands were alive, so that remarriage was often the only realistic alternative to destitution.¹⁰² The longer a woman was a widow the more difficult her circumstances became and the less likely she was to marry. This was a more serious issue for squirearchy widows than for wealthier women of higher status or the widows of merchants and traders, like Abigail Gawthorn, who could continue in employment.

Widows of the parish clergy, gentry by courtesy, often faced very severe difficulties because their husband's income was often so poor that few could save enough for the future support of a widow and her children.¹⁰³ Clergy widows lost home and income when their husband died. Remarriage, even to somebody of lower social status, must often have seemed more acceptable than genteel poverty. In 1678 the

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, DG11/959. Post-nuptial agreement between Samuel Barker and Elizabeth Wildbore, 1652.

⁹⁹ Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, p. 250.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Dilworth, *An Advocate for the Ladies*, p. 33. [ECCO]

¹⁰¹ Bonfield, 'Marriage Settlements', p. 107.

¹⁰² Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, p. 250. Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', pp. 78, 83.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 72, 78. Hill, *Women Work and Sexual Politics*, p. 250.

'Sons of the Clergy' charity was established to help poor clerical widows, so that they did not have to marry men of inferior status. Todd argued that the existence of such organisations showed that for some widows, remarriage was more about economic necessity than for affection or esteem.¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Byrche, widow of the bishop's Chancellor and daughter of a landed family, had to vacate her home when her husband died. Befriended and supported by Richard Congreve, she returned to Leacroft, the Byrche family home, where she married him. As a younger son and parish priest his prospects were limited. Marriage cost her social status but gave her support and security for her children.¹⁰⁵

A wealthy older man probably seemed a desirable catch for many younger widows. Isaac Archer spoke of a poor young widow who 'had a design upon me, because I was heir to some estate'.¹⁰⁶ The prospect of an older husband's early death promised the bonus of renewed independence and possibly a generous jointure. This situation featured regularly in prose fiction and drama and was familiar to many eighteenth century readers. In *The Beggars Opera*, Peacham, anticipating MacHeath's execution, told his daughter that 'widowhood is the only hope that keeps up a wife's spirits. Where is the woman who would scruple to be a wife if she had it in her power to be a widow whenever she pleased?'¹⁰⁷ In *The Conscious Lovers*, Sir John Bevil, urging his reluctant son to marry, argued that marrying 'a fortune is yet a better bargain if she dies: for then a man still enjoys what he did marry, the money, and is disencumbered of what he did not marry – the woman'.¹⁰⁸ This situation existed in real life, not just in fiction. Vere Isham joked that if Mary Hacket 'had not refused Mr Thursby, she might now have been a fine widow'.¹⁰⁹

Advice literature regularly discussed the benefits of widowhood. *Maxims and Cautions* cynically argued that it was a status most wives desired, saying, 'ere thou art wed remember thou art to be a widow ... Widowhood to the wife is like

¹⁰⁴ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', p. 72.

¹⁰⁵ SRO, D1057/M/I/17a, *Congreve Papers*, pp. 41, 43, 44, 47-50, 54-56, 58-61. Letters from Richard Congreve to various correspondents about his friendship and subsequent marriage to Mrs Byrche, February to August, 1742.

¹⁰⁶ Storey, *The Diary of Isaac Archer*, p. 109.

¹⁰⁷ John Gay, *The Beggars Opera* (1728), in Ricardo Quintana (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Plays* (New York, 1992), pp. 194-196, Act 1, scene 10.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), in Quintana, (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Plays*, p. 125, Act 1, scene 2.

¹⁰⁹ NRO, IC2163, *Isham Correspondence*. Vere Isham to her brother Sir Justinian, 1 April, 1730.

liberty to the prisoner ... She who says that she wishes not for it, lies.' The author suggested however, that wives who wanted to be widows would, nevertheless, be driven by their passions to want marriage again. She advised them not to rush into 'unwidowing thyself again' and concluded that though widowhood might seem enticing to a wife remarriage was just as enticing to a widow.¹¹⁰

The desire to marry for a second time might be driven by lack of practical experience in managing affairs. This made many younger widows vulnerable to social pressures. Some might be helped by parents, relatives or friends, but this support was not always easy to obtain. Parents might be dead and married siblings were usually concerned with their own family's affairs. A second marriage offered an obvious source of support and a new husband could be a 'friend' to a widow, offering her protection, support and a father for her children.¹¹¹ J. S. urged men looking for a wife to offer widows practical help, because it might 'induce her to change her condition, that she will have one that will ease her of her cares, [and] give her more leisure ... to enjoy the sweets of life'.¹¹²

Reputation was an area of life where a widow was particularly vulnerable. A small or uncertain income could make it difficult to protect her virtue or the interests of her children. Many eighteenth century writers believed that since widows were sexually experienced they would be unwilling to forgo the pleasures of sex when widowed and so might be vulnerable to seduction.¹¹³ This theme was regularly addressed in prose fiction, drama and advice literature. In 1709 a pamphleteer asked whether widows could survive 'without the thought of [sex], or live without it'. A widow replied 'I could give you several instances of widows that ... lived without desiring the thing you hint at'. Although expressed as a denial, the answer, probably written by a man, implied that most widows really did want sexually active lives.¹¹⁴ In 1725 Edward Ward wrote 'it is easier for a young man or a maid to forbear that carnal act than it is for a widow'.¹¹⁵ Despite these claims, it was generally believed that marriage was

¹¹⁰ A Lady, *Maxims and Cautions*, pp. 61-63. [ECCOII]

¹¹¹ Abbott, *Family Ties*, p. 68.

¹¹² J. S. *City and Country Recreation*, p. 19. [ECCO]

¹¹³ Barbara Todd, 'The Virtuous Widow in Protestant England', in Cavallo and Warner (eds.), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, p. 69.

¹¹⁴ Anon, *The Widow's Catechism or a Dialogue Between an Old Gentleman that Killed Two Wives with Kindness in One Month and an Eminent Widow that Mourned Three Months for One Husband* (London, 1709), p. 3. [ECCOII]

¹¹⁵ Ward, *Female Policy Detected*, p. 76. ECCO]

the only way for a woman to satisfy her physical desires and retain respectability. A widow's reputation was vulnerable and had to be protected if she was to remain in society and have any hope of a second marriage.

Widowhood might pose challenges of accommodation for a new owner. A widow was entitled to 'freebench' which included a room in the home of her dead husband or of her eldest son. A new owner might not want to share his house with a dependent widow, but would be even less willing to have her second husband living at his expense.¹¹⁶ Lisle Hacket's will guaranteed his widow 'some of the rooms in Moxhull ... limited to her for her life if she survives me'.¹¹⁷ When Mary Isham was widowed, her husband's successor allowed her the mandatory forty days before she had to vacate Lamport.¹¹⁸ Tidy Russell described a single woman living with her widowed mother 'at the family seat, which the son ... [who] has no discord with the mother and sister, yet would like ... to be disburdened of them'.¹¹⁹ Remarriage offered a double benefit by relieving a landowner of the burden of a widow in his home and restoring to the widow the security of a home of her own.

Remarriages were not always based just on practicalities, as emotions could influence decisions as much as material benefits. Some gentry daughters, having obeyed parental demands to marry prudently for a first marriage, used their independence as widows to remarry for love. Some eighteenth century tracts suggested that widows might be reluctant to remarry because of their love for a first husband, while others found in a second marriage the security and affection they had not had in their first. Replying to 'True Penitent' a writer said her first husband married her for love, but boredom rapidly set in. Her second husband gave her more lasting satisfaction because of her life-experience. His attitude was that 'If ... I could live so comfortably with a wife of other people's choosing, how much greater satisfaction I may expect in one of my own choosing'.¹²⁰

The widows who married William and Richard Congreve were both older than their new husbands and had enjoyed long-term friendship with them. Both marriages

¹¹⁶ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', p. 75.

¹¹⁷ SRO (Lc), B/C/11, Lisle Hacket's will, 1729.

¹¹⁸ NRO, IC 2549, IC2550, IC 2551, IC2553, *Isham Correspondence*. Letters from Edmund Isham to his wife after the death of Sir Justinian Isham, March 1737.

¹¹⁹ Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters*, pp. 33-34. Tidy Russell to her brother Edmund Williamson, 3 October, 1758.

¹²⁰ A Lady, *The Characters of Widows and Old Women*, pp. 20-21. [ECCO]

contributed significantly to the husband's prosperity. These two marriages seem to have been motivated by friendship, esteem and the desire for companionship even though there were financial benefits. Widows each had their own reasons to remarry, but material considerations were never completely absent. Later in the period, shared interests, friendship and affection were significant influences and the agency of individual choice was more persuasive than collective family pressure.

Some widowers wanted to remarry soon after the death of their spouse because they needed to have a mother for young children, a household manager or just a companion.¹²¹ Both Abel Barker and Edmund Williamson were encouraged to marry because they had a young child who needed a mother to care for them. This may also explain why Elizabeth Byrche married Richard Congreve and why Elizabeth Wildbore married Samuel Barker. Isaac Archer and his father both wanted a companion and a nurse to look after them in their old age. Sometimes a widower might propose to his wife's sister or a cousin to maintain familial links and perhaps retain his first wife's portion. Marriage to cousins was sometimes frowned upon but accepted, whereas, as Abel Barker explained to his sister Elizabeth Goodman, marriage to a brother or sister-in-law was forbidden by rules of affinity.¹²² There were solutions for widowers with young children which did not involve remarriage, but many preferred to remarry. Remarriage could be an important solution for widowers with a daughter approaching puberty.¹²³ George Vernon, widowed with seven young daughters after fifteen years of marriage, chose a new wife as a mother for his children.¹²⁴ Edmund Williamson, with a teenage daughter, was advised to remarry or 'part with [his daughter], for women must bring up women'. He advised him that a step-mother could chaperone the girl to assemblies and concerts, ensure that she married prudently and protect her against seduction by fortune hunters.¹²⁵

Since George Vernon's and Edmund Williamson's first marriages only produced daughters they were urged to remarry to have a son to preserve the family

¹²¹ Abbott, *Family Ties*, p. 33. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (revised edition, Chicago, 2002), p. 325.

¹²² See above chapter 7, p. 196 for Abel Barker's objection to his sister's proposed marriage.

¹²³ Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, pp. 26, 27, 56. Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, p. 242.

¹²⁴ Cherry Anne Knott, *Who Built This House*, p. 205.

¹²⁵ Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters*, p. 59. Talbot Williamson to his brother Edmund, January, 1760.

succession. Talbot urged Edmund to marry rapidly because you will 'be old by the time you can have a son ... able to take care of himself and his inheritance'.¹²⁶ Widowers with only one son might feel it prudent to remarry to produce a reserve. This was part of the reason that Abel Barker looked for a new wife in 1655. The marriage was intended to be a business arrangement but, as one woman explained her refusal was because of 'your condition ... as you have a son'.¹²⁷

Some widowers wanted a young and easily-controlled wife. Edmund Williamson was praised for choosing a girl 'so much to your mind' who 'will always be grateful for her good fortune'. He said he had married 'a prudent woman' of good sense who would make him happy and be grateful to him for saving her 'out of dependency on the great'.¹²⁸ Ralph Congreve congratulated Richard Congreve for choosing 'an agreeable lady who has all the prudence in life to make a man happy'. He praised her discretion in conduct, in her relationships, in household management and in dealing with children, all of which, he thought, were essential qualities for a clergyman's wife.¹²⁹ Agnes Weeton wrote about 'a widower with one child' who 'desired a wife to preside at his dining table, and superintend the kitchen'.¹³⁰

Financial advantage was a powerful incentive for remarriage, especially in the early part of the period. A retired soldier appealed in *The Female Tatler* for 'a wife with a good portion, especially in land ... this comfortable ingredient to matrimony'.¹³¹ Frances Sheridan described an apprentice who married his master's widow, took over his business and after her death 'married the widow of a merchant, with whom [he] got an immense fortune'.¹³² Maria Edgeworth's Mr Hartley 'married a [rich] widow, took possession of her fortune, and all his affections soon were fixed upon a son'.¹³³ Financial ambition could be more important than the desire for domesticity.¹³⁴ Letters and diaries often describe the benefits of a rich widow. Ann Hales, a friend of Joseph Banks, described a young man 'who is to have a widow at

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ LRO, DG11/1, *Conant Papers*. Rebeccah Parselow to Abel Barker, 30 July, 1655.

¹²⁸ Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters*, pp. 54-56. Tidy Russell to Edmund Williamson, 22 July, 1760. Talbot Williamson to Edmund, 29 July, 1760. Tidy to Edmund, 31 July, 1760.

¹²⁹ SRO, D1057/M/1/6/2, *Congreve Papers*. Ralph Congreve to his brother Richard, 15 March, 1745.

¹³⁰ Bagley (ed.), *Miss Weeton's Journal*, pp. 215-216. Miss Weeton to Miss Winkley, 28 December, 1809.

¹³¹ *The Female Tatler*, 13 January, 1710. [British Periodicals Collection]

¹³² Sheridan, *Sidney Bidulph*, p. 337.

¹³³ Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (London 1801, Oxford, 1994), p. 408.

¹³⁴ Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, p. 29.

Sleaford with two thousand in money and a good jointure'.¹³⁵ Widowers might need money to pay portions, establish younger sons in trade, or redeem debts. Marriage to a wealthy widow could provide a necessary infusion of funds, unless her money was reserved 'to her own use'.¹³⁶ Richard Congreve's two marriages brought him income from his first wife's property and ownership of the Iscoyd estate in North Wales from his second. Ralph Congreve's wife, 'possessed landed estates in Berkshire ... to the amount of £1,300 p. a. all in her own disposal', which she settled on her husband and his heirs.¹³⁷

The second marriages of Squirearchy widowers were sometimes influenced by emotions as much as by practical or material advantage.¹³⁸ Observers frequently referred to the affection and esteem that many husbands showed towards second wives. John Byrche assured his niece that Richard Congreve 'has a great regard for your mother'. William Congreve wrote that Jane Eyre 'is the most amiable and deserving woman I ever knew'.¹³⁹ Several widowers, while not professing affection for their brides, looked for companionship. Isaac Archer 'found it not good to be alone'. He denied remarrying just to satisfy his sexual needs and claimed to have done it for 'society, for religion and other affairs' and, when necessary, for 'careful nursing'.¹⁴⁰

In the mid seventeenth century two out of six Barkers in the senior line married twice and at least three out of six of the partners they chose were widows. There is no indication that any of the seventeenth century Congreves married widows or married for a second time, but two of the three mid eighteenth century Congreve marriages in the senior line were with widows. Their cousin Ralph married a woman who was twice widowed. Richard Congreve married twice as did his brother-in-law Robert Clavering.¹⁴¹ Lisle Hacket, his father Sir Andrew, his grandfather John and a great-nephew, Andrew III each married twice. John Mortimer married three times while

¹³⁵ Hall (ed.), *The Banks Letters*, p. 151, no. 215. Anne Hales to Catherine Banks, 17 December, 1733.

¹³⁶ Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, p. 81.

¹³⁷ SRO, D1057/M/F/64, *Congreve Papers*. An appeal to the government for financial support for General Congreve. D1057/M/C/2, Ralph Congreve to his cousin, 26 May 1752.

¹³⁸ Abbott, *Family Ties*, p. 33.

¹³⁹ SRO, D1057/M/I/15/2, *Congreve Papers*. John Byrche to his niece, 8 February, 1745. D1057/M/I/3/39, William Congreve to his brother Richard, 23 December, 1747. D1057/M/I/3/38, William Congreve to his brother Richard, 13 December, 1747.

¹⁴⁰ Storey (ed.), *Diary of Isaac Archer*, p 183, 13 December, 1699.

¹⁴¹ See Appendix 1a and 1b for the Barker and Congreve family trees.

his daughter Elizabeth was the second wife of Dr Theophilus Lobb. Contemporary diaries and letters reflect a similar pattern of frequent remarriage during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The decrease in remarriage in the eighteenth century reflected and responded to changing attitudes and was a natural consequence of increased matrimonial longevity. Increased competition because of the gender imbalance and the social acceptability of a wider selection of young never-married brides from more disparate backgrounds reduced widows' opportunities for remarriage. Many gentry widowers preferred to marry young single women, even if they had a bourgeois background, rather than widows with children.¹⁴² In 1746, 'True Penitent' said that men preferred not to marry widows who were regarded as 'second-hand' goods.¹⁴³ Despite the general decline in female remarriage, wealthy widows of any age remained in demand, especially among those gentry who needed an infusion of wealth to repair their finances, or younger sons who wanted to retain gentry status.¹⁴⁴

Second marriages in the sample often had a wider age differential and broader social spread than first marriages. Ralph Congreve (1718-1775) was 32 when he married 43-year-old Charlotte Stawell (1709-1762). She was childless and came from a higher social group than Ralph. Richard Congreve's first wife was the widow of a close friend, colleague and minor landowner. She was younger than Richard, then aged 32. In 1776, 62 year old Richard, now a widower, surprised his relatives by marrying the young daughter of a minor Welsh landowner, some fourteen years after the death of his first wife.¹⁴⁵ Edmund Williamson was aged 47 when he married 18-year-old Mary Tipping (1741-1810) as his second wife. She came 'from a poor but respectable family'.¹⁴⁶ The Vernons of Sudbury concluded several second and even third marriages in the seventeenth century. Anne Vernon, widow of a Derbyshire baronet's younger son, married a Derbyshire

¹⁴² Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in Provincial Towns 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989), p. 244.

¹⁴³ 'True Penitent', *The Folly of Marrying Widows* (London, 1746), pp. 13-16. [ECCO]

¹⁴⁴ Holderness, 'Widows in Pre-Industrial Society', p. 428.

¹⁴⁵ SRO, D1057/M/H/13/5, *Congreve Papers*. William Congreve of Shrewsbury to his nephew Captain William Congreve, 6 March, 1777. D1057/M/C/2, Ralph Congreve to his cousin (Richard?), 26 May, 1752. D1057/M/F/64, an appeal to the government for financial support for General William Congreve.

¹⁴⁶ Manning (ed.), *The Williamson Letters*, pp. 26, pp. 53-54, p. 56, 114. Tidy Russell to her brother Edmund Williamson, 13 December, 1757, 22 July and 31 July, 1760, 19 March, 1763.

physician, ten years after her first husband's death. He was three years older than she was but her social inferior. Anne's younger sister married a London lawyer and then a London linen draper. Their brother George successively married three single young women, aged respectively 18, 22 and 18 meaning they were progressively younger than he was by six, eighteen and twenty-seven years.¹⁴⁷

It is difficult to calculate how many multiple remarriages there were in the sample, but generally they were quite common and socially acceptable. Widowers were three times as likely to marry for a second time as widows.¹⁴⁸ The writer of *The Widows Catechism* (1709) claimed to have 'buried two wives ... and have not been sensible of a moment of grief'. A writer who challenged 'True Penitent' said 'I have already had two husbands ... and confidently expect to be married again'. *The Female Tatler* (1709) cited 'a brisk widow ... [who] has had three husbands ... and is very desirous of a fourth'.¹⁴⁹ Abigail Gawthorn noted a 'three times married friend' and Syllas Neville mentioned a 'thrice-married' lawyer.¹⁵⁰

The time between bereavement and remarriage varied considerably. Many widowers remained single for a relatively short time, with some looking for a second wife almost immediately after being widowed. In 1740 Richard Congreve noted a Mr Hill who 'buried his wife about 5 months ago and has got another'.¹⁵¹ In 1730 Joseph Banks II was advised within two months of his wife's death to remarry, but difficult negotiations resulted in a year's delay.¹⁵² Six weeks after his wife died Isaac Archer 'had thoughts of changing [his] condition'.¹⁵³ Sometimes, remarriage was delayed for several years. Sir Francis Whichecote married a widow in 1737 eleven years after his first wife died and Edmund Williamson only remarried eight years after his first wife's death.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ Knott, *George Vernon*, pp. 44, 154, 156, 189, 215.

¹⁴⁸ Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁹ *The Widow's Catechism*, p.2. [ECCOII] Anon, *The Characters of Widows and Old Women*, p. 18. [ECCO] *The Female Tatler*, no. 24, 31 August, 1709. [British Periodicals Collection]

¹⁵⁰ Henstock (ed.), *Abigail Gawthorn's Diary*, p. 122, March 20, 1806. Basil Cozens Hardy (ed.), *The Diary of Syllas Neville 1767-1788* (Oxford, 1950), p. 97, 5 April, 1771.

¹⁵¹ SRO, *Congreve Papers*, D1057/M/17a, *Congreve Papers*, pp.16-17 and 21-22. Richard Congreve to his brother William, 20 May, 1740 and to his brother Francis, in Cairo, 5 June, 1740.

¹⁵² Hall (ed.), *The Banks Letters*, p. 121, letter 165a. Unknown writer to Joseph Banks II, 3 November, 1730.

¹⁵³ Storey (ed.), *The Diary of Isaac Archer*, pp. 226-227.

¹⁵⁴ Hall (ed.), *The Banks Letters, Introduction*. For Barker remarriages see chapter 4, pp. 102-103, 113.

Wealthy gentry widows were more likely to remarry than poorer ones and younger widows were more likely to remarry than older women.¹⁵⁵ The marital prospects of a widow depended on a combination of circumstances, including her age, wealth, the number and ages of any children and any restrictions placed on her in her marriage settlement or by her first husband's will. Worries about punitive financial clauses resulted in a lower marriage rate among gentry and professional widows than among artisans and tradesmen. The adult death rate, the availability of potential rivals and numerical disparity between men and women were influences affecting remarriage rates for gentry widows.

Remarriage was more common among widowers than widows.¹⁵⁶ Many of the widowers in the sample remained unmarried. None of the widows, apart from Penelope Hacket, remarried, although several outlived their spouse by many years. The only indications in the sources to explain this difference are the restrictive clauses in settlements and wills. In 1752 the writer of *Maxims and Cautions* suggested that 'The desire of the maiden is to be a wife; even so the desire of the wife is to be a widow, and so the desire of the widow is to be a wife again'.¹⁵⁷ Some may have wished to marry but lacked opportunity while others may have chosen to remain single.

There are several reasons why widows remained unmarried, including: family opposition; the existence of young children; being too old to have children; physical illness or disability; lack of sufficient fortune to attract a husband; limited prospects or offers; and contractual barriers to remarriage. Long-term widowhood may have reduced the desire for marriage, and those who had been 'on the market' for years might seem stale and lacking in appeal. Societal expectations and religious beliefs presented powerful arguments against remarriage which became stronger as the century progressed. Men, who might in the past have married older widows, preferred to marry younger single women or live as bachelors.¹⁵⁸ In 1755 the 'Lady', suggested that a husband's death was an act of God which released his wife from the pressures of marriage and allowed her to devote herself to good works in 'sobriety and piety' which, the writer asserted, were fulfilling and liberating.¹⁵⁹ Mrs

¹⁵⁵ Foyster, 'Marrying the Experienced Widow', p. 112.

¹⁵⁶ Holderness, 'Widows in Pre-Industrial Society', pp. 429, 431.

¹⁵⁷ A Lady, *Maxims and Cautions*, pp. 74-75. [ECCOII]

¹⁵⁸ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', pp. 80-82.

¹⁵⁹ A Lady, *The Lady's Present*, pp. 169-173. [ECCOII]

Bennet in *Amelia*, who argued against remarriage, was driven by her religious beliefs to perform good works rather than to remarry.¹⁶⁰

Some eighteenth century writers argued that an unhappy experience might create an aversion to marriage and cause a woman to reject any offers she received. Conversely, a happy first marriage might make a widow feel unable to replicate this in a second marriage. The writer of *The Lady's Present* argued that 'marriage is so great an adventure, that once seems enough for the whole life; whether ... prosperous or adverse in the first, it does almost discourage a second'.¹⁶¹ Dilworth argued that 'an objection commonly made [is] that they love their first husbands best' so that any second marriage would be doomed to failure.¹⁶² In 1709, *The Widow's Catechism* claimed that marriage made some women dislike sex, which they could avoid through perpetual widowhood.¹⁶³ It was more difficult for a widow than a single-woman to preserve a virtuous reputation and some widows found the easiest way to do so was to withdraw from public life and reject remarriage altogether.¹⁶⁴

The new legal and social status, described by some writers as 'almost equal to men', that a widow acquired through her husband's death was frequently offered to explain why some women chose not to remarry.¹⁶⁵ J. S. explained this reluctance to remarry was because a widow 'stands much upon her own judgement and thinks it an undervaluing to her years of discretion to be directed in her affairs by others'.¹⁶⁶ In 1752 the author of *Maxims and Cautions* said of widows 'thou art accountable to none ... thy reserve is still at thy command'.¹⁶⁷ Three years later, a writer argued that widowhood was attractive for those with the financial resources to pursue their own interests and for them it was 'not very prudent to relinquish both liberty and property, to espouse at the best subjection'. She reminded her readers that remarriage passed control of a widow's fortune to her husband and suggested that this was the main reason why wealthy widows chose not to remarry. Her conclusion was that where a marriage was made for economic reasons rather than love 'the man bids

¹⁶⁰ Fielding, *Amelia*, pp. 256-257.

¹⁶¹ A Lady, *The Lady's Present*, pp. 162, 164. [ECCOII]

¹⁶² Dilworth, *An Advocate for the Lady*, p. 53. [ECCO]

¹⁶³ Anon, *The Widows Catechism*, pp. 2, 3, 6. [ECCOII]

¹⁶⁴ Todd, 'The Virtuous Widow', p. 69.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 68.

¹⁶⁶ J. S., *City and Country Recreation*, p. 19. [ECCO]

¹⁶⁷ A Lady, *Maxims and Cautions*, pp. 77-78. [ECCOII]

adieu to the wife, though not to her fortune. He married her fortune, and he has it; she his person, and has it not'.¹⁶⁸

Fiction emphasised the widow's independence. Roxana, a widow, opposed remarriage because 'a wife must give up all she has'. She claimed to have

differing notions of matrimony from what the received custom had given us; I thought a woman was as free an agent ... as a man and was born free, and could she manage herself suitably, might enjoy that liberty ... as the men do; ... that the very nature of the marriage-contract was... giving up liberty, estate, authority and everything to the man.¹⁶⁹

Lady Speck 'found little happiness in marriage ... and rejoiced at being released from that bondage... ever to think of entering into the same state a second time'.¹⁷⁰

Independence allowed widows to explore new opportunities and develop their talents and skills, but remarriage meant loss of control over their own lives, loss of freedom and loss of individualism.¹⁷¹

Many squirearchy widows lacked the opportunity to remarry, but others chose not to do so. The sample families include widows who, surviving their husbands for decades, remained unmarried. Some, like Mrs Clavering, Mrs Congreve, Elizabeth Wildbore, Thomasin Barker, Elizabeth Mortimer and Abigail Gawthorn relished the authority and freedom of widowhood and the opportunity to manage their husband's estates. 'The Lady' thought 'to be a wretched widow is better than to be a happy wife'.¹⁷²

Conclusion

High adult mortality levels throughout the period meant that widows and widowers formed a significant proportion of the adult population. They were usually viewed from contrasting perspectives. Among the gentry it was accepted that widowers ought to remarry especially those who lacked children, were relatively young, or who

¹⁶⁸ A Lady, *The Lady's Present*, pp. 169, 173, 180. [ECCOII]

¹⁶⁹ Defoe, *Roxana*, pp. 170, 187.

¹⁷⁰ Haywood, *Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy*, pp. 136-137.

¹⁷¹ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', pp. 75- 81.

¹⁷² A Lady, *Maxims and Cautions*, p. 75. [ECCOII]

had young children. In a patriarchal property-owning society, men were responsible for estate transmission and the perpetuation of the family name. They needed household managers, mothers for their children and, sometimes, companions for themselves. Widowhood barely changed their status and legal standing. In different forms of literary material and correspondence they rarely seem different to other gentry of comparable status.

The marriage strategies of squirearchy widowers did not greatly differ from those of not-yet married squires, but squirearchy widows faced a vastly different situation. Widowhood changed a woman's legal and social status, giving her a separate legal identity and independence. In theory, widows were free agents in the marriage-market, but lesser gentry widows were constrained by personal circumstances and prevailing social attitudes. Remarrying widows were often criticised in pamphlets, fiction and public opinion. Gentry widows were urged to devote themselves to a single life of good works. In practice, remarriage was quite common, at least until the middle of the eighteenth century, after which the proportion of remarrying widows declined. The circumstances of many squirearchy widows drove them to seek remarriage, even though they were not always successful.

More second marriages occurred in the sample families during the seventeenth century than in the eighteenth century. Few widows in the sample remarried but perhaps a quarter of widowers did. Those remarriages which did occur illustrate different marriage-making strategies. Some were used to obtain political, social or economic advantage so that the personality of the partner was less significant than the benefits she brought. Some marriages were designed to achieve financial security or benefit, while others were made for personal and emotional reasons and reflected feelings which ranged from simple esteem to affection and perhaps romantic love. Some married for comfort, companionship and care in old age. Each marriage was unique, but most were probably made for a combination of reasons.

Finance, undoubtedly, had a major influence on remarriage for lesser gentry widows. Their circumstances inevitably separated them in their experience from both the wealthy upper gentry and the urban middling sort. The latter could support themselves through employment while the former usually had the financial resources to live completely independent lives. Both groups could decide whether they wanted to remarry, but squirearchy and clergy widows, with relatively small

jointures, often had difficulty supporting themselves and had few respectable employment opportunities open to them. Many faced a stark choice between dependence on the charity of family and friends, a descent into genteel poverty or remarriage. Some were probably driven by desperation to choose the latter course, especially if they had dependent children.

Remarriages in the sample families show a wider age discrepancy between partners than in first marriages. Several of those in the sample had an age differential of ten years or more. Many involved older men marrying much younger women. There are a few examples of younger men marrying older women. In several marriages older widows contributed land, property or wealth to significantly younger husbands, giving them greater resources than they might otherwise have had, but there is insufficient evidence in the sample correspondence to establish how many of these younger husbands were fortune-hunters. Several husbands took pains to stress that their marriages were not influenced by the wealth of their wives.

A status tension faced many widows wishing to marry. Widowhood gave them an independent legal, social and economic existence which would be sacrificed if they remarried. Some of the long-term widows in the sample exercised considerable authority and influence over their families, but there is insufficient evidence to establish whether they rejected remarriage to preserve their autonomy, whether they found the idea distasteful or whether they simply lacked opportunity. Several of the widows were limited by restrictive clauses which made remarriage financially difficult if not impossible. In at least one instance in the sample a widow who wanted to marry an older man for whom she felt affection was prevented from doing so because of the potential loss of jointure income.

Finance continued to be a significant influence but its predominance was challenged by questions of comfort, convenience and affection. Changes evident in the sample were probably influenced by the growing emphasis on personal choice and the increased competitiveness of the marriage-market. As remarriage for widows became more difficult it is possible that those who did remarry felt the need for a personal relationship based on individual choice and mutual compatibility rather than just material advantage.

Widows were unique in facing a reversal in status if they married. Some felt that the benefits outweighed loss of independence and income but others deliberately rejected remarriage. The number of remarrying widows decreased but there is less evidence of a decline in the number of remarrying widowers. Not only was there a gender imbalance but there was also a discrepancy in the proportion of widows and widowers remaining unmarried. Squirearchy widows who had the resources to survive comfortably without marriage could choose their own partner and were more likely to do so on grounds of affection, esteem and the need for companionship rather than by the search for 'fortune'.

Conclusion

Introduction

There are certain features of Western European marriage-making practices which apply to any period, irrespective of age, social status, wealth, occupation or race. Marriage is the physical and social union of two individuals, uniting two separate family or kinship groups and pooling resources to establish a new independent entity. But marriage is also culturally specific, shaped by time, space and values. This thesis has considered the context of the Midlands squirearchy during the long eighteenth century. It explores how families navigated the making of such a union and the financial implications which all too often determined how, when or even if, such a union might occur.

Pooling resources, implicit in eighteenth century gentry marriage-making, involves complex negotiations and the agreement of terms between two families. This was a powerful argument for broad financial and social parity between the two parties but also created a tension between material considerations and the emotional demands of affection and companionship as causal factors in marriage-making. Central to these discussions was the future transmission and accumulation of wealth and property. Recognising these competing pressures Dudley Ryder complained that even with financial help from his family he could not marry until he had accumulated sufficient resources to support a household, unless he was fortunate enough to marry a woman of considerable fortune.¹ This thesis has addressed the underlying fundamental issue of the relationship between the lesser and greater gentry. It has shown that the squirearchy was not a separate social group with its own distinctive approach to marriage-making, but was at the lower end of a continuum embracing the whole of 'the social elite'. It demonstrates that the marriage-making practices of the Midlands lesser gentry were not unique or distinct from those of gentry in other regions, including London.

Modern accounts of eighteenth century marriage-making practices often describe in detail aristocratic, upper gentry and wealthy bourgeoisie strategies, but simply extrapolate from these the strategies followed by the squirearchy and urban

¹ William Matthews (ed.), *The Diary of Dudley Ryder, 1715-1716* (London, 1939), pp. 251-252, 271, 370, Tuesday 5 June, Wednesday 11 July, Tuesday 27 November, 1716.

'pseudo gentry', by implication seeing them as a sub-set of the social elite. Mingay distinguished between the strategies of the greater and lesser gentry, asserting confidently that the property and financial demands faced by the wealthy gentry were too pressing to allow children free choice of a marriage partner. However, he appeared less confident when discussing the lesser gentry, claiming that 'probably the further one went down the social scale the more the individual feelings of young people were respected'. He felt that since their resources were much smaller their children's marriages were less likely to contribute significantly to the financial security of the family estate.² The Stones were equally unsure, asserting that 'any conclusions drawn about the county elite may well not apply to the parish gentry'.³ 'Probably' and 'may ... not' indicate uncertainty about the nature of the marriage-making strategies of the squirearchy, how they related to those of the greater gentry, and whether extrapolation from one group could describe accurately the practices of another. The Stones suggested that a study of

an area near the centres of new economic growth, say North Warwickshire ... might find ... a provincial subculture in which the interaction of land and money was very free indeed.⁴

Margaret Hunt challenged the 'theory of emulation', arguing that many urban gentry who could have set up as landed gentry chose not to do so, although they were content to adopt those aspects of gentry lifestyle which appealed to them.⁵ Expressions such as these imply that some writers believed that differences may have existed between the marriage strategies of the wealthy gentry and the squirearchy, and between those of the squirearchy and the urban or pseudo-gentry, and that such differences may have been influenced on a regional basis by differing economic circumstances.

My hypothesis at the start of this project was that distinct social and regional differences did indeed exist between the marriage-making strategies and practices of the squirearchy and urban bourgeoisie and that these were markedly different

² G. E. Mingay, *The Gentry* (London, 1978), pp. 111-112.

³ Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (abridged edition, (Oxford, 1986), p. 180.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁵ Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and Family in England 1680-1780* (California, 1996), pp. 2-5.

from those of the London and Bath based aristocracy and wealthy gentry. Warwickshire and neighbouring counties were chosen for this study because their distance from London and Bath raised expectation that the squirearchy would be relatively free of metropolitan influence. I agreed with the Stones that the area, one of the eighteenth century's major centres 'of new economic growth', had a substantial and rapidly expanding population of wealthy urban gentry which might provide evidence of close integration with the rural gentry population and the adoption of similar marriage strategies. I also posited that, because of the relatively limited resources of the squirearchy, they would be less driven than the wealthy upper gentry to adopt marriage-making strategies designed to maintain estate integrity and reinforce primogeniture. I assumed that parents would be less likely to pursue arranged marriages for their heirs and socially advantageous alliances for their daughters, believing that the evidence would show that their children were allowed greater freedom to choose marriage partners for themselves, based on love and affection rather than material considerations. I believed that there would be a noticeable difference in marriage-making strategies between the provincial lesser gentry and the wealthy elite.

However, my study has shown that throughout the long eighteenth century those Midland lesser gentry families sampled had similar aims and followed similar practices to those identified by historians for the London elite. Finance and financial settlements were critical in their marriage-making, especially for heirs and daughters. Even at the start of the nineteenth century, for some families, financial considerations could determine whether a marriage would be approved and might take place. This study shows that provision made for eldest sons was considerably greater than for other children. For several families, estate integrity and transmission remained important and shaped marital decisions.

Some lesser gentry families maintained similar elaborate pedigrees to those kept by the upper gentry and aristocracy which, together with bequests in wills, show that the squirearchy believed that marital and kinship links were significant and should be preserved. A feature common to most of the sample families is the existence of inter-familial marital links, but the evidence does not often show how strong these were in practice or for how long they remained practically effective. The sample families provide only limited evidence of social, financial or geographical exogamy. In the sample, there were few marriages between lesser

gentry families and the higher social strata but equally there were few with members of the urban gentry and none with people from a non-gentry background. Very few marriages, especially in the seventeenth century, were with families from outside the region. The sample consists mainly of families with landed rather than urban backgrounds. Most of the urban gentry families represented in the sample either had familial links with landed families or had acquired landed estates by purchase or inheritance. Two of the urban families included, both from the early nineteenth century, seem to have lacked any social links with the landed gentry, even though they land and property owners who received rental income.

1. Conclusions

- i. The marriage-making strategies of the sample of provincial lesser gentry had similar marital aims and followed similar marriage-making procedures to those attributed to the upper gentry. During the eighteenth century the similarities became closer in both purpose and process. Changes taking place in the marital strategies of the upper gentry were replicated, if at a slightly slower pace, in squirearchy practices.
- ii. The process changed from one based on parentally selected partners and arranged marriages with 'strangers' towards a more individual one based on personal choice of partner resulting from prior acquaintance and a period of courtship. An important factor in many later marriages was mutual attraction, affection and compatibility. The acceptance of individual choice created a clear tension with the principles of parental authority and filial obedience which had been the basis of arranged marriages, but this tension was not satisfactorily resolved in several of the selected families. Seventeenth century marriages in the sample, especially those of heirs and daughters, were usually arranged by parents with the two principals sometimes not meeting each other until after the terms of the marriage had been agreed in principle. Around 1700, it became generally accepted by most parents that the two principals should be allowed a limited right to veto an unacceptable proposal. During the eighteenth century the initial choice of partner was left to the couple often following a period of 'courtship' during which they got to know each other and established compatibility, before serious negotiations began between parents and their advisors. After 1753 the consent of parents was

required for the marriage of children under 21, but otherwise they could only exercise a limited veto through control of finance and moral pressure.

- iii. Despite changes occurring in attitudes and practices, finance and other material considerations continued to be important factors in marriage-making throughout the period. Many of the seventeenth century marriages in the sample families, especially those of heirs and daughters, were motivated by property and finance and were designed to benefit the family and estate more than the individual. Increasingly through the eighteenth century the importance of other factors, such as personal inclination, affection, compatibility and shared interests assumed greater importance. However, financial and material considerations continued to remain significant and could determine whether a marriage received parental support and approval. Failure to win parental approval could result in the denial or withholding of financial support. Control of finance meant that parents were still able to exercise some influence in marriage-making even when a couple were determined to marry. Failure to gain financial support might sometimes delay or prevent a marriage. Confidence in the importance of parity as the basis of a successful marriage, especially in terms of status and wealth, remained strong.
- iv. A successfully implemented marriage-strategy could transform lives and had the potential to change social status, whereas an injudicious policy could adversely affect an individual and a family and its estate. Successful marriages could lead to the social survival of families and could result in upward social mobility. Marriage could be the source of much needed finance and enable a family facing financial extinction to survive or clear debts. Considerable benefit could accrue from marriage into a family with political or social influence. A financially rewarding marriage could open the path to membership of the middle or upper gentry and even eventually of the aristocracy. Each of these effects can be seen in the sample families. The status of an already prosperous family could be enhanced by a good marriage but an injudicious marriage could increase financial difficulties and lead to a downward social spiral. A key concern in the period revolved around the perceived benefits and disadvantages of both prudent and imprudent or injudicious marriages.

- v. Strict settlements changed the nature of provision for children and widows. Eighteenth century settlements began to specify commitments to widows and portions for children. As more land became inalienable, parents had to finance portions by borrowing, which created an accumulating and often unupportable financial burden. Inability to provide generous portions, increased competition and portion inflation may explain the increase in life-time celibacy, especially among daughters, in the sample families.

Eldest sons were treated differently to their siblings since primogeniture meant that estate integrity and lineal succession depended on their marriages. Making an heir's marriage therefore received greater attention than given to the marriages of their siblings. Matches for heirs were often arranged to benefit the estate and family rather than the individual. Daughters were often regarded as an encumbrance and their early marriage was encouraged as the best way to reduce estate costs. 'Setting up' younger sons to be self-supporting was more important than arranging their marriages. In the early seventeenth century younger sons sometimes received land but after 1660 provision was usually in the form of an annuity or lump sum. Differences in treatment could result in sibling rivalry, delay the marriages of younger sons and push them into a downward social spiral. However, younger sons often had greater freedom over bride-choice than their sisters or eldest brother, often because they were usually older when they could afford to marry.

- vi. Contemporary literary material is a valuable historical resource. Fiction, drama and advice literature provide useful insights into contemporary debates about marriage and marriage-making. They provide descriptive detail of locations, social activities and social pressures relevant to this study of lesser gentry marriage-making. Although mainly focused on a London-centric society and the wealthy gentry each of these genres has relevance for the lives and practices of the provincial lesser gentry, both as consumers and as actors on a regional rather than the metropolitan stage. The members of the sample families would have recognised and been able to relate to the circumstances and situations described in literature even though ostensibly they concened a higher social class in a superior social environment.

Of greater significance is the way literary material represented courtship, marriage and marriage-making to its audience. Whether in imaginative or didactic style, writers offered persuasive images of how they perceived courtship and marriage-making. By pursuing their own agenda while dealing with issues of contemporary interest, they raised questions and proposed solutions which differed from the traditional norm. This gave writers the potential to reflect and to shape and change attitudes and behaviours.

The sample correspondence contains little evidence of the reading habits of the selected families and does not indicate whether literary material influenced their conduct or attitudes. Literary material did help to publicise changes taking place in marriage-making practices during the long eighteenth century. As well as reflecting changing practices, it also presented authorial perceptions of marriage and marriage-making. Writers examined many issues of concern to young people, including the relationship between filial obedience and personal choice and the tension between the demands of financial prudence and emotional commitment. The attention given to such questions, and the different perspectives of authors, almost certainly raised audience awareness and encouraged debate. There may be a causal link between literary representations and changes in lesser gentry attitudes and practices, but it is unclear from the sample whether this reflected changes already occurring or whether literature was a driving force behind developments.

Courtship literature, whether imaginative or didactic, encouraged marriage based on love rather than simply financial or social parity, but also tried to establish a balance between 'prudent' and 'injudicious' or 'imprudent' marriages. An important theme was that upward social mobility could be achieved through emotional commitment rather than through finance and material advantage. This unrealistic focus may have raised expectations and could help explain why 'love' and 'affection' became significant factors in partner-selection.

2. Implications

Even when individual circumstance limited their experience of metropolitan society many of the provincial gentry maintained strong links with family and friends who

had such experience. Throughout the period most of the sample families had familial or matrimonial links with members of the upper gentry and occasionally with the aristocracy. Diaries and correspondence show that through these links people who rarely left their own immediate environment were kept fully informed of metropolitan and upper gentry fashions, attitudes and behaviour. They could also access informative content in the London periodical press which was widely circulated in the provinces and gave up-to-date 'news' about metropolitan life. Consequently, London values, ideas and practices were disseminated to, and adopted by, the regional gentry. Increasingly, an over-arching sense of national identity developed leading to a commonality of practice. Regional identities existed and were maintained but as the century progressed they were subsumed within a national sense of identity. The squirearchy had long been accustomed to taking a lead from their greater gentry neighbours and continued to do so by sharing and imitating the values and behaviours of the upper gentry strata.

The development of new forms of regional urban sociability, based on the patterns set by London and Bath, encouraged a shared approach through the dissemination and adoption of 'London values'. New sociable forms allowed a wide range of social groups to intermingle, so that the aristocracy, when 'in the country', could mix with the squirearchy and urban gentry. The sexes were encouraged to mix more freely and females, who had traditionally been limited to a largely domestic environment, were allowed to develop a wider range of acquaintances and enjoy physical opportunities for informal courtship. These developments encouraged greater independence and a growing willingness among young people to make their own choices rather than to simply accept parental directives. However, greater opportunities for social mixing did not inevitably mean an increase of intermarriage between different social groups. The evidence of the sample families is that the members of the squirearchy did not think of themselves as an isolated 'lesser' group but thought of themselves as an integral part of the gentry. They were content to mix socially with people of other strata, but when it came to marriage they were content to marry within their own fairly tight-knit social structure.

The increasing complexity of marriage contracts and the need to raise money to fund settlements led to increasing reliance on the expertise of London based lawyers and the London financial market. This helped to develop and disseminate

a common pattern of negotiation and form of matrimonial legal documentation. Demand encouraged the development of expert legal and financial institutions in regional centres to service the needs of the provincial gentry. Lisle Hackett and George Birch used Birmingham based lawyers and the Browns relied on the Smiths of Horbling to draw up marriage contracts and other legal documents, whereas William Congreve of Shrewsbury and Justinian Isham relied on London based lawyers.

In the sample families, the marriage strategies of the squirearchy were successful in maintaining their status over time, when economic and political pressures might have led to their demise. There are no instances in the sample of families or individuals who failed to maintain their status, whether through poor marriage strategies or for other reasons, although such families and individuals did exist nationally and regionally. The sample does contain examples of successful marriages which raised the status of individuals to become members of the upper gentry and, in a few cases in the nineteenth century, achieve aristocratic status. There are a few cases in the sample of individuals with a lesser gentry background who, by following a successful marriage policy, rose to national prominence and played an active role in national affairs.

The wider dissemination of print material in the eighteenth century helped to create a national identity, patterns of behaviour, and sense of values. The debates presented in literary material had relevance for all sections of gentry society. Literary material mirrored the challenges they faced in their own lives, enabling the provincial gentry to relate what they read to their own lives and experiences, even if they were not directly exposed to London society. Literary material gave them a broader perspective on life than that offered simply by a local or regional environment and had the potential to encourage emulation.

The emergence of a sense of national identity could have reduced the sense of a local or regional identity, but this does not seem to have happened. Certainly, in the mid seventeenth century some of the sample families were active members of the county community. Throughout the period, many retained a strong sense of belonging to a specific region and, when taken away by employment, they were happy to return to their native environment. This is reflected in the relatively high proportion of geographically endogamous marriages which occurred in most of the

sample families. Seventeenth century marriages were mainly in-county, but many eighteenth century marriages were to out-of-county families. Even so, they were usually with people of comparable social standing from within a relatively short distance, who often came from neighbouring counties. Apart from the Barkers and Mortimers, whose eighteenth century marriages were mainly on a north-south axis, many of the marriages in the sample were based on an east-west axis. This may have been because of existing family connections, the location of provincial leisure towns or the existence of transport links, such as Watling Street. The Mortimers were the only family with strong links to the London area, but their marriages and acquisition of property gradually drew them into the Midland counties. The principal geographical orientation of most of the other families' marriages suggests that they were not drawn to London but preferred to marry into their own regional community. This east-west axis probably goes some way to explain the high level of marital connections between the sample families.

The period saw the development and growth of several leisure towns, including spas and county towns such as Shrewsbury, Stourbridge, Northampton, Leamington and Lichfield. Entrepreneurs developed a range of social facilities and activities designed to attract visiting gentry. They replicated, at a regional level, amenities which were available in London and Bath. Those who could not, or did not, visit London could visit local leisure towns and experience the circumstances and behaviours described in literature or recounted by friends who had visited London. Some towns developed their own mini-season, often linked to significant occasions such as the Northampton assizes or the Lichfield races. These 'seasons' helped to provide a focus for the squirearchy which confirmed their regional identity, but reminded them that they were part of a larger national society. Leisure facilities reinforced existing philosophical links between the provincial lesser gentry and the wealthier London based gentry and practically acted as local marriage-markets. The existence and success of such regional centres may help explain the high level of regionally endogamous marriages in the sample families.

Changes in methods of partner-selection were aided by the emergence of new forms of urban sociability for those who had access to them. Traditionally, young people, especially females, had a limited range of acquaintances, often being restricted to relations, near neighbours or family friends. This usually provided a

restricted selection of potential partners and made it easier for children to accept parentally arranged or approved marriages. New social opportunities increased the range of acquaintances and friendships and facilitated the dissemination and acceptance of different ideas and practices. These new facilities encouraged young people to select their own future partners rather than rely on parental choice and helped to change the balance of decision-making between parents and children. The greater sense of independence that young people had and their increasing willingness to take their own decisions challenged traditional patterns of filial obedience.

The emergence of local and regional marriage-markets brought about major changes in the marriage-making process. Newspapers had, since the end of the seventeenth century, regularly printed the supposed portion of a young wife and the estimated worth of her husband. Marriage-markets were valuable centres for the exchange of this vital information and encouraged parents and children to broaden the search for marriage partners. This may have encouraged social and financial exogamy but raises the question of how some younger sons and sons of cadet branches in the sample could marry much more advantageously than they might normally have expected. Advantageous marriages gave them possession of landed property and wealth allowing them to retain gentry status when normally they might have expected to lose gentry status, or at best join the urban gentry.

The lesser gentry believed themselves to be an integral part of the broader gentry culture. Several of the sample families had emerged from the yeoman class during the seventeenth century and, apart from periods of financial difficulty, were upwardly mobile. The Congreves were well-established gentry who experienced temporary social decline after the Civil War although, like the Hackets, they had re-established their status by the 1780s. Some younger sons retained gentry status thanks to successful marriages. The sample families show that strong links existed between individuals and families in the upper gentry strata and aristocracy. Sometimes this was based on simple neighbourly friendship, occasionally through marriage and even in some cases through a business relationship. Even though marriage was usually with people of comparable status there is evidence that a few sons and daughters married into higher status groups, but rarely into non-gentry ranks.

Literature described patterns of behaviour which were acceptable in high society. These were probably accepted by the squirearchy as examples to be followed in their local setting and so helped raise expectations and aspirations. 'Love' and independent decision making were ideals opposed to the more traditional views that marriage should be arranged, prudent and avoid the dangers of short-term passion. Literature presented marriage as a mechanism for upward social mobility. Certainly, as the century progressed there is increasing evidence that the squirearchy accepted the importance of emotional attachment alongside material and financial considerations. Prudent marriages, based on sound finance, continued to be the main parental aim well into the nineteenth century, but there was also an appreciation that in marriage sound finance without mutual compatibility was a potential disaster.

Squirearchy and upper gentry marriage contracts were written in similar form. Later seventeenth century settlements show that some sample families used strict settlements soon after they were first introduced. This new legal instrument was cumbersome and inflexible and became increasingly complex, but by adopting it so rapidly, squirearchy families could maintain their position in a rapidly changing social and economic world. It reflects the strength and success of their survival instincts that so many retained their identity when they might have declined and been absorbed into inferior social groups.

The shift from parental to personal choice of marriage partner helped to reinforce the significance of paternal control of finance. Parents could use their ability to restrict or withhold financial support to discourage or delay an unacceptable marriage, although they could rarely prevent it altogether. Financial power gave parents a partial veto over the choice of partner. The 1753 Hardwicke Marriage Act gave parents an unquestionable right to forbid the marriage of a child under 21, but the only practical influence parents had over older children was to withhold financial support. Children over 21 who were not financially dependent on their parents could ignore parental wishes and follow their own inclinations. The Marriage Act may have encouraged more under-age children, especially daughters, to elope.

Finance was critically important in most gentry marriages. Failure to achieve a satisfactory financial settlement could end negotiations even if a proposed

marriage was otherwise completely satisfactory. Financial resources strengthened an individual's position in a competitive marriage market and could enable a person to marry out of their social group and achieve upward social mobility. It could enable the children of urban gentry to marry into the landed gentry. The prospect of upward social mobility may have encouraged 'fortune hunters'. The increased freedom permitted by the new public sociability provided greater opportunity for poor young gentry to meet and seduce young women of fortune.

Prose fiction and other literary forms often discussed fortune hunting, showing that it was a real concern to lesser gentry parents. Some novels, like *Belinda*, show that fortune hunters could be female, although the majority were men. Writers stressed the way that finance could dominate gentry marriage-making and suggested to readers that love and affection rather than wealth provided the best foundation for marriage. However, some authors emphasised that financial prudence still had an important part to play in marriage-making.

Success led to self-perpetuating imitation as new writers copied successful formulae. This proliferation of similar material dealing with similar issues reinforced ideas and values in readers' minds and may have acted as self-fulfilling prophecies. The practices of marriage-making represented in literary material are like those revealed in evidence from the sample families. The changes in process described by writers are reflected in the empirical evidence. This written material not only contains advice but also reflects the pressing concerns of many of the squirearchy, who were lower down the social scale than the fictional characters depicted in novels and plays.

3. Questions for further research

This study has drawn attention to several areas which could repay further investigation to throw more light on the marriage-making strategies of the Midland's squirearchy. Most of the sample families were landed gentry, but some evidence has been used relating to urban gentry. Only two of these families were genuinely urban and their evidence comes almost entirely from after 1800. Strategies followed by urban gentry would benefit from further research using a larger sample, taken especially from earlier in the period. The limited evidence in the sample suggests that some urban gentry strategies, especially for daughters,

had some features in common with the landed gentry. Some urban gentry adopted a more egalitarian approach, ignoring primogeniture and treating all children equally when it came to inheritance. An important issue is whether, over time, urban and landed gentry strategies and practices grew more alike. If they did, it raises the question of whether urban gentry modelled their approach on that of the landed gentry or whether the lesser gentry modified their behaviour to mimic urban gentry practices.

Of equal importance is whether the development of a major industrial centre, such as Birmingham and its hinterland encouraged closer integration between the urban and landed gentry and whether intermarriage between the two social groups increased or decreased. It does not seem from the sample that the financial resources of the region's rapidly growing urban centres and populations became closely enmeshed with the Midland squirearchy. Overall, the two social groups existed in a separate but parallel world. This study has mainly considered the question from the perspective of the rural squirearchy. The sample records do not reflect a high level of intermarriage with the urban gentry or reflect significant numbers who completely abandoned the business and industrial world to become fully fledged landed gentry. The only real evidence of intermarriage in the sample involved the Congreves and was focused on Shrewsbury a leisure town rather than Birmingham an industrial centre.

The families studied include a mix of long-established gentry or newly emerging families from a farming-yeoman or urban middling background. They were selected because of the availability of archive material which generally covered the entire period and because they were based in different parts of the Midlands. It would have been useful to include established squirearchy families which declined in social status to become artisans or yeomen, but just as success and survival often ensures the preservation of archive material, so social decline often means the loss of such records. Occasionally, material is embedded in the archives of more successful families in the way Lisle Hacket's 1718 tripartite agreement has survived in the Leigh archives in Stratford-upon-Avon.

In this study reference has been made to published versions of primary source material, used for comparative and illustrative purposes. Comparison of the Midlands squirearchy with lesser gentry families in other regions of the country

could profitably repay further investigation. Regions of interest include South West Lancashire, West Yorkshire, the North East around Newcastle, South Wales and the Scottish industrial belt. These regions have similarities with the Midlands because of rapid industrialisation in the eighteenth century that saw the emergence of a new, wealthy urban gentry which challenged the status and influence of the landed gentry. Their status and wealth were based on industrial prosperity rather than trade or the professions. A major difference between these regions and the Midlands is that they are much further from London and its influence and might be expected to be less directly influenced by metropolitan values and practices. Each area had access to important regional leisure towns which were centres for public sociability and local 'marriage-markets'. Further study could show whether these areas developed different marriage-making practices to the squirearchy and urban gentry of London and the Midlands and whether they evolved to become more like the metropolitan model.

It would be profitable to investigate why many widows in the sample failed to remarry, especially as many widowers, both in the sample and reported in the published source material did. Some of these widows continued to be a financial drain on their husband's estates for many years, perhaps because of restrictive clauses in settlements and wills which discouraged remarriage. This suggests the existence of a 'remarriage double standard' comparable to the 'sexual double standard' of morality. Society accepted without question that widowers needed, and were entitled, to remarry within weeks of the death of a spouse, but the remarriage of widows was generally frowned upon and criticised. Many people felt that widows should remain unmarried and 'virtuous' for the remainder of their lives, devoting themselves to 'good works' and denying themselves companionship and sexual fulfilment, whereas widowers were expected to carry on life as normal. A minimum of twelve months seclusion and mourning was a social requirement of widows and those who failed to observe it were criticised and might be ostracised. The remarriage of widows has been researched for other areas of the country and it would be instructive to examine how far the experience of Midland widows matches that of other regions.

Did literary representations of marriage-making bring about change or did writers simply reflect changes already taking place? The sources give little indication of the effect of literary material or of reading on the attitudes and values of the

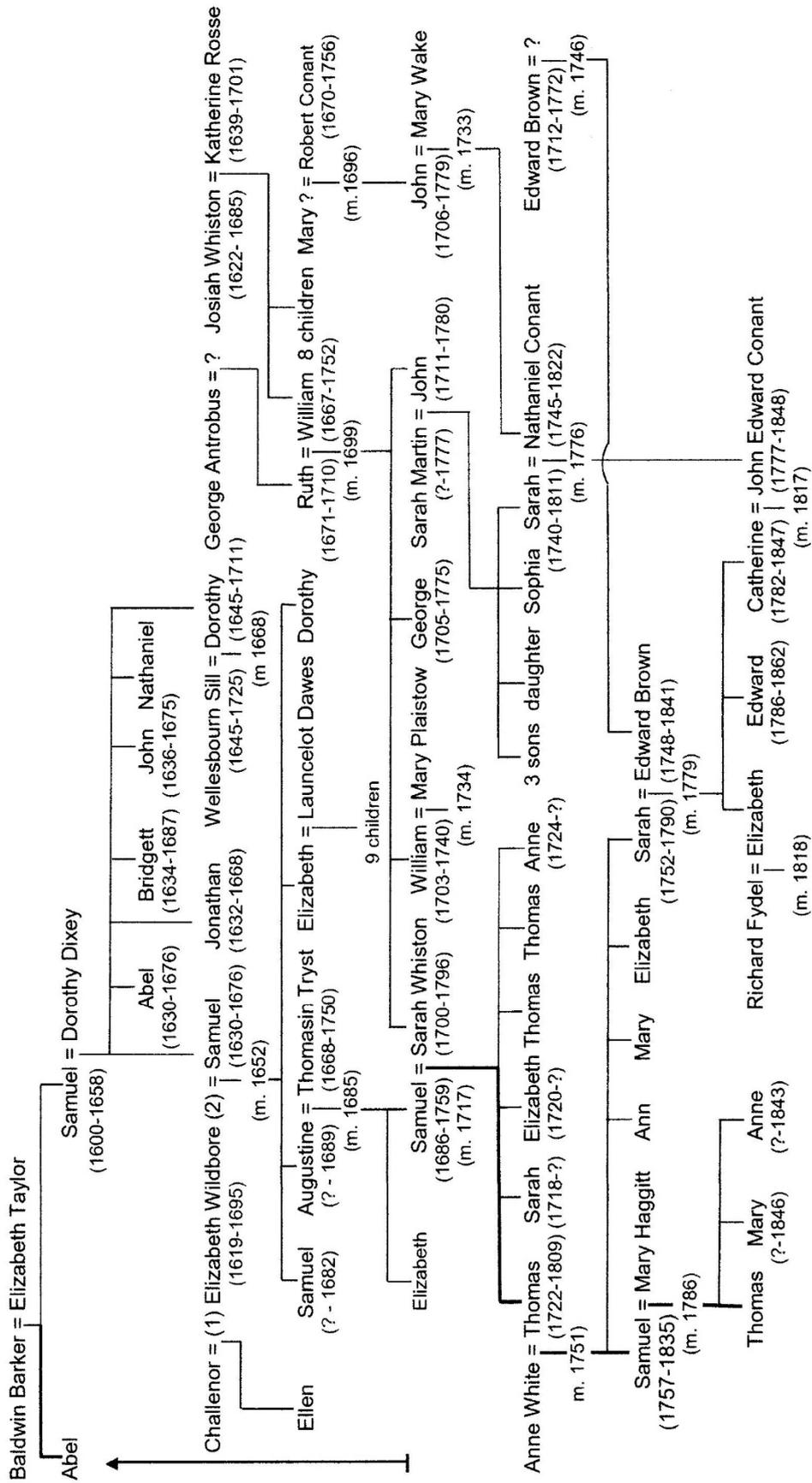
Midland squirearchy. The sample archives contain insufficient evidence about books or reading patterns to establish any meaningful causal link between conduct and the advice received from literary material. This question could benefit from further research. Associated questions are whether reading novels and plays raised young people's expectations, challenged established practices and created awareness of the importance of love, affection and personal compatibility in marriage. It would be interesting to investigate whether the idealised images of fiction led to disappointment and dissatisfaction among readers when they discovered that reality fell short of imagination. Does the relationship between the increased availability of literary material and changing attitudes towards nuptiality reflect causation or simple correlation?

My research has shown that this sample of lesser gentry had much in common with the greater gentry and shared many of their attitudes towards marriage-making, although they were restricted by limited resources and opportunities. However, it has also raised several questions, particularly about the relationship between the rural lesser gentry and the newly emergent wealthy urban bourgeoisie of the expanding industrial and commercial centres. Another issue is the influence of literary material on the changing attitudes of the lesser gentry to marriage and marriage-making. These questions could well provide an agenda for further work in this field.

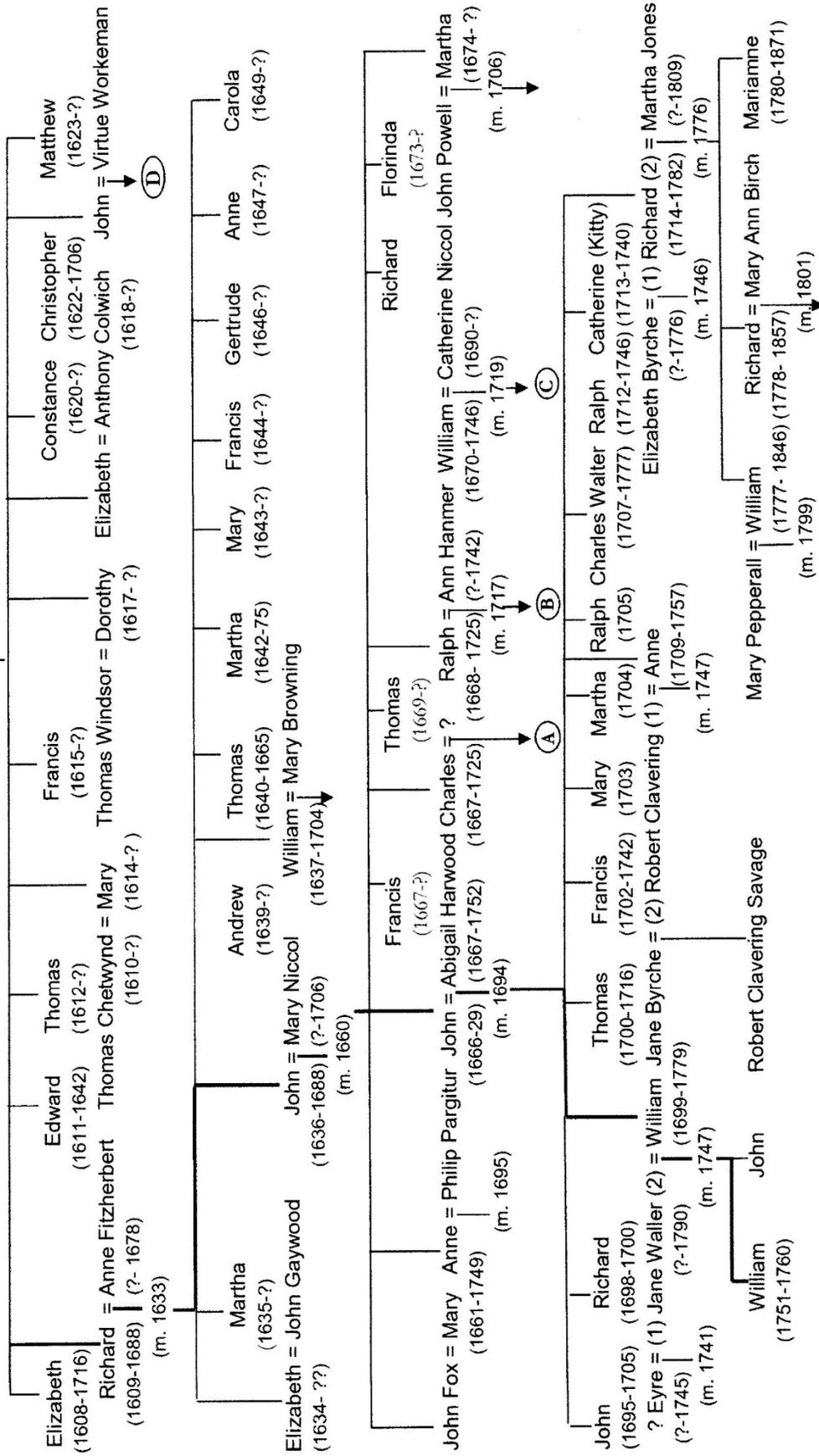
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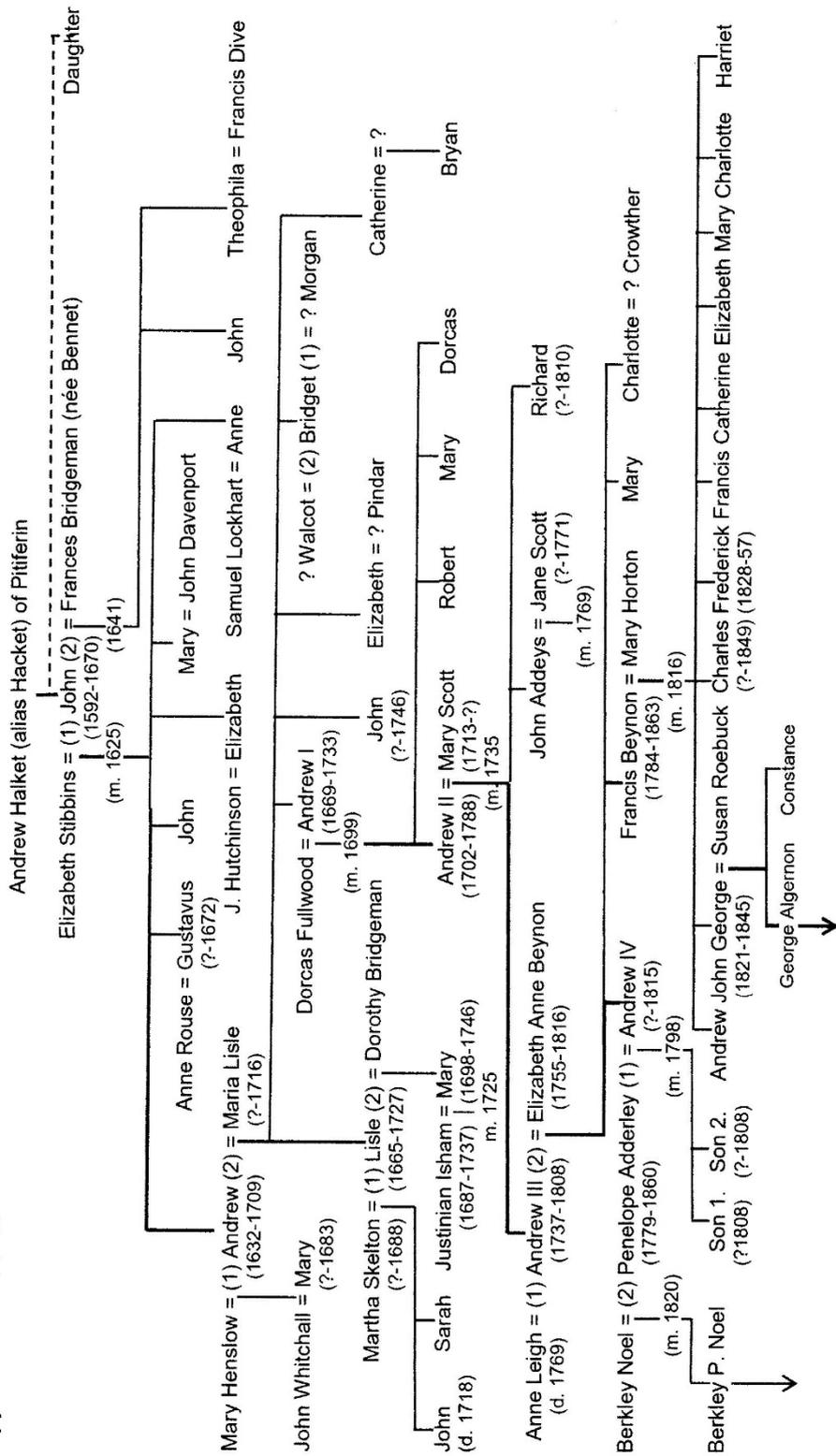
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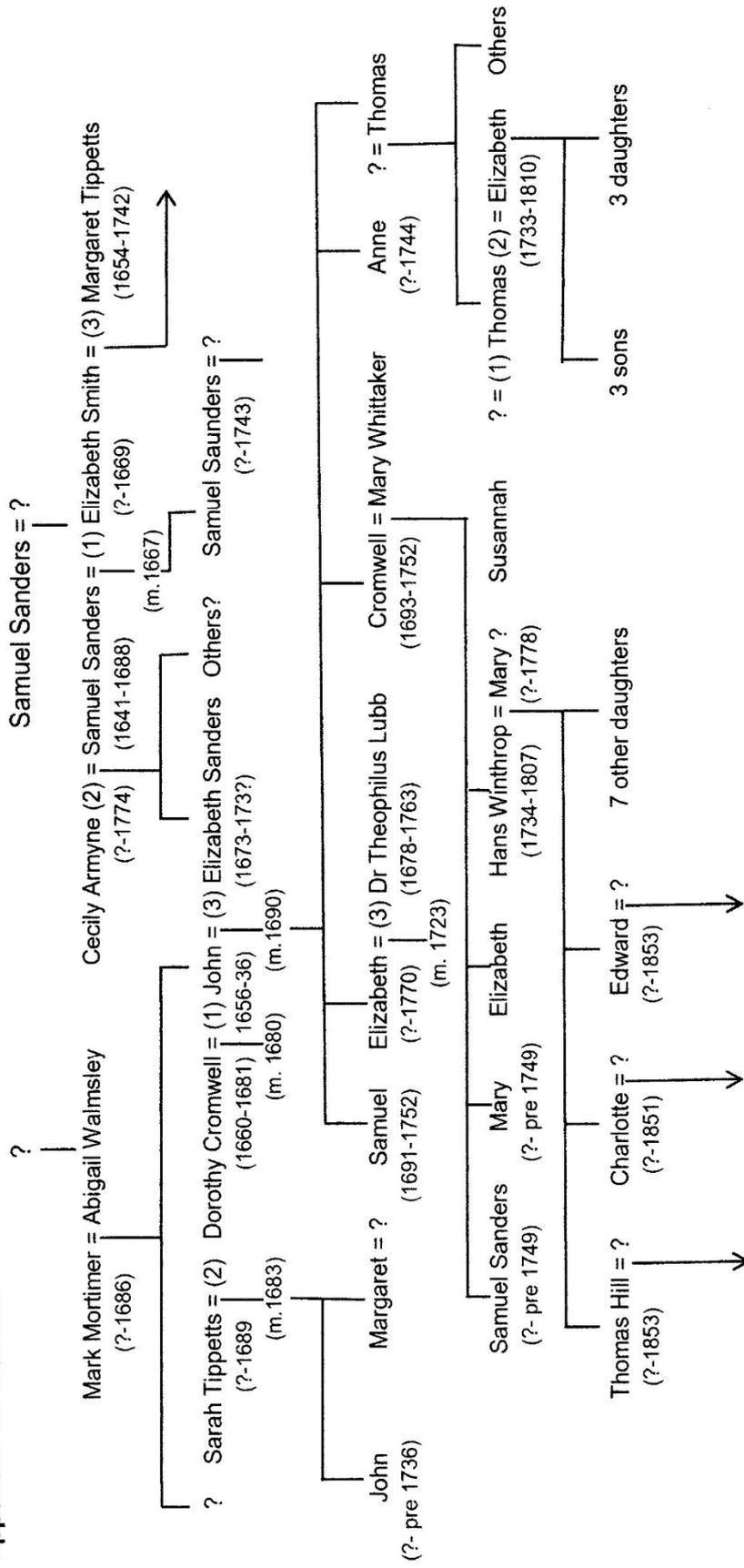
Appendix 1:b (i) Congreve (senior line)



Appendix 1:c Hacket



Appendix 1:d Mortimer



Appendix 2: Glossary

Aristocracy/aristocrat: the highest rank in society. The family head has a hereditary title of nobility; a small privileged/exclusive social group; often wealthy, politically influential and having large estates. There were five grades of nobility plus baronet.

Affinity: relationship by marriage rather than blood; descent from different ancestors.

Bar: (legal): a barrier or obstacle which can defeat, prevent, cut off or put an end to a process; an impediment to a proposed agreement or action. So: a 'bar to marriage' makes a marriage impossible, or prevents it taking place; a 'bar to dower' prevents or impedes a woman's legal right to dower; to 'bar a settlement' means to break a settlement and prevent its terms being implemented; to 'bar an entail' brings an end to an entail by legal means.

Bigamy: having two spouses concurrently but without a valid (legal) divorce from either. In the eighteenth century the term could refer to a serial monogamist or a person (legally) having two consecutive spouses.

Bourgeois: urban merchants, traders and professionals; the wealthier and most powerful/influential people in an urban area; those responsible for managing the governance of an urban area; sometimes 'urban gentry'.

Chancery (court of): a court of equity, first established in the fifteenth-century, having jurisdiction over all matters of equity (the quality of being just and fair), including: trusts, land law, the administration of the estates of lunatics and the guardianship of infants. Headed by the Lord Chancellor, supported by six 'Masters in Chancery'; it was more flexible than the Common Law courts and was concerned with implementing 'rights' rather than resolving problems.

Clandestine marriage: legal but 'irregular' marriages not conducted strictly according to the 1604 Canon Law. They were used by: people who wanted a secret marriage; those marrying without parental consent; those wanting a cheap marriage. Marriage rules were amended by Hardwick's Marriage Act (1753) to

outlaw such marriages. As the Hardwicke Act did not apply in Scotland it was said to have encouraged couples to elope.

Common Law: law developed from previous legal decisions and precedents rather than statute (Acts of Parliament); sometimes called 'case law' or 'precedent'. Common Law decisions define and interpret statute law. Judges create new law by setting 'a precedent' in cases involving issues not previously considered; these are binding in future cases. Common Law decisions may be set aside or overturned by higher courts.

Common recovery: a legal device used to bar land settlements and convert entail into absolute ownership.

Consanguinity: relationship by blood as opposed to affinity; descent from a common ancestor; kinship.

Contingent remainder: an interest (inheritance) which will go to a person or entity only upon a certain set of circumstances existing at the time the title-holder dies.

Coverture: a legal doctrine whereby a woman's rights are subsumed in her husband's, making her a *feme covert* instead of *feme sole*; she had no legal identity separate from her husband. Married women lost the right to own property or make contracts.

Curtesy: a husband's right to a life estate held by his wife at her death, provided she has left a living child able to inherit her estate.

Divorce: in the twenty-first century sense was possible, but very rare; in the eighteenth century about 300 divorces permitting remarriage were granted by Parliament. An invalid marriage might be annulled, usually because the marriage was within forbidden degrees of relationship (consanguinity) or because of prior contract. 'Divorce' usually referred to a legal separation from 'bed and board' which did not permit remarriage within the couple's lifetime.

Dower: provision under common law to support a widow and her children after her husband's death; she was entitled to a third of her husband's property held at the

point of marriage, acquired during the marriage, or alienated by her husband while they were married. A husband could not alienate land set aside for dower without his wife's agreement. Pre-nuptial settlements fixing jointure barred dower; post-nuptial settlements did not bar dower because, under coverture, a wife was then incapable of giving consent.

Dowry: (or 'portion'). Property/money brought to a marriage by a bride and placed at the husband's use and disposal.

Endogamy: marriage within one's own tribe, social, racial, religious or ethnic group; applied to marriage within one's own social, educational, religious or economic group or within a specified geographical area.

Entail: the restriction, especially of lands, by limiting inheritance to the owner's lineal (male) descendants or a specific group of descendants.

Exogamy: marriage outside one's own tribe, social, racial, religious or ethnic group; in marriage applied to marriage outside one's own social, religious, educational or economic group or outside a specified geographical area.

Feme covert: legal term for a married woman who is dependent on her husband financially and legally; her legal identity is subsumed in her husband's. (see 'coverture').

Feme sole: an unmarried woman, whether never married or widowed. The term can be applied to a woman who is independent of her husband as far as property is concerned; a trust or pre-nuptial agreement may have given her the right to execute contracts independently of her husband or hold property for 'her sole use'.

Freebench: the legal right of a widow to tenure of her husband's land until she remarried; usually including the right to bed and board in her eldest son's house during her widowhood.

Greater gentry: wealthy and powerful landowners holding a dominant position in the county community and county governance; often involved in national as well

as local affairs. These were often indistinguishable in terms of wealth, landholding and influence from the aristocracy and the greater London bourgeoisie.

Heir: a person who inherits or is entitled by law to inherit an estate or other property. Heirs are specified in marriage settlements or in wills. The law defines those entitled to inherit should a person die intestate.

Heiress: a female heir, used to describe a single female who inherited a large fortune; more accurately any female inheritor. Under the eighteenth century patrilineal system property was usually equally divided between daughters if there was no son or male to inherit. All such daughters were 'heiresses', irrespective of the size of their fortune or estate.

Intestate: dying without leaving a will.

Jointure: land or property settled jointly on a husband and wife to provide income during their joint lives and a widow's maintenance after her husband's death. The property usually reverted to the husband's estate when she died. Provision might be revoked if a widow remarried. Jointure was usually granted in lieu of the wife's common law entitlement to 'dower and thirds'. Jointure allowed better estate planning than dower and gave greater certainty of a widow's income. It was more easily enforceable through Chancery whereas Dower could only be enforced through expensive Common Law litigation.

Kindred: a person's relatives; usually describing relatives outside the nuclear family; membership varied according to circumstances and might include distant relatives through a common ancestor. Kindred consisted of maternal, paternal and conjugal relatives or affines (relatives by marriage).

Lesser gentry: an ill-defined group of landowners; estates, income and influence were less than the greater gentry. Their status was usually centred on their estate, home parish and occasionally county. On the upper boundary membership could fluctuate between the lower reaches of the greater gentry and the upper reaches of the lesser gentry depending on economic circumstances and individual personality and interest. At the lower-level they might be indistinguishable from wealthier farmers; often had a single estate or were restricted to a single parish;

able to live mainly off income rather than employment. In this study the terms 'squire' and 'squirearchy' are used as equivalent terms.

Parish gentry: the lower ranks of the lesser gentry having a small estate; status, and influence usually restricted to their own estate and home parish. Many were farmers rather than rentiers.

Patriarchy: a social system where power lies with males who control political power, wealth and property, having social prestige and authority over women and children in their family.

Patrilineal: descent, kinship and inheritance are traced through the paternal (male) line.

Portion: a child's share of the family estate; in the eighteenth century usually fixed in a marriage settlement; for sons, usually payable at 21; for girls usually at 21 or marriage, whichever was earlier. Frequently the capital was held by the landowner/head of family and the portion holder was paid interest in the form of an annuity or allowance. Portions became larger in the late seventeenth century; their size was reflected in a jointure; in the 1640s, the ratio was usually 5/6:1; by 1700 it was more often 10:1. See 'Dower' and 'Jointure'.

Post-nuptial: a legal contract, agreement or settlement agreed after marriage. Coverture meant a wife was deemed legally barred from making an agreement and so could renounce a post-nuptial jointure in favour of dower.

Pre-nuptial: a legal contract, agreement or settlement made before marriage. A widow could not renounce a jointure, fixed before marriage in a pre-nuptial settlement, in favour of dower rights.

Primogeniture: the right of a first-born son to inherit an estate in preference to younger children; this right was usually confirmed in a marriage contract which settled a substantial part of the estate on him and his (unborn) heir. Under primogeniture sons took precedence over girls.

Pseudo-gentry: townsmen, as wealthy as the rural gentry, whose income came from trade or professional employment rather than land.

Right (or true) heir: an heir at law, by blood. A specific individual granted or left an estate by will in contrast to heirs in general.

Settlement: a legal contract or agreement made either before or after marriage dealing with the disposal of property, inheritance and provision for widows and younger children.

Squire (Squirearchy): an eighteenth century term used to describe the lesser gentry (see above).

Strict settlement: a legal device developed in the 1650s which settled land on a property owner as a tenant-for-life and then to his first and other sons in tail. Trustees preserved the contingent remainder. The device became popular in the late seventeenth century and was the most common form of land settlement used in the eighteenth century. Helped to preserve the integrity of an estate, maintain inter-generational transfer of property and prevent alienation. A strict settlement could be established at any time between a father and son once the heir reached 21. It was most commonly used in a marriage settlement and was adopted by the lesser gentry at the same time as the greater gentry.

Trust (Trustees): a legal arrangement that vests property in a person or persons to hold it as nominal owner for the good of one or more beneficiaries. Used in settlements to protect land set aside for jointures and portions; also to preserve the 'contingent remainder'.

Urban gentry: wealthier merchants and professionals with similar income, education and social activities as the gentry; influential in town affairs (see pseudo-gentry).

Appendix 3. Notes on novelists, playwrights and their works

(i) Novelists

Daniel Defoe (1660-1731), son of a dissenting London tradesman, chose to be a writer rather than a non-conformist minister. He wrote on social, political and economic issues, and was imprisoned for his outspoken views and debt.¹

Eliza Haywood (1693?-1756) wrote in various genre. The daughter of a Shropshire yeoman or a minor gentleman, she was a professional actress and writer. Her earliest novels were amatory romances but she later developed a moralistic style.²

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) wanted to be a clergyman but instead trained as a printer. He wrote for periodicals and newspapers but achieved considerable popularity and commercial success with his first novel. His work was frequently imitated or parodied.³

Henry Fielding (1707-1755), eldest son of Somerset gentry, lived a life of leisure until financial need forced him to find work. Failing as a barrister, he became a successful dramatist and writer. His style contrasted with Richardson, whose work he often parodied.⁴

¹ Paula R. Bakscheider, 'Defoe, Daniel (1660–1731)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/7421>. [accessed 23 April, 2016]

² Paula R. Bakscheider, 'Haywood, Eliza (1693?–1756)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Sept 2010. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/12798>. [accessed 19 April, 2016]

³ John A. Dussinger, 'Richardson, Samuel (*bap.* 1689, *d.* 1761)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2012. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/23582>. [accessed 23 April, 2016]

⁴ Martin C. Battestin, 'Fielding, Henry (1707–1754)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/9400>. [accessed 25 April, 2016]

John Shebbeare (1709-1788), son of a Devonshire lawyer, found writing more profitable than medicine. A political writer and satirist he was repeatedly imprisoned for attacking the government.⁵

Tobias Smollet (1721-1771), the youngest son of a Scottish farmer who combined writing with medicine.⁶

Frances Sheridan (1724-1766) was the daughter of an Anglican minister who opposed educating girls. Married to an actor and theatre manager, she settled in London where she worked as a playwright and novelist.⁷

Charlotte Lennox (1727-1804), daughter of a Scottish naval officer, worked as a lady's companion. She became a writer after an imprudent marriage and failure as an actress. A friend of Samuel Johnson, she joined his literary circle.⁸

Fanny Burney (1752-1840), youngest daughter of a musician and a French Catholic mother, had an unhappy home-life after her father eloped with a wealthy widow. She mixed with leading artistic and literary figures and was a prolific writer.⁹

Mary Hays (1759-1843), daughter of rational dissenters. Her father's death when she was 14 and that of the man she loved a week before their marriage affected

⁵ M. John Cardwell, 'Shebbeare, John (1709–1788)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/25282>. [accessed 4 June, 2016]

⁶ Kenneth Simpson, 'Smollett, Tobias George (1721–1771)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/25947>. [accessed 23 April, 2016]

⁷ Ian Campbell Ross, 'Sheridan, Frances (1724–1766)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/25365>. [accessed 26 April, 2016]

⁸ Hugh Amory, 'Lennox, (Barbara) Charlotte (1730/31?–1804)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/16454>. [accessed 25 April, 2016]

⁹ Pat Rogers, 'Burney, Frances (1752–1840)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2015. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/603>. [accessed 26 April, 2016]

her badly. She wrote about religious and social issues and the disadvantaged place of women in society.¹⁰

Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) was close to her father, an Irish landowner and MP. She lived in Ireland and, apart from one brief romance, never received a proposal. Deeply interested in education she wrote prolifically for adults and children.¹¹

Jane Austen (1775-1817), daughter of a clergyman who was related by marriage to Lord Leigh. She wrote about the lesser gentry to which group she belonged. Her novels are semi-autobiographical and include references to her disappointing love life.¹²

(ii) Novels

Love in Excess (1719), an amatory romance, examines attitudes which stopped women revealing their romantic feelings for men. Marriage is depicted as a commercial arrangement for the transmission of wealth, while love and marriage are treated as separate, unrelated spheres.¹³

Roxana (1724) shows that marriage in a patriarchal society cost women their financial and personal independence. It contrasts middle-class respectability through marriage with the sexual freedom of the gentry.¹⁴

The Adventures of Roderick Random (1744), partly autobiographical, shows a young fortune hunter's search for wealth through marriage.¹⁵

¹⁰ Marilyn L. Brooks, 'Hays, Mary (1759–1843)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2009. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/37525>. [accessed 26 April 2016]

¹¹ W. J. McCormack, 'Edgeworth, Maria (1768–1849)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/8476>. [accessed 26 April 2016]

¹² Marilyn Butler, 'Austen, Jane (1775–1817)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2010. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/904>. [accessed 26 April 2016]

¹³ Eliza Haywood, *Love in Excess or the Fatal Enquiry* (London, 1719, Broadview Literary Texts, 1994).

¹⁴ Daniel Defoe, *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* (London 1724, London, 1982).

Amelia (1752), describes the problems of a young woman who married without parental consent. It considers filial obedience, elopement, remarriage, the double standard of sexual morality, socially exogamous marriages and financially imprudent marriages.¹⁶

The Female Quixote (1752), parodies amatory romances, compares 'romantic' and 'pragmatic' love and contrasts arranged marriages with marriages based on love and affection. It describes public sociability, the London marriage-market, and fortune hunters, and concludes that marriages for love need a prudent financial base.¹⁷

Sir Charles Grandison (1753) is about a young heiress in London and the trials of a 'good' man torn between love and honour. It describes London society, courtship, the marriage-making process and questions whether marriages without love or those involving religious differences can succeed.¹⁸

The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy (1753) shows a young couple adjusting to a parentally arranged marriage. It describes London social life and discusses courtship, marriage-making, the sexual double standard, fortune, and clandestine or imprudent marriages. It concludes that a successful marriage must have love and affection.¹⁹

The Marriage Act (1754) attacks Hardwicke's Marriage Act by telling a series of short loosely connected stories which argued that the Act encouraged parentally arranged marriages at the expense of love and personal choice. It discusses mercenary marriages, love, the double standard, elopement and the unfairness of settlements.²⁰

¹⁵ Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (London, 1748, Oxford, 1981).

¹⁶ Henry Fielding, *Amelia* (London, 1752, London, 1987).

¹⁷ Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote or the Adventures of Arabella* (London 1752, Oxford, 1989).

¹⁸ Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (Dublin, 1753, Oxford, 1972).

¹⁹ Eliza Haywood, *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (London, 1753), in John Richetti (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Novels by Women Kentucky*, 2005).

²⁰ John Shebbeare, *The Marriage Act* (London, 1754 reprinted New York, 1974).

The Memoires of Miss Sidney Bidulph (1762) considers parents and friends as marriage-makers. It contrasts marriage for love with mercenary loveless marriages. A didactic novel, it attacks the sexual double standard and discusses sociability, financial settlements, partner selection, female reputation, inheritance and jointures.²¹

Evelina (1778) describes a girl's entry into society. Largely autobiographical, it describes public and private sociability, socially-climbing tradespeople, clandestine marriage, the sexual double-standard, courtship, love, fortune and social status.²²

The Memoires of Emma Courtney (1796) is semi-autobiographical. It challenges contemporary prejudices about finance, the sexual-double standard and gentry 'poverty'. It considers attitudes to love, marriage and women's passionate nature.²³

Belinda (1801) examines attitudes to marriage, sociability, the London marriage-market and courtship. A didactic novel, it discusses inter-racial and loveless but prudent marriages. Edgeworth claimed it was 'a moral tale' and not a novel.²⁴

Sense and Sensibility (1811) foregrounds romantic love, and lack of fortune, describing public and private sociability, the marriage-market, paternal authority, inheritance and elopement.²⁵

Pride and Prejudice (1813) examines social snobbery and bigotry, shows the importance of marriage for young gentry women and deals with arranged and prudent marriages, fortune, sociability, marital exogamy, entail and inheritance, seduction, elopement and reputation. Characters include a cross-section of small-town merchants and professionals, aristocrats and lesser gentry.²⁶

²¹ Frances Sheridan, *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (London, 1762, London, 1987).

²² Frances Burney, *Evelina or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (London, 1778, Oxford 2002).

²³ Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (London, 1796, London, 1987).

²⁴ Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (London 1801, Oxford, 1994).

²⁵ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (London, 1811, London, 1996).

²⁶ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London 1813, London, 1995).

(iii) Playwrights

Aphra Behn (1640?-1689), had an obscure background and was, allegedly, a government spy. She was the first professional woman writer.²⁷

Susanna Centlivre (1667?-1723) claimed to be gently born but was probably a yeoman's daughter. Her marriage was disastrous, but she was a successful actress and writer. She had to conceal her identity because of society's dislike of female playwrights.²⁸

William Congreve (1670-1729), of the Staffordshire Congreves, lived in Ireland in a Royalist family. Settling in London, he joined fashionable society and became a politically active Whig.²⁹

Richard Steele (1672-1729), son of an Irish attorney was a prolific writer best known as an essayist. He was a Whig M.P.³⁰

John Gay (1685-1732) came from a Somerset urban gentry family whose status had been declining for several generations. He was a prolific and popular writer.³¹

George Lillo (1691-1739), the son and partner of a London goldsmith was a part-time writer of tragedy and the only one in the sample not to earn his living mainly from writing.³²

²⁷ Janet Todd, 'Behn, Aphra (1640?-1689)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/1961>]. [accessed 8 July, 2017]

²⁸ J. Milling, 'Centlivre, Susanna (*bap.* 1669?, *d.* 1723)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2007. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/4994>. [accessed 8 July, 2017]

²⁹ C. Y. Ferdinand, D. F. McKenzie, 'Congreve, William (1670-1729)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/6069>. [accessed 8 July, 2017]

³⁰ Calhoun Winton, 'Steele, Sir Richard (*bap.* 1672, *d.* 1729)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2005. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/26347>. [accessed 8 July, 2017]

³¹ David Nokes, 'Gay, John (1685-1732)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2009. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/10473>. [accessed 8 July, 2017]

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) was the son of an Irish cleric. He was a prolific writer but his life-style resulted in perpetual debt. He was a friend of Samuel Johnson.³³

Hannah Cowley (1743-1809) was the daughter of a Devon bookseller. Settling in London with her husband, a minor government official and part-time journalist, she became a successful dramatist.³⁴

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) was born in Ireland with a gentry background. He was a prolific writer and Whig M.P. His mother was also a successful writer.³⁵

(iv) Plays

Sir Patient Fancy (1678) achieved early popularity, but was later condemned for its immorality and the emphasis it gave to material and sexual considerations rather than affection and companionship. It encouraged sexual licence, deception and self-interest, showing contempt for middling values.³⁶

The Way of the World dealt with marriage-making, favouring materialism and lust rather than affection; encouraged sexual licence, deception and self-interest; and treated the middling sort with contempt.³⁷

³² James L. Steffensen, 'Lillo, George (1691/1693–1739)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2008. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/16657>. [accessed 8 July, 2017]

³³ John A. Dussinger, 'Goldsmith, Oliver (1728?-1774)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn. Jan 2009. <https://0-doi-org.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/10924>. [accessed 8 July, 2017]

³⁴ Mary de la Mahotière, 'Cowley, Hannah (1743–1809)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/6500>, [accessed 8 July, 2017]

³⁵ A. Norman Jeffares, 'Sheridan, Richard Brinsley (1751–1816)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/25367>, accessed 12 Aug 2017].

³⁶ Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy* (London 1676), in Kathryn Rogers (ed.), *The Meridian Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth Century Plays by Women* (London, 1994).

³⁷ William Congreve, *The Way of the World* (London, 1700), in E. Gosse (ed.), *Restoration Plays* (London 1932).

A Bold Stroke for a Wife (1718) is about deception, consent and fortune. It presents different views of 'the ideal husband' and parodies the marriage-market, fashion, the world of commerce, academia and religion.³⁸

The Conscious Lovers (1722), contrasts mercenary 'arranged' marriages with those based on love; compared filial obedience with personal choice; contrasts aristocratic moral ambiguity with mercantile moral conservatism; and discusses the respective spheres of husbands and wives in decision making.³⁹

The Beggars Opera (1728) is set in London's underworld, and addresses parental authority, partner selection, filial obedience, fortune and the 'happy' prospect of widowhood, suggesting these issues were common to all social groups.⁴⁰

The London Merchant (1731) is a tragedy set in middling society; ostensibly located in time past it dealt with contemporary issues, addressing fortune and marriage-making, heiresses, filial obedience, courtship, seduction and the sexual double standard of morality. Lillo commended female virtue and sexual restraint in a society that condoned sexual laxity among males. It has a strong moral message, showing that all social groups shared the same marriage-making concerns.⁴¹

She Stoops to Conquer (1771) described mistaken identity, fortune transmission, secret romance and the double standard of sexual morality. It has a rural rather than London setting and examines parental authority, filial obedience and personal choice, and socially exogamous marriages.⁴²

³⁸ Susannah Centlivre, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (London, 1718), in Kathryn Rogers (ed.), *The Meridian Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth Century Plays by Women* (London, 1994).

³⁹ Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers* (London, 1722), in Ricardo Quintana (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Plays* (New York, 1952).

⁴⁰ John Gay, *The Beggars Opera* (London, 1728), in Ricardo Quintana (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Plays* (New York, 1952).

⁴¹ George Lillo, *The London Merchant* (London, 1731), in Ricardo Quintana (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Plays* (New York, 1952).

⁴² Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer, or the Mistakes of a Night* (London, 1773), in Ricardo Quintana (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Plays* (New York, 1952).

The Rivals (1775), set in Bath, is a 'deception' drama which examines parental authority, filial obedience and independence. It questions whether love adequately compensates for poverty.⁴³

The Witlings (1779), considers the relationship between wealth, poverty and romance. It parodies stock contemporary 'cultural' figures and discusses the relationship between 'fortune' and prudence in gentry marriage-making.⁴⁴

The Belles Stratagem (1780) stresses the importance of love and discusses arranged marriages, suitors who are strangers and indifferent to each other. It emphasises mutual love as the only sound basis for marriage.⁴⁵

⁴³ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals* (London, 1775), in Ricardo Quintana (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Plays* (New York, 1952).

⁴⁴ Frances Burney, *The Witlings* (London, 1779), in Kathryn Rogers (ed.), *The Meridian Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth Century Plays by Women* (London, 1994).

⁴⁵ Hannah Cowley, *The Belles Stratagem* (London, 1780), in Kathryn Rogers (ed.), *The Meridian Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth Century Plays by Women* (London, 1994).

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