

Illegitimacy in South Wales

1660-1870

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by

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To my grand-children, Ossian and Cerys

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Abstract

The history of illegitimacy has been much studied in England, Scotland and elsewhere in Europe, but has attracted little attention in Wales, in spite of the significance of the debate about the sexual laxity of Welsh courting couples to the historiography of the nineteenth century. This thesis examines illegitimacy in the counties of Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire between 1660 and 1870, using data from 74 parishes to measure the changing level of illegitimacy, at a time when south Wales was being transformed by economic, social and religious change. The research sets out to introduce Wales to the debate on illegitimacy, locating south Wales within the established picture of European demography. Patterns of illegitimacy in England and Wales are compared in order to establish whether south Wales fell within the range of regional variation found in England or displayed a distinct pattern, related to different traditions of courtship and marriage, or to experiences such as industrialisation and religious revival, which developed in different ways in the two countries. Material from poor law records, the consistory courts, Nonconformist disciplinary records, and personal narratives is brought together to give a holistic picture of the courtship of young people, and the circumstances of illegitimate children and their parents. Analysis suggests that patterns of illegitimacy in south Wales fit well with the characteristics of the 'highland' region of England described by Adair, but with additional intra-regional variation in levels of illegitimacy, which reflected local social, economic and cultural factors.

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List of abbreviations

Bart.	baronet
CA	Carmarthenshire Archives
CMN	Carmarthenshire
daur	daughter
ed.	editor
edn.	edition
<i>et al.</i>	and others
GA	Glamorgan Archives
GLA	Glamorgan
lab.	labourer
NLW	National Library of Wales
PLAA	Poor Law Amendment Act
PRO	Pembrokeshire Record Office
RD	Registration district
RSD	Registration sub-district
servt.	servant
SMAM	Singulate mean age of marriage
TNA	The National Archives
U	unmarried
WGA	West Glamorgan Archive Service
wid.	widow/er

Abbreviations used in tables

..	not available
-	nil
*	significant at the 1 per cent level
**	significant at the 0.1 per cent level

Chapter 1 Introduction

Framework of the research

Although the history of illegitimacy has been much studied throughout western Europe, both in its demographic aspects and the wider social context, there has been very little research in Wales. The aim of this study is to make a start in providing comparable information for Wales through an investigation of the demographic and social aspects of illegitimacy from the Restoration to the mid-Victorian period. Rather than undertaking a study of parishes across the whole of Wales, as the Cambridge Group did for England, this study looks in depth at illegitimacy in the counties of Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan. The advantage of carrying out a more locally-based study is that it allows a fuller investigation of the lived experience of illegitimate children and their parents than one with a wider geographic scope, which would inevitably have to concentrate on the demographic aspects of the topic. As well as providing an investigation of a largely unexplored aspect of Welsh history, the study also attempts to offer a new perspective on current issues concerning the history of illegitimacy in Britain.¹

The reasons why illegitimacy provides a fruitful topic for study have been set out elsewhere, but are worth summarising here.² The study of any behaviour which society labels as unacceptable or deviant illuminates its opposite, 'normal' behaviour, and the boundary between the two. So a history of illegitimacy inevitably includes consideration of courtship, marriage and the family, and the provision of social support. There are several factors which make the study of illegitimacy in Wales of particular interest. The country's distinctive cultural traditions, particularly those concerned with courtship such as *caru yn y gwely* (courting in bed, sometimes known as bundling in English), might be expected to have implications for

¹ This approach, of taking a neglected aspect of Welsh history, to cast a new light on Welsh social history and to place the topic in a wider British context, is in line with that taken in Alun Withey's *Physick and the Family: Health, Medicine and Care in Wales, 1600 – 1750* (Manchester, 2011).

² P. Laslett, K. Oosterveen and R.M. Smith (eds.), *Bastardy and its Comparative History* (London, 1980), pp. 3-4, R. Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 2-3.

illegitimacy. Farm service, which survived later in Wales than in England, has been found in some studies to be associated with illegitimacy. There is also some interest in investigating whether the characterisation of Welsh women by English government reports as ‘almost universally unchaste’ – an allegation challenged at the time but not seriously investigated since – had any general validity.³

Among the issues which this study considers is whether the demography of illegitimacy in Wales is different from that in England. If there are differences, do they fall within the range of regional variation found within England, do they arise from a different social structure or are they symptomatic of a different culture? Differences in social structure between Wales and England apparent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries included class and power relationships. For instance there was less distance between farmers and labourers than would be found in England, but language differences led to a greater gulf between the mass of the people and the gentry. In addition to long-standing cultural differences between Wales and England, the impact of Nonconformity in Wales was quite unlike that of England, both in its prevailing Calvinist theology and in the social makeup of its membership, which was predominantly rural and working class.

England is the most obvious point of comparison; the two countries shared the same systems of secular and canon law, a common definition of marriage and the same poor laws. But, as indicated above, there were social and cultural differences, so that comparisons with other countries may be illuminating. There are for instance parallels with Scotland, where could be found rural communities which had many features in common with those in Wales, and where Blaikie found distinctive cultural regions of illegitimacy.⁴

The remainder of this chapter looks first at the definition and measurement of illegitimacy, together with the sources of data used in the study. The main characteristics of the region, and the changes which took place during the study

³ Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales Part I, Carmarthen, Glamorgan and Pembroke, p. 21, PP 1847 xxvii.

⁴ A. Blaikie, ‘Scottish illegitimacy: social adjustment or moral economy?’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (1998), pp. 221-41.

period are outlined, together with the methodology for selecting a sample of parishes which reflected these characteristics. This is followed by a discussion of the particular problems of demographic research in a Welsh context and of the issues which the study seeks to address. Chapter 2 reviews the literature relating to illegitimacy and to the wider context of courtship and marriage. Changing attitudes to sexuality are considered, and also the social contexts within which illegitimacy occurred. Chapter 3 looks at the incidence of illegitimacy in the study region up to the early nineteenth century, using principally parish registers and the records of the old poor law to investigate the characteristics of the parents of illegitimate children and patterns of child care. Chapter 4 considers the introduction of the New Poor Law, particularly in south Wales, and the part played by nineteenth-century government reports in associating Wales with high levels of illegitimacy. Poor law reports are used to compare the impact on illegitimate children and their parents in south Wales with Wales as a whole and England, and this analysis is extended using linked census and baptism records to consider outcomes in more detail. Chapter 5 is concerned with the investigation of the demographic, social, economic and cultural factors which influenced the incidence of illegitimacy across the study area in the mid-nineteenth century. Attempts to control illegitimacy, through a variety of formal and informal means, are discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 looks at the relationship between courtship, community and illegitimacy in the rapidly changing society of south and south-west Wales in the nineteenth century. The concluding chapter sets out the main findings of the study, together with the implications for current theories of the causes of illegitimacy, and suggests further avenues for research into illegitimacy in Wales.

Defining illegitimacy

The keeping of parish registers recording weddings, christenings and burials was instituted by Thomas Cromwell, in a mandate of 1538 addressed to the parish incumbent.⁵ Several later orders provided for more careful keeping of registers, and for copies, known as Bishops' Transcripts, to be sent to the dioceses. Although there was no specific requirement for the baptismal register to note a child's status

⁵ W. E. Tate, *The Parish Chest* (Chichester, 2000), p. 30.

with respect to legitimacy, this was the general practice, though some of these births were recorded in separate books now lost.⁶ A very wide range of epithets was used in the study region to describe the illegitimate child, the vast majority of which carried some degree of censure, with 'natural' and 'loveson/daughter' being possibly the least judgemental. 'Base', 'illegitimate' and 'reputed' were the terms most widely used in the parishes which are considered here. Entries in the Llanegwad register, written in Welsh throughout 1755 and again in 1765, described illegitimacy as 'gordd[erch] fab', that is, the son of a concubine, a term also used, in its Latin version, in the Cydweli register for 1664-1694. Many early registers show only the father's name, though mothers were increasingly likely to be included from the mid-eighteenth century. Later registers, particularly after 1840, often show only the mother's name, possibly reflecting the initial New Poor Law philosophy that mothers alone should bear the burden of an illegitimate child. There seems also during this period to be some reluctance to label a child as illegitimate, even where the information provided implies that this was the case, for instance where parents have different surnames or addresses.

The rules used to define illegitimacy are adapted from those given by Adair.⁷ A child is counted as illegitimate if:

- He/she is described as *illegitimate*, *spurious*, *base-born* or by some similar epithet;
- The father is described as *reputed* or given an equivalent description, or described as a bachelor;
- The mother is described as a *concubine*, or as a *single woman* or similar;
- The mother's name only is mentioned;⁸
- The mother and father have different surnames and there is additional information to suggest that they are unmarried.

The last condition is adapted from that used by Adair ('the child is given a surname other than that of the mother') to take account of Welsh naming

⁶ Tate, *Parish Chest*, p. 60.

⁷ Adair, *Courtship*, p. 32.

⁸ This approach might slightly overstate numbers since a mother's name might appear alone where the father was absent from the parish at the time of the baptism.

traditions. In the patronymic system, which continued to be used instead of surnames in parts of Wales as late as the nineteenth century, a woman became known on marriage by her relationship to her husband (*gwraig John Dafydd* – John David's wife), but did not cease to be her father's daughter (*ferch William Griffith*) and this patronymic description may be found in written records, such as a baptism or will. Where the relationship is omitted, it is difficult to tell whether patronymics or surnames are being used, and whether a woman is married or single. Thus although baptismal records from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries may show the mother's patronymic, this cannot be taken as evidence of the child's illegitimacy. Nevertheless there are cases where the inclusion of the mother's surname, together with additional evidence that the parents are not married to each other, strongly suggests that the child is illegitimate and should be counted as such. Contextual evidence includes entries which lack the description 'wife' whereas the vast majority of surrounding entries include it (typical of earlier periods); and different addresses for the parents, often found in the later printed registers introduced in 1813. Confirmation of illegitimacy may also be found in poor law records. Where there is no additional evidence to suggest that parents with different surnames are unmarried, the baptism has been counted as legitimate.

Adair chose to include children who were apparently unbaptised but identified as illegitimate in records other than baptisms, for instance burial records. This procedure may be acceptable in a situation where the vast majority of infants are baptised. However where a substantial minority are not, it risks biasing illegitimacy ratios upwards, since although the numerator and denominator in the ratio are adjusted to include unbaptised illegitimate children, no adjustment to the denominator is made for those who are unbaptised and legitimate. Even if similar procedures were to be used to identify and include unbaptised legitimate children, there may be substantial numbers of unbaptised legitimate children who could not be identified. These procedures would require nominal linkage which can rarely be undertaken in a Welsh context with any degree of accuracy. In this study, therefore, the counts in the numerator and denominator of the illegitimacy ratio include only children identified in the baptismal register.

Measuring illegitimacy

Ideally fertility, whether legitimate or illegitimate, should be measured in relation to the population at risk, that is, married or non-married women of fertile age, using age-specific fertility rates to allow for the age distribution within the group. Most demographic studies of illegitimacy which relate to periods earlier than the 1851 census, which was the first to provide information about age, sex and marital status, use the illegitimacy (or bastardy) ratio – that is, the ratio of illegitimate baptisms/births to all baptisms/births. Where broad population figures are known, but a detailed breakdown by age and marital status is missing, the illegitimacy rate per thousand of the female population may in some circumstances be preferable to the bastardy ratio. In general this study uses the bastardy ratio to examine trends over the whole period studied, with the index of illegitimate fertility used for a detailed comparison between districts within Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan in 1851. Details of the calculation of this and related indices are given in Appendix A.

Sources of data used in the study

The main data sources used to estimate the incidence of illegitimacy in Chapters 3 and 5 are parish registers and the records of civil registration. For the most part, the survival of parish records is poorer than in England. Only a minority of parish baptismal registers survive for periods before 1700, and those that do are often defective during the civil war and Interregnum, particularly after 1653, when registration became the responsibility of secular officials. Fewer still have a full run of years. In order to provide continuity between information gathered from the sample of parishes in Chapter 3 with that derived from civil registration data for the mid nineteenth century in Chapter 5, areas were selected at the registration sub-district (RSD) level, the lowest level at which illegitimate births were compiled, and all parishes within the chosen districts included in the sample. The process used to select a sample of representative parishes is discussed later in this chapter.

The growth in Nonconformity led to a decline in the proportion of infants baptised in the Church of England, particularly from the early decades of the

nineteenth century. This shortfall seems to have been only partly matched by a growth in Nonconformist baptisms, whose records have not survived in great number, and for reasons discussed below are not suitable for inclusion in the main database. Though many Welsh baptismal registers were surrendered to the Non-parochial Registers Commission of 1837, their survival for subsequent periods is poor, and in practice, few illegitimate baptisms are found in those registers which have survived. Whether this is because the practice of excommunicating chapel members who found themselves pregnant outside marriage discouraged them from baptising their infants, or because many chapel-goers were not full members but 'hearers', unlikely to have their children baptised there or indeed anywhere, is unclear. In summary, between about 1810-20 and 1847, when detailed illegitimacy statistics derived from civil registration records began to be published, the path of illegitimacy in south Wales is uncertain, and the quality of the information derived from parish registers in this period cannot be improved by the inclusion of Nonconformist baptisms.

The records of the ecclesiastical courts provide some insight into illegitimacy in the earlier part of the study period, but again are far from complete. Other records used include those of the Old and New Poor Laws, the secular courts, and printed sources such as newspapers and religious periodicals. Information about individual baptisms from registers for a selection of parishes has been linked to that from census enumerators' books and other local sources such as marriage registers and poor law records, to examine outcomes for illegitimate children born during the period 1835-60. Census enumerators' books have also been used to calculate numbers in each RSD by age and marital status in 1851, which were not published at this level of detail.

The survival of records in south Wales is poorer than might be expected in an English region, particularly in the early years of the study. Information from parish records is sufficiently reliable to allow a range of demographic analyses to be undertaken. However the poor survival of consistory court and poor law records means that quantitative analyses from these sources should be treated with some

caution, and detailed case papers among these records are rather sparser in south Wales than in England.

The period chosen for this study has been constrained at the start by the poor survival of the main sources of data, described above. The end of the period has been determined by a desire to include consideration of the immediate changes brought about by the New Poor Law, but to avoid overburdening the research by including the later nineteenth century, when society in most of south Wales was changed radically by the scale of industrialisation and in-migration from England. Thus the scope of the study is the period between the Restoration and 1870.

South Wales from the Restoration to the mid-Victorian era

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a period of major structural changes in south Wales. In the late seventeenth century, the region was overwhelmingly rural and agricultural, with only small-scale industry, and no town of more than 3,000 inhabitants.⁹ Upland settlements were often scattered, though some nucleated villages were to be found, particularly in the more anglicised lowland areas. Jenkins' description of Wales as 'a mosaic of self-contained localities, cut off from each other by geographical division and poor communications', rather than a coherent entity, exactly described the region considered here.¹⁰ By 1871, the population of Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan together had risen sevenfold since the beginning of the eighteenth century, with nearly half living in settlements of more than 250.¹¹ The transformation from a deeply rural area to a largely urbanised and industrial one, from eastern Carmarthenshire across most of Glamorgan, was largely the result of exploitation of the region's mineral resources. From the end of the seventeenth century, the area between Neath and Swansea saw the development of lead and copper working, fuelled by local coal; along the northern coalfield rim a series of iron works opened from the late 1750s; and from the nineteenth century the mid-Glamorgan coalfield developed to supply the

⁹ N. Powell, 'Urban population in Early Modern Wales revisited', *Welsh History Review* (2007), pp. 1-43

¹⁰ G. H. Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales: Wales 1642-1780* (Oxford, 1993), p. 87.

¹¹ Calculation based on John Rickman's data for 1700 and census information taken from J. Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics 1700-1974* (HMSO, 1985).

burgeoning demand for steam coal elsewhere in Britain and overseas. Many industrial settlements grew up in previously sparsely populated valleys, frequently cutting across parish boundaries, and lacking the most rudimentary facilities. In contrast to the dynamic industrial areas, the countryside remained deeply conservative, particularly in the west, slow to adopt new agricultural practices, and retaining features such as farm service which were dying out in England.¹²

The labour needed for this massive industrial development came in the first instance from within the region, and from elsewhere in Wales, creating a Welsh-speaking workforce; only after the mid nineteenth century were large numbers drawn from England. Many migrants to the industrial areas were young men, leading to imbalances between the sexes, particularly among people of marriageable age, both in industrial areas and in the rural parishes from which many migrants came. Thus in 1851 there were 164 men to a hundred women between the ages of twenty and thirty-four in Aberdare, whereas in Myddfai, a Carmarthenshire village about 22 miles away, there were only 70 men per 100 women in the same age group. Such population movements might be expected to have consequences for customary patterns of courtship and hence illegitimacy; indeed from the late eighteenth century poor law records for Carmarthenshire parishes begin to show expenditure on journeys to the iron districts to apprehend fathers of illegitimate children.

Religion provided the second agent of change in the region. Wales had been relatively untouched by seventeenth-century Puritanism, which was widely seen as an alien implant, with little support outside the border areas and in ports.¹³ At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the established church was weak and impoverished, with many absentee clerics and decaying buildings. In the 1730s two

¹² Estimates of the extent of farm service in England and Wales are hard to come by. Gritt has shown that the categorisation used in the 1831 census data does not allow farm service to be identified adequately (A. J. Gritt, 'The census and the servant: a reassessment of the decline and distribution of farm service in early nineteenth-century England', *Economic History Review* (2000), pp. 84–106). Nevertheless subsequent censuses show that the structure of agricultural labour in England and Wales was very different. For instance in 1871 some 52 per cent of all hired agricultural workers in Wales were servants, whereas in England the figure was 16 per cent (A. Howkins, 'Peasants, Servants and Labourers: the marginal workforce in British Agriculture, c.1870-1914', *The Agricultural History Review* (1994), p. 57).

¹³ G.H. Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 157.

young men, Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland, began a programme of evangelism, in the first instance in south and west Wales. From their ministry Welsh Calvinistic Methodism emerged, initially as a tendency within the Anglican Church. The movement stimulated religious debate, from which Old Dissent also benefited, particularly the Independents and Baptists. By the early nineteenth century each of the denominations had a strong following, and local congregations had embarked on ambitious programmes of chapel building. In contrast with England, Welsh Nonconformity was largely a working-class and Welsh-speaking movement, with its roots in the countryside, and often brought to the industrial areas by migrants.¹⁴ The religious revival in Wales provided alternatives to the established church, using methods which were better able to capture the loyalty of the people. Untrammelled by the parochial structure of the established church, Nonconformity was also better placed to respond to population movements, readily providing places of worship for the new industrial settlements. By the middle of the nineteenth century, as evidenced by the Religious Census of 1851, churchgoers were not just in the minority, but had fewer attendances than either the Independents or Calvinistic Methodists.¹⁵ Nonconformity came to dominate both rural and urban culture, discouraging traditional modes of life and imposing on its adherents a discipline which the church had largely abandoned by the middle of the previous century. Attempts to control behaviour – particularly in respect of sexual deviancy and drunkenness – were enforced by the threat of excommunication.

Selection of a sample of parishes

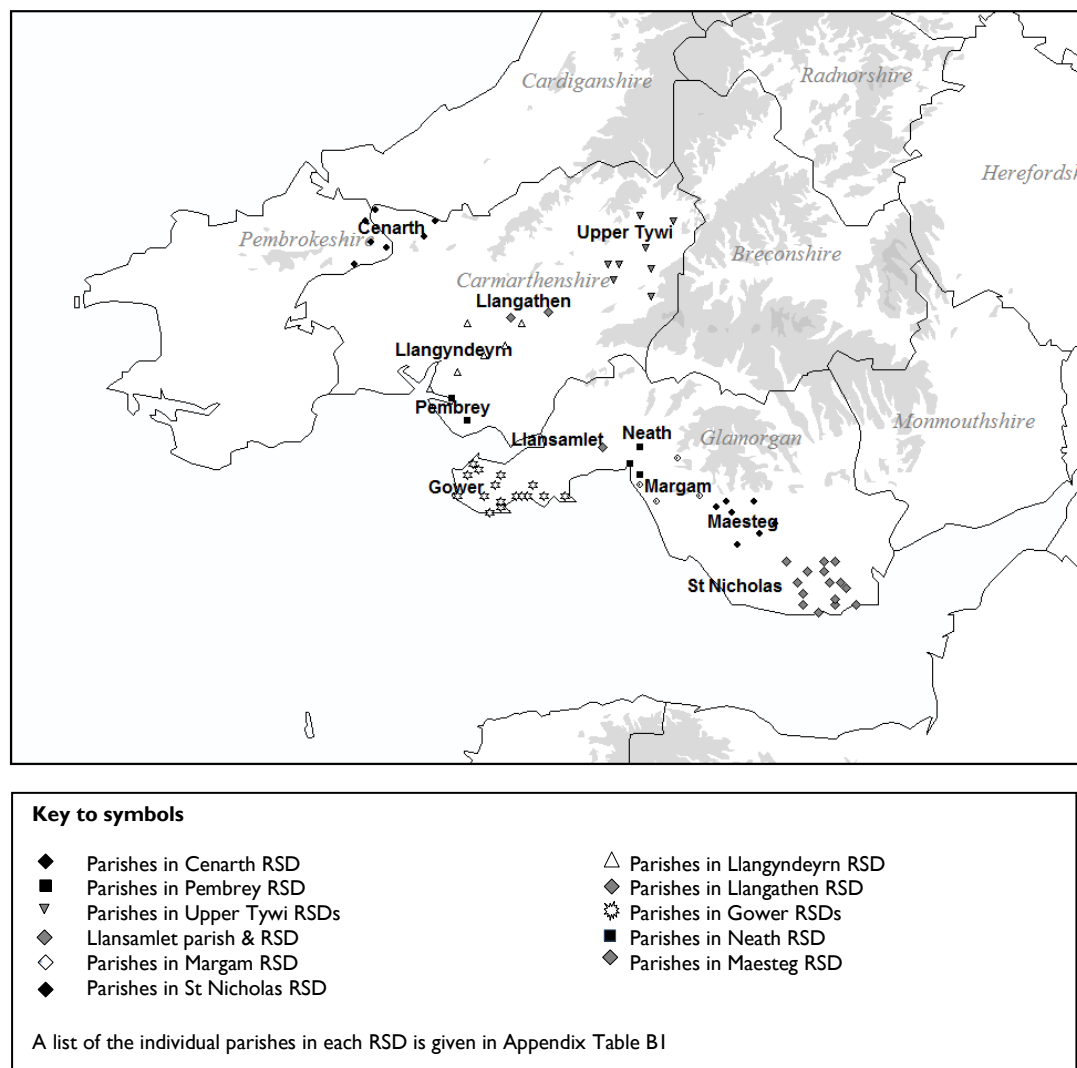
Having described the main social and economic characteristics of the study region, we turn to the methodology to be used to be used for the estimation of illegitimacy rates. Since the study area included a large number of parishes, it was necessary to sample these. The basis of the sample was the registration sub-district (RSD), which was chosen to allow continuity with statistics of illegitimacy ratios published from 1847 by the Registrar General. The study area thus comprised all those RSDs which were wholly or mainly within the historic counties of Glamorgan

¹⁴ E.T. Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales* (Cardiff, 1965), p. 17.

¹⁵ Data compiled from details published in I.G Jones and D. Williams, *The Religious Census of 1851: South Wales v. 1: A Calendar of the Returns Relating to Wales* (Cardiff, 1976).

and Carmarthenshire. As a result a few parishes in Breconshire, Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire fell within the scope of the study. A representative sample of RSDs was chosen by first excluding districts where parish registers were known to have low levels of baptisms in relation to the local population, using information on baptisms collected for the 1801 and 1831 censuses, and then selecting a sample from those remaining.¹⁶ Areas thus unsuitable for selection included the eastern

Figure 1.1 Map showing location of sample parishes



industrial districts of Glamorgan. All parishes within the selected registration sub-districts were included in the sample. In all, 17 registration sub-districts including 74 parishes were chosen; 49 of the parishes were in Glamorgan, 21 in Carmarthenshire, three in Pembrokeshire, and one split between Carmarthenshire

¹⁶ *Abstracts of the Answers and Returns: Parish Registers*, PP 1801-2 vii; *Abstract of the Answers and Returns: Parish registers*, Vol. III 1831, PP 1833 xxxviii

and Pembrokeshire. Names of the RSDs and location of the parishes are shown in Figure 1.1; a list is given in Appendix B.¹⁷ These parishes form the basis of the estimates of illegitimacy and its characteristics in the period from the Restoration to the early nineteenth century given in Chapter 3. The sample is not as heavily weighted towards Glamorgan as the number of parishes might imply, since parishes tended to be smaller there than in Carmarthenshire.

In the early years of the study, the factors to be taken into account in selecting a representative sample of districts are relatively straightforward, covering mainly geographic and economic considerations. Thus the sample included a spread of coastal, lowland and upland parishes, industrial districts, market towns and rural areas. The sample was also chosen with regard to cultural factors, determined by language differences; thus both county samples included Welsh-speaking, English-speaking and mixed communities.¹⁸ Industrial development in the nineteenth century brought greater diversity, and though it was not difficult to choose a sample of parishes for Carmarthenshire which remained broadly representative of the county throughout the period, the choice of a sample for Glamorgan which reflected the extraordinary economic development of that county was more challenging. Poor coverage of parish registers in the larger towns and in the eastern industrial valleys ruled them out as suitable candidates for selection, thus eliminating many districts with sizeable industrial areas, notably Merthyr Tydfil. Although the sample includes industrial districts in the south and west of the county, by the mid-nineteenth century the Glamorgan sample is not entirely representative of the county as a whole, particularly in respect of population growth, occupational structure, religious attendance and language. Table 1.1 gives details of population and employment, for the sample and whole population. In each county, the population of sample parishes grew more slowly than that for the county as a whole. The Glamorgan sample was over-weighted with agricultural districts, so that

¹⁷ The main sample, covering the period 1671-1840 and including 134,000 baptisms, is somewhat smaller than Laslett and Oosterveen's sample of English parishes from 1540 to 1839 (723,000 baptisms), and Adair's sample of English parishes from 1538 to 1754 (581,000 baptisms), but is comparable in size with most of Adair's regions, during the first half of the eighteenth century.

¹⁸ Information about language areas was kindly provided by W. T. R. Pryce, who has written several articles based on details given in answer to language questions in successive bishops' visitation queries – see for example I. Hume and W.T.R. Pryce (eds.), *The Welsh and their Country: Selected Readings in the Social Sciences* (Llandysul, 1986).

there were fewer manufacturing households, and labourers not in manufacturing or agriculture, than among the county as a whole. In contrast, the employment profile of the Carmarthenshire sample was broadly representative of the wider county population. These reservations apply to the findings in Chapter 3; the demographic analysis of illegitimacy in the mid-nineteenth century which appears in Chapter 5 is based not merely on sample parishes but includes all the registration sub-districts which fall wholly or mainly within the two historic counties, and thus does not suffer from problems of representativity.

Table 1.1 Comparison between population and sample characteristics

	Carmarthen		Glamorgan	
	County (sum of RSDs)	Sample RSDs	County (sum of RSDs)	Sample RSDs
Population				
1801	70,100	27,298	75,360	17,988
1851	113,392	37,841	243,678	48,142
<i>percentage growth, 1801-51</i>	62	39	223	168
Employment (1831)				
Agricultural households as a % of all households	49.0	52.0	26.1	37.2
Manufacturing households as a % of all households	25.6	26.0	34.0	28.2
Labourers (other than in manufacturing or agriculture) as a % of all labourers >20	10.9	9.4	31.8	26.0

Source: Census data for 1801, 1831, 1851

Three of the districts chosen in Glamorgan, St Nicholas, Maesteg and Gower, were predominantly agricultural, though coal and iron working began to develop within Maesteg from the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Gower and St Nicholas, areas of mixed farming, were made up of small parishes (both in area and population), in contrast with the widely scattered populations in the upland cattle and sheep rearing parishes of Maesteg. The best land was to be found within St Nicholas, where farms were larger, and a very substantial proportion of the workforce employed as agricultural labourers.¹⁹ Culturally, there were marked differences between the three districts; south Gower was predominantly English-speaking, as a result of long-standing English in-migration, though both languages

¹⁹ Based on information from 1831 census report.

were spoken in the north of the district and in St Nicholas. Maesteg was predominantly Welsh speaking, though use of the language declined there and in St Nicholas during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁰ Several parishes within Maesteg and St. Nicholas were noted for the survival of traditional customs and festivities which had been lost elsewhere. Trade across the Bristol Channel between Somerset, Devon and Cornwall and the coastal parishes of Gower and St. Nicholas brought both cultural exchange and in-migration, but land-locked Maesteg was relatively remote from outside influences, before the coming of the railways in the 1860s.

Of the districts selected for this study, the area around Margam, Neath and Llansamlet saw the greatest industrial development. Some copper and iron had been smelted and coal had been mined in earlier periods, but from the beginning of the eighteenth century the use of coal rather than charcoal for smelting led to rapid industrialisation, with the development of copper works from 1710 and iron manufacture later in the century. By the time of the 1831 census, Llansamlet was the most industrialised of the selected districts, with 60 per cent of families described as 'chiefly employed in Trade, Manufactures and Handicraft', compared with around 30 per cent in Margam and Neath. In terms of language, the towns of Llansamlet and Neath were bilingual, while the rest of the district of Neath, and most of Margam remained predominantly Welsh speaking.

Agriculture was the most important activity in all but one of the Carmarthenshire registration sub-districts. The pattern of cultivation was broadly of some arable farming in the valley floor, dairy farming on the lower slopes of the hills, and sheep and cattle rearing on higher ground. There were small pockets of industrial activity in several districts. Cenarth, in the Teifi valley, an area of mixed farming, became a centre of weaving during the period of this study. From a few small domestic looms at the start of the eighteenth century, the industry expanded slowly, with the gradual introduction of carding and spinning machines from the early decades of the nineteenth century, making use of the power provided by the

²⁰ W.T.R. Pryce in Hume and Pryce (eds.), *The Welsh and their Country*.

fast-flowing tributaries of the Teifi, in a process reminiscent of English valley communities in Yorkshire and Lancashire.

The south-east of the county included the anthracite coalfield, which ran through the coastal district of Pembrey and an adjoining part of the district of Llangyndeyrn, providing coal for export as well as the local manufacture of iron. Pembrey was more industrialised than the other sample districts, with iron works at Cydweli. These expanded in the second half of the eighteenth century to manufacture tinplate, which in the nineteenth century became the area's major manufacturing output.²¹

Although the Carmarthenshire coalfield encompassed the south-east corner of the Upper Tywi valley area, this section was not exploited commercially until the early nineteenth century; the area remained overwhelmingly agricultural. Llandovery in the district of Llandingad was the principle town in the area, sited on what was then the main road from London to Carmarthen, and was well-placed to provide professional services for the agricultural interest – it was an important collection centre for the droving trade – as well as a social centre for the many gentry families who had their seats in the Tywi Valley.

Having selected the sample of parishes for the estimation of illegitimacy rates during the parish register period, we now consider the issues which are particularly relevant for research into the demographic history of Wales.

Problems of a Welsh context

The problems which beset demographic research in a Welsh context have been touched on earlier, but are worth discussing in more detail.²² Welsh historiography lacks a strong tradition of demographic research, so that much related information which might be found for England, such as population estimates for periods before 1801, is not available. Reference has been made earlier to the

²¹ D. Rees, *Carmarthenshire: the Concise History* (Cardiff, 2006), pp. 128-31.

²² For a review of the problems of researching the poor law in Wales, see J. Stewart and S. King, 'Death in Llantrisant: Henry Williams and the New Poor Law in Wales', *Rural History* (2004), pp. 70-1.

poor survival of records in comparison with England, and the deficiencies of both Anglican and Nonconformist baptism records. In consequence, some caution is needed in extrapolating from the estimates of illegitimacy rates to those of the population as a whole, since there is the possibility of systematic deviation between the sample and the wider population, particularly from early in the nineteenth century, when baptismal rates were falling.

A different kind of problem is posed by the late adoption of the English system of surnames, which was touched on earlier in the context of defining illegitimacy. The majority of country dwellers were still using patronymics at the beginning of the eighteenth century; this, together with the limited range of male names in use in the period when most people adopted surnames, led to a very small pool of surnames, making record linkage difficult and population reconstitution virtually impossible. While many records can be linked, particularly where occupations or farm names are included, there are usually too many inconclusive matches to allow reliable statistical analysis. The abundance of Mary Johns and David Williams in the same parish, for instance, makes it impossible to measure the length of time from marriage to the birth of the first child, or to count the number of mothers who had more than one child outside marriage.

The issues described above are not fatal to the study of illegitimacy in Wales; rather, they limit the depth of analysis possible, and necessitate a greater degree of caution in interpreting results than might generally be the case for English studies. In the next chapter we examine the historiography of illegitimacy and of courtship and marriage in Britain.

Chapter 2 Literature review

In contrast with England, little has been written about the history of illegitimacy in Wales; indeed, the editors of *Illegitimacy in Britain* (2005) regretted that they were 'unaware of any historians who are presently working on Welsh illegitimacy'.¹ The approach of this chapter is thus to look first at the state of research relating to England and Scotland, and then to review Welsh historiography which makes reference to illegitimacy. The rationale for focussing on England is that from the medieval period, Wales shared with England a common framework of canon law, which also extended to secular law following the Acts of Union passed during 1535 to 1542. Thus the legal framework which defined illegitimacy, corrected and punished the parents of illegitimate children, and provided for their support, was from the early modern period the same throughout England and Wales. In the later sections of the chapter, the more substantial body of material relating to courtship and marriage in Wales is discussed together with that for England.

Research into illegitimacy in Britain

England

In 1964 the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure was founded for the study of English demographic history and the history of family and household structures. Several researchers, led by Peter Laslett, contributed to a better understanding of illegitimacy, derived partly from the study of a large number of parish registers and partly from the detailed reconstitution of parish populations which were the foundation of the Group's wider work on English demography in the era before vital statistics. The Group's findings on illegitimacy were summarised in *Bastardy and its Comparative History*, which provided a benchmark for further studies.² They showed that from the second half of the sixteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century, there had been a long-term upward trend in the illegitimacy ratio, rising from two illegitimacies per 100 baptisms in 1570 to nine per 100 in the mid-1970s. This trend was interrupted

¹ A. Levene, T. Nutt and S. Williams (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain, 1700-1920* (Basingstoke 2005), p. 4, n.14.

² P. Laslett, K. Oosterveen and R.M. Smith (eds.), *Bastardy and its Comparative History* (London, 1980).

by two periods of decline, from 1610 to 1660, and again from 1845 to 1905.³ There was an evident synchronicity of legitimate and illegitimate fertility, with prenuptial pregnancy following a similar path; age at marriage however was negatively correlated with these three factors.⁴ Laslett proposed a 'courtship intensity' hypothesis: when opportunities for marriage were good, there was a growth in the numbers of young people embarking on courtship, so that age at marriage fell, and fertility rose. Since sexual intercourse often preceded marriage, prenuptial pregnancies and illegitimacy occurred when marriage plans were frustrated; they were in effect 'accidents of courtship'. Such 'accidents' accounted for a substantial proportion of first births, estimated to be at least one-fifth, though more often twice that, confirming that sexual experience among courting couples was common.⁵

While the 'courtship intensity' hypothesis may seem to explain the relationships described above between legitimate and illegitimate fertility, prenuptial pregnancy and age at marriage, evidence relating nuptiality with economic conditions is harder to find. Hill, looking at the eighteenth century, questioned the existence of a simple relationship between economic circumstances and age at marriage, quoting the example of Culcheth, a weaving community in Lancashire, in the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century, where some women seemed to have separated childbearing from marriage, marrying after the birth of several children, or not at all. In some circumstances favourable economic conditions might have had an opposite effect from that suggested by the hypothesis; that is, the opportunity for paid employment for women may have been a deterrent to their marriage, and a lack of employment may have made marriage more desirable.⁶ Snell suggested that enclosure and the decline in farm service had, by the early nineteenth century, made it difficult for single people in agricultural communities, and particularly women, to save for marriage.⁷

³ Laslett, 'Introduction', in Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, pp. 14-19.

⁴ Laslett, 'Introduction', in Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, pp. 20-2.

⁵ Laslett, 'Introduction', in Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, pp. 54-5.

⁶ B. Hill, 'The marriage age of women and the Demographers', *History Workshop Journal* (1989) pp. 143-4.

⁷ K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (1985, Cambridge, 1987 edn.), pp. 217-18, 348-9.

Other writers have confirmed the broad picture of trends in illegitimacy described above. Adair, in his study of illegitimacy in early modern England from 1538 to 1754, based on 250 parishes together with church court records, found similar temporal trends to those shown in Laslett *et al*, though a more exhaustive examination of records beyond just baptismal registers, and particularly burials, led to somewhat higher levels of illegitimacy. He also discovered an early trough (1551-1570) which had not been apparent in the scantier records for this period examined by Laslett, and showed that there was a distinct gradient in regional variation, with higher illegitimacy ratios in the north and west than in the south and east.⁸ Fathers' names were more likely to have been recorded in the north-west than in the east, and a higher proportion of mothers of illegitimate children married subsequently, suggesting regional variations in the extent to which couples had sexual relations in the expectation of marriage.⁹ Adair emphasised the importance of viewing illegitimacy within the economic and social context of the community, and particularly in terms of the process of courtship and marriage.

One of the more remarkable features of the illegitimacy ratio over the longer term is its cyclical nature, with clear turning points, apart from a period of erratic changes from 1790 to 1850, when there were also measurement issues with the series.¹⁰ Otherwise only two events – the two world wars – produced major interruptions to the smooth development of the series and even these were reduced to minor disturbances when reckoned in relation to the population at risk.¹¹ This pattern suggests that whatever short-term considerations may have influenced individual behaviour, long-term trends in the illegitimacy rate have been determined by factors with a much longer period of development. Moreover, viewed through this longer-term perspective, the broad societal changes which have influenced changes in illegitimacy rates seem self-evident. A decline in the illegitimacy ratio in the early seventeenth century went alongside the rise of Puritanism, with the Restoration heralding a reversal in the direction of change

⁸ R. Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 1996), chapter 2, pp. 48-91.

⁹ Adair, *Courtship*, pp. 78-9.

¹⁰ Laslett, 'Introduction', in Laslett *et al.*, *Bastardy*, Figure 1.2, p. 18.

¹¹ The discrepancy between the illegitimacy ratio and rate during these periods suggests that the wars had a greater effect in reducing overall births than in increasing illegitimacy.

during the latter part of the century, and industrialisation having some responsibility for the acceleration in the series during the second half of the eighteenth century. Following the period of uncertainty in the series in the first half of the nineteenth century, the subsequent decline in illegitimacy would seem to be associated with Victorian attempts to reform the morality of the masses. What is lacking from the historiography is an evidence-based description of the mechanisms through which these broad societal changes were translated into changes in sexual behaviour.

Regional trends

Laslett *et al.* found a strong regional variation in the illegitimacy ratio, with rankings of English localities with respect to the illegitimacy ratio tending to persist over time, though overall levels changed. Thus seven of the English counties which appeared in the top ten by illegitimacy ratio in 1842 were also in the top ten sixty years later, though there was more change among the bottom ten. As Laslett remarks, this tendency for regional rankings to persist took place against a background of structural changes in many aspects of English society which might have been expected to have had an impact on illegitimacy rates. These include factors such as the continuing growth of, and structural change in, industry and in the composition of the industrial workforce; the decline of agriculture, and particularly of farm service; and a growth in the size of the professional and middle classes.¹² A tendency for regional variation in illegitimacy rates to remain relatively constant can also be seen in Adair's study; the ranking of his six English regions remained relatively constant over the early modern period, with higher rates in the north and west than in the south and east, though the regional divergence in illegitimacy rates tended to reduce over time.¹³ Moreover within regions illegitimacy rates varied in a similar way, from higher rates in the north and west to lower rates in the south and east. However, there is less consistency between Adair and Laslett's studies than within them; thus four of the counties in Adair's eastern region, which had lower than average illegitimacy rates until the middle of

¹² Laslett, 'Introduction', in Laslett *et al.*, *Bastardy*, pp. 29-36. The seven counties were Norfolk, Shropshire, Nottinghamshire, Cumberland, the North Riding of Yorkshire, Suffolk and Herefordshire.

¹³ Adair, *Courtship*, pp. 52-64.

the eighteenth century, that is, Suffolk, Norfolk, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, fall in Laslett's top ten counties by illegitimacy rates in 1842.¹⁴

Demographic research relating to England and Wales in the Victorian period has a sounder and more extensive database in census and registration data than the parish registers of earlier eras, from which can be calculated indices which are standardised for age and marital status.¹⁵ Recent work by Woods has shown that the relationships which Laslett *et al.* found in longitudinal data for earlier periods between legitimate and illegitimate fertility also held in cross-sectional data for the mid to late nineteenth century. An analysis of age-specific fertility rates for the 626 registration districts of England and Wales for 1861 showed that there was a positive, if weak, relationship between illegitimate and marital fertility, and between illegitimate fertility and nuptiality.¹⁶ A map of illegitimate fertility rates for registration districts shows, for the region of this study, a tendency to higher levels of illegitimate fertility in the more industrialised districts of Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire than in rural districts, though rates were not as high as in some of the districts adjoining the border between England and Wales. Nuptiality was high in most of Glamorgan and low in most of Carmarthenshire.¹⁷

Scotland

Studies of illegitimacy in Scotland have been constrained by the availability of records; thus the generally unsatisfactory nature of parish registers has focussed most demographic studies on the period covered by civil registration.¹⁸ An exception is Blaikie's study of Rothiemay, which used nineteenth-century parish registers to determine levels of illegitimacy.¹⁹ Mitchison and Leneman took a different approach, using records of the kirk sessions to study Scottish illegitimacy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁰

¹⁴ Laslett, 'Introduction', in Laslett *et al.*, *Bastardy*, p. 30, Adair, *Courtship*, pp. 54-6.

¹⁵ These measures are defined in Appendix A.

¹⁶ R. Woods, *The demography of Victorian England and Wales* (Cambridge, 2000) pp. 140-3, pp. 102-3.

¹⁷ Woods, *Demography*, colour pages *b* and *c* between pp. 96-7.

¹⁸ R. Mitchison and L. Leneman, *Girls in Trouble: Sexuality and Social Control in Rural Scotland 1660-1780* (Edinburgh, 1998), p. 14, describe parish registration, established in 1616, as 'effectively optional'.

¹⁹ A. Blaikie, *Illegitimacy, Sex and Society. Northeast Scotland, 1750-1900*, (Oxford, 1993).

²⁰ Mitchison and Leneman, *Girls in Trouble*, L. Leneman and R. Mitchison, *Sin in the City: Sexuality and Social Control in Urban Scotland, 1660-1780* (Edinburgh, 1998).

Smout's study of nineteenth-century Scotland shows some interesting contrasts with England: illegitimacy rates in Scotland were rather higher, though there was a decline similar to that in England in the second half of the century; the very wide disparity in regional illegitimacy levels tended to reduce in the early twentieth century.²¹ In his view regional variation in illegitimacy rates was linked to patterns of parental and community control and of female employment. Thus in the Highlands and Islands parental surveillance and church controls tended to constrain sexual relations before marriage and to ensure that a high proportion of those whose transgression was made evident by pregnancy subsequently married. By contrast in the north-east and in the Lowlands, where work for women was plentiful, and housing available for single women, illegitimacy gave rise to very little stigma, and rates were much higher.²² A comparison of the Isle of Skye, off the west coast of Scotland, with Rothiemay, in the north-east, supports this hypothesis.²³ Rothiemay, a farming community in which a high proportion of young unmarried women lived away from home as farm servants in unrelated households, had a substantially higher age-specific index of illegitimacy (0.166) than the mainly crofting community of Skye (0.034), where a higher proportion of the same group lived at home or within the extended family.²⁴ However, as the authors demonstrate, the difference between the two communities is exaggerated by the greater mobility of unmarried women from Rothiemay; if the 'population at risk' is taken to include single women of fertile age born in the parish, as well as those resident there, the index nearly halves, whereas a similar calculation for Skye results in only a small reduction.²⁵

The locality persistence which Laslett found for England was yet more marked for Scotland, both in terms of the variation in illegitimacy rates between localities, and length of time that the differences persisted.²⁶ Blaikie argued that the

²¹ T. C. Smout, 'Aspects of sexual behaviour in nineteenth-century Scotland' in Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, pp. 199-200.

²² Smout, 'Aspects of sexual behaviour', pp. 215-6.

²³ A. Blaikie, E. Garrett, R. Davies, 'Migration, living strategies and illegitimate childbearing: a comparison of two Scottish settings' in Levene et al. (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, pp. 141-67.

²⁴ See Appendix A for a definition of age-specific indices of fertility.

²⁵ Blaikie et al., 'Migration, living strategies and illegitimate childbearing: a comparison of two Scottish settings' in Levene et al. (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 166.

²⁶ Laslett et al. (eds.), *Bastardy*, pp. 41-7.

enduring differences between localities depended on underlying cultural differences, which continued to have relevance in spite of extensive economic changes.²⁷

The social context of illegitimacy

One of the more contentious issues raised by the work of the Cambridge Group was the possibility that a substantial proportion of illegitimate births came from mothers who had more than one illegitimate child ('repeaters') and were related to other parents of illegitimate children, together forming a 'bastardy prone sub-society'.²⁸ Studies of a number of parishes seem to show that in periods when the illegitimacy ratio was increasing, a growing proportion of bastards was born to mothers who already had one child.²⁹ However, despite extensive investigation of the surnames of bastard-bearing parents, it was difficult to demonstrate the existence of a distinct sub-society. The concept was controversial when first described, partly because of what was perceived to be insensitive use of language; it remains disputed, though more recently it has been interpreted in a more nuanced way. Adair has emphasised the complexity of behaviour among repeaters, which cast doubt on the idea of a coherent deviant group; some eventually married, others seemed to have been part of stable consensual unions.³⁰ Reay, in his study of society in rural Kent in the nineteenth century, described the concept of a bastardy prone sub-society as 'ideologically loaded', using negative terms to label women or describing them as 'powerless and passive'.³¹ He concluded that the idea of a distinct sub-society was not helpful; illegitimacy was a common part of the experience of the rural poor.³² On the other hand King's researches in early nineteenth-century Lancashire provide fresh evidence for a distinct group of bastard-bearers. He found a high level of bastardy among a limited number of families, with some spatial concentration of these families within the parishes

²⁷ A. Blaikie, 'Scottish illegitimacy: social adjustment or moral economy?', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (1998), pp. 240-1.

²⁸ Laslett, 'The bastardy prone sub-society', in Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, Chapter 8, pp. 217-240 gives a detailed exposition of Laslett's ideas, with examples in the various reconstitution studies in Chapters 3-6, pp. 86-175.

²⁹ Laslett, et al., *Bastardy*. Examples of the relationship between repetitive bastard-bearing and the illegitimacy rate can be found at p. 82 and pp. 86-8.

³⁰ Adair, *Courtship*, pp. 76-77.

³¹ B. Reay, *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800-1930* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 190.

³² Reay, *Microhistories*, pp. 211-2.

studied, and a higher than average likelihood that these were migrant families. Mothers within this group had a distinctly more assertive attitude to the poor law authorities, writing to demand their rights, as compared with mothers bearing only one illegitimate child, who used more submissive terms, or did not write at all.³³ Other work has pointed to a distinct group of the population responsible for raised rates of illegitimacy; for instance Hudson and King, examining the demography of two textile townships from the Restoration to the early nineteenth century, found that 'illegitimacy was associated with a finite subset of the population'. More generally, the changes in demographic behaviour which accompanied economic change affected only a subset of the population; thus 'between a quarter and one-fifth of the population in each township experienced marked change in two or more aspects of demographic experience and that this restricted group was responsible for shifts observable in aggregate vital rates'.³⁴

Laslett noted that servants made up the largest occupational group among parents of illegitimate children, but thought that this was unsurprising, as they 'made up a large part of the marriage queue'.³⁵ Several studies have looked at a possible connection between illegitimacy and occupation, but no very clear picture has emerged. Goose has summarised it thus:

Some historians have detected an association between agricultural employment and high levels of illegitimacy, others have suggested a relationship between illegitimacy and the level and persistence of service, while others still have posited a relationship between female employment and illegitimacy, mediated through the enhanced migratory movements that this employment entailed.³⁶

The picture from parish studies is not clear-cut, with information about occupation scarce before the late eighteenth century. In some parishes, parents of illegitimate children were more likely to be servants or labourers, or children of the same; elsewhere, mothers of illegitimate children tended to come from these groups, but fathers from a wider range of social groups.³⁷ Black, in his research into illegitimacy

³³ S. King, 'The bastardy prone sub-society again; bastards and their fathers and mothers in Lancashire, Wiltshire and Somerset, 1800-1840', in Levene *et al.* (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, pp. 84-5.

³⁴ P. Hudson and S. A. King, 'Two textile townships, c. 1660-1820: a comparative demographic analysis', *The Economic History Review*, (2000), pp. 722-3, p. 730.

³⁵ Laslett, 'Introduction', in Laslett *et al.*, *Bastardy*, p. 30, Adair, *Courtship*, p. 56.

³⁶ N. Goose, 'How saucy did it make the poor? The straw plait and hat trades, illegitimate fertility and the family in nineteenth-century Hertfordshire' *History*, (2006), pp. 530-56.

³⁷ The information in K. Oosterveen, R.M. Smith and S. Stewart, 'Family reconstitution and the study of bastardy: evidence from certain English parishes' in Laslett *et al.*, *Bastardy*, pp. 86-140 is in line

in London in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, found that the fathers of illegitimate children 'were not a socially and economically limited group of bastard-begetters', but little different in terms of occupational and economic status from the male population of London as a whole.³⁸ Reay's analysis of the social background of parents of illegitimate children in nineteenth-century rural Kent shows that they came disproportionately from labouring families, with mothers more markedly so.³⁹ A study of mining districts in England and Wales in 1861 and 1871 by Haines showed that they had higher rates of illegitimate fertility (and also legitimate fertility) than those in a random sample of districts.⁴⁰

The linking by Shorter of the growth in illegitimacy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with industrialisation, and the greater opportunity it was said to have given for women's employment outside the home or in service, leading to greater sexual freedom, has largely been discredited. Tilly *et al.* have demonstrated that the early stages of industrialisation tended instead to displace women from employment and were thus more likely to confine them to the home or domestic service.⁴¹ Goose, in his study of the straw-plait industry in nineteenth-century Hertfordshire, remarked that this industry – mainly the occupation of women and children – was more likely to keep women at home, since it provided an alternative to domestic service. He found a small positive association between illegitimacy rates and districts with a concentration of the straw-plait industry, but showed that it was less marked than the association with urbanisation.⁴²

Emma Griffin, categorising the various hypotheses for the rise in illegitimacy rates during the eighteenth century into 'economic' and 'cultural', takes the view

with Laslett's summary. However K. Wrightson in a later chapter, 'The nadir of English illegitimacy in the seventeenth century', p. 187, found that fathers of illegitimate children came from every social level.

³⁸ J. Black, 'Who were the putative fathers of illegitimate children in London, 1740-1810?' in Levene *et al.* (eds.) *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 64

³⁹ Reay, *Microhistories*, pp. 188-9.

⁴⁰ M. R. Haines, 'Fertility, nuptiality, and occupation: a study of coal mining populations and regions in England and Wales in the mid-nineteenth century', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, (1977), pp. 245-80.

⁴¹ E. Shorter, 'Illegitimacy, sexual revolution and social change in modern Europe', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, (1971), pp. 237-72; L. A. Tilly, J. W. Scott and M. Cohen, 'Women's work and European fertility patterns', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, (1976), pp. 474-5.

⁴² Goose 'How saucy did it make the poor?', *History* (2006), pp. 530-56.

that neither have satisfactorily explained the processes through which these factors brought about change. Though many historians would agree that ‘sexual behaviour changed significantly during the era of modernisation and industrialisation’, as evidenced by ‘the rise in popularity of penetrative sex to the detriment of other forms of sexual activity’, the reasons for this change are obscure.⁴³ Explanations based on elite discoveries about the nature of male and female reproductive functions fail to provide an account of how these ideas might have transformed the courtship practices of the masses.⁴⁴ On the other hand, she is unconvinced by the ‘courtship intensity’ hypothesis, that in good times more people embarked on courtships, a proportion of which would fail and lead to more illegitimacies, suggesting that the economic conditions which made marriage more feasible should also tend to reduce illegitimacy.⁴⁵ Griffin’s perspective, based on a study of plebeian autobiographies which include detailed accounts of sexual activity, was that the availability of secure well-paid work provided by industrialisation changed the nature of courtship, so that in areas of high female employment, some women seem to have chosen to raise children without male support, thus increasing the illegitimacy rate.⁴⁶ Her study is particularly relevant to illegitimacy in urban and proto-industrial communities, but casts little light on the circumstances of illegitimacy in rural areas, since the autobiographies include only two such births.⁴⁷

Researchers into illegitimacy since the ground-breaking studies of the 1980s have used a wide range of sources and methodologies to examine the topic. Records including those of the poor law, secular and ecclesiastical courts and charitable organisations have been examined to investigate the ‘lived experience of bastardy’.⁴⁸ Reay has combined the techniques of family reconstitution with the use of a wide variety of additional sources to create a ‘history from below’ of a rural area of Kent. In the chapter on fertility he sets illegitimacy in its social context,

⁴³ E. Griffin, ‘Sex, illegitimacy and social change in industrialising Britain’ *Social History* (2013), pp. 141-3.

⁴⁴ See for example T. Hitchcock, ‘Redefining sex in eighteenth-century England’, *History Workshop Journal* (1996), p. 73-90.

⁴⁵ Griffin, ‘Sex, illegitimacy and social change’, p. 141-2.

⁴⁶ Griffin, ‘Sex, illegitimacy and social change’, p. 158.

⁴⁷ Griffin, ‘Sex, illegitimacy and social change’, p. 160.

⁴⁸ Levene, Nutt and Williams, *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 1.

illuminating (as referred to elsewhere in this chapter) such issues as the deviancy (or otherwise) of premarital sexuality, and the ‘bastardy prone sub-society’.⁴⁹

Several writers have looked at systems of support for illegitimate children, using record linkage to demonstrate that kin – usually the mother’s parents or siblings – played an important role in providing a home, often while the mother worked elsewhere, though, as Blaikie has noted, this did not necessarily imply family approval of the illegitimacy.⁵⁰ The records of the London Foundling Hospital have proved a fruitful source of information about eighteenth and nineteenth century attitudes towards, and provision for, illegitimate children. Evans, looking at the experience of lone mothers in eighteenth-century London, used the Hospital’s records among others to put aside the image of mothers of illegitimate children as victims and outcasts, emphasising their resourcefulness in using the limited means at their disposal, and the important role played by kin, friends, employers and institutions.⁵¹ Levene investigated the Hospital’s mortality records to show that illegitimate foundlings had a higher mortality rate than their legitimate contemporaries, though the reasons for this were obscure.⁵² Williams has shown how changes in public attitudes to sexual morality led to alterations to the rules regulating access to the Hospital in the early nineteenth century, to emphasise the moral character of mothers rather than the economic distress which formed the basis of earlier applications, with a concomitant change in the narrative of their applications to dwell on their previously high moral character, and feelings of remorse.⁵³

Other themes which form part of the recent historiography of illegitimacy include the role of gender and agency, recurring themes in *Illegitimacy in Britain*,

⁴⁹ Reay, *Microhistories*, Chapter 7.

⁵⁰ Reay, *Microhistories*, p. 207; A. Blaikie, ‘Scottish illegitimacy: social adjustment or moral economy?’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (1998), pp. 233-4; A. Blaikie, E. Garrett and R. Davies, ‘Migration, living strategies and illegitimate childbearing: a comparison of two Scottish settings, 1871-1881’ in Levene et al, (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 162.

⁵¹ T. Evans, *Unfortunate Objects: Lone Mothers in Eighteenth-Century London* (Basingstoke, 2005).

⁵² Levene, ‘The mortality penalty of illegitimate children’, in Levene et al, (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, pp. 47-9.

⁵³ S. Williams, ‘A good character for virtue, sobriety and honesty: unmarried mothers’ petitions to the London Foundling Hospital and the rhetoric of need in the early nineteenth century’ in Levene et al. (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 100-101.

published in 2005.⁵⁴ There has been a new interest in the role played by fathers of illegitimate children; thus Nutt and King have examined the complexity of the relationships between parents of illegitimate children, viewed through studies of the old poor law, and Black has used similar material to investigate the economic status and motivation of fathers in London.⁵⁵

Social control of illegitimacy

Another strand to the study of illegitimacy has been the means by which society sought to control illegitimacy. Before the abolition of the church courts in the mid-seventeenth century, lapses of sexual behaviour – fornication, adultery and bastardy – had generally been actively pursued, with such business dominating prosecutions in the church courts.⁵⁶ Ingram considered whether a hardening of attitudes towards sexual offences such as fornication and bastardy was associated with the growth of Puritanism, but found that these changes took place even in areas where the Puritan element was weak. He concluded that sexual morality was already strict, and ‘Only quite small changes in attitudes and behaviour were necessary to effect the shifts of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries’.⁵⁷ Following restoration of the courts in 1661, sexual offences continued for more than a century to form an important component of prosecutions in the church courts, but at a much reduced level, and by the last quarter of the eighteenth century had virtually disappeared.⁵⁸ Alongside this decline of the role of the church courts in the control of sexual behaviour ran an unprecedented increase in the illegitimacy ratio, from 1.5 per cent in 1660-69 to 5.0 per cent in 1780-89.⁵⁹ Outhwaite noted that prosecutions disappeared first in urban and industrialising rural areas, and ‘appear to have survived longest, and in greatest number, in jurisdictions where economic change was least evident, where small village and

⁵⁴ Levene et al., *Illegitimacy in Britain*, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁵ T. Nutt, ‘The paradox and problems of illegitimate paternity in old poor law Essex’, King, ‘The bastardy prone sub-society again’; Black, ‘Who were the putative fathers?’, all in Levene et al. (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, pp. 66-85; 102-111; 50-65.

⁵⁶ R. B. Outhwaite, *The Rise and Fall of the English Ecclesiastical Courts, 1500-1860* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 59-61.

⁵⁷ M. Ingram, ‘The reform of popular culture? Sex and marriage in Early Modern England’ in B. Reay (ed.), *Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century England* (London, 1985) pp. 157-9.

⁵⁸ Outhwaite, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 83 & 95.

⁵⁹ Laslett, ‘Introduction’, in Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, p. 14.

modest urban communities prevailed, in those 'face to face' communities where reputation clearly mattered'. He ascribed the decline in court activity to the ineffectiveness of the punishment available, that is, excommunication, and to economic changes which resulted in a declining proportion of the population living in 'face to face' communities. Following the Toleration Act (1689), the growth of alternative places of worship somewhat reduced the impact of the deterrent effect of excommunication.⁶⁰

Outhwaite's analysis of the decline in the role of the church in prosecuting sexual offences offers no simple explanation of its relationship with the concurrent rise in bastardy. He noted that private Societies for Reformation of Manners, which used the magistrates to punish transgressors, were active in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and that following their decline, magistrates continued to attempt to control sexual misdemeanours.⁶¹ Notwithstanding such actions, it seems likely that by the second half of the eighteenth century, the focus had moved from the control of bastardy *per se* to that of reducing the numbers of bastards likely to become chargeable to the parish.

Though as we have seen several studies discuss the function of the church as an agent of social control, there seems to have been little research into the impact of changes in religiosity on illegitimacy in England. Wrightson examined illegitimacy in England in the seventeenth century and concluded that there was little support for the view that 'the low illegitimacy ratios calculated from parish register evidence for [the Interregnum period] reflect a real decline in the incidence of bastardy attributable to the Puritan triumph'.⁶² Snell and Ell, in discussing the regional pattern of secularisation in 1851, point to the association between low rates of religious attendance and high levels of illegitimacy in the English-Welsh and English-Scottish border areas, but detailed studies of the relationship between changes in

⁶⁰ Outhwaite, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 81 & 95.

⁶¹ Outhwaite, *Rise and Fall*, p. 95.

⁶² Wrightson, 'The nadir of English illegitimacy in the seventeenth century', in Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, p. 186.

religious enthusiasm, or differences in denominational adherence, and sexual behaviour seem to be lacking.⁶³

The growth of Nonconformity during the eighteenth century saw the moral influence of the established church begin to drain away. While the Church of England abandoned the prosecution of sexual offences during the eighteenth century, many Nonconformist congregations, including those of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, continued to excommunicate offenders.⁶⁴ The early Welsh Methodists, in their published writings, do not seem to have been overly concerned to discourage fornication among their followers, even though as White has shown William Williams in particular offered advice, sometimes quite frank, about the marital problems of women within the Methodist societies.⁶⁵ Stevens has shown how the Welsh Nonconformist denominations, from the second decade of the nineteenth century, used their periodicals to attack the custom of *caru yn y gwely* (courting in bed) and its presumed consequences of fornication and bastardy. In the context of the growing power of the Nonconformist chapels in nineteenth-century Welsh life, the face-to face nature of excommunication in the local chapel may well have made it a much more effective deterrent than the somewhat bureaucratic nature of earlier ecclesiastical processes. Nonconformists were also active in forming societies to promote chastity, in a development parallel with that of the temperance movement.⁶⁶

Reekie has put forward the view that society's view of illegitimacy changed fundamentally in the early nineteenth century. Prior to this, illegitimacy was seen as a problem of individuals, in terms of their own morality and as a potential burden on the parish finances.⁶⁷ However, as evidenced by the concerns of Malthus about the effect of illegitimacy on population growth, and its association with sexual

⁶³ K. D. M. Snell and P. S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: the Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 417, n.35.

⁶⁴ C. Stevens, *Welsh Courting Customs* (Llandysul, 1993), pp. 106-7.

⁶⁵ E. M. White, "'The world, the flesh and the Devil'" and the early Methodist societies of south-west Wales', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, (1995), pp. 45-51; E. M. White, 'Women, religion and education in early modern Wales', in M. Roberts and S. Clarke (eds.), *Women and Gender in Early Modern Wales* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 223-7.

⁶⁶ Stevens, *Welsh Courting Customs* pp. 104-5.

⁶⁷ G. Reekie, *Measuring Immorality: Social Inquiry and the Problem of Illegitimacy* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 21-23.

deviance and poor parenting, illegitimacy came to be seen as a problem for society as a whole.⁶⁸ Attempts were made to measure it, in the first instance from baptismal information collected for the 1831 Census Report for England and Wales, and later, more comprehensively, in the 1842 Registrar General's report for England and Wales, giving the impression, as Reekie remarked, that it was a biological rather than a socially constructed concept which varied over time and between cultures, its definition frequently linked to policy agendas.⁶⁹ Thus during the nineteenth century, illegitimacy came to be seen as an indicator which marked out an innately deviant group, rather than as an unfortunate accident of a regular process of courtship and marriage.

Courtship and marriage in England

Notwithstanding the views of nineteenth-century commentators, modern research has confirmed that courtship and marriage did indeed provide the context of much illegitimacy. The unusual features of the western European marriage pattern, with late marriage, particularly for women, and a substantial proportion of the population remaining unmarried, have long been known. Associated with this was a tendency for the newly married to set up their own household rather than live in extended families, relying on servants to supply the labour which in extended families would have come from within the family unit. It is unclear how far back this distinctive pattern goes, but in England at least it seems to have been present as early as the thirteenth and fourteenth century.⁷⁰

Macfarlane has emphasised the primacy of individual choice of marriage partner, supported by English law, which in contrast with that of much of continental Europe gave no rights to parents, before Hardwicke's marriage act of 1753 allowed them a veto over the marriage of a minor, though he also shows how individual choice was frequently constrained by pressures from family and friends.⁷¹ Gillis however took the view that marriage was never just a private agreement

⁶⁸ Reekie, *Measuring Immorality*, pp. 50-52.

⁶⁹ Reekie, *Measuring Immorality*, pp. 27-28.

⁷⁰ Laslett, 'Introduction', in Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, pp. 11-12.

⁷¹ A. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 119-47.

between individuals; though this was the formal position in both secular and canon law, the popular view, expressed through marriage rites and customs, was different.⁷² O'Hara, in her study of records from the ecclesiastical courts in early modern Kent, also suggests that family and community had a greater role than Macfarlane allows. The formalised nature of courtship in the early modern period, through the use of intermediaries and the exchange of gifts, was used as a means to bring the relationship into public recognition, and to 'facilitate harmony' among the couple, their kin and the wider community. Though personal attraction was important, material considerations – the size of the dowry and portion – also played a significant role in the choice of a partner.⁷³

From around the middle of the eighteenth century there seems to have been a greater freedom in choosing a partner, which Gillis linked to the decline of service.⁷⁴ Other historians have looked for explanations in proto-industrialisation, particularly in the greater opportunities it gave to young people to acquire resources and establish households. It has proved difficult to establish simple relationships between changes to courtship and marriage regimes and changing economic conditions. King has pointed to the danger of relying on averages and ignoring the variety of experiences which underlie the national picture; in his view it is important to recognise 'the essential complexity of nuptiality', in which individual histories seem often to have depended on chance factors and rarely on a rational view of resources.⁷⁵

More recently, there has been an attempt to understand attitudes towards nuptiality through the use of autobiographical narratives and other contemporary records of personal experiences. Griffin, in her study of the circumstances of courtship and marriage revealed by autobiographies of working people found that from the second half of the eighteenth century there was a tendency within proto-industrial communities for courtships to be shorter than in earlier periods, for a

⁷² J. R. Gillis, *For Better, for Worse: British marriages, 1600 to the Present* (Oxford, 1985), p. 4.

⁷³ D. O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 238-9, 289.

⁷⁴ Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, p. 112.

⁷⁵ S. A. King, 'Chance encounters: paths to household formation in early modern England', *International Review of Social History* (1999), pp. 25-7.

higher proportion of marriages to have no very secure economic basis and for increasing numbers of young people to engage in intimate relations with apparently no intention of marriage.⁷⁶ Similar material has also cast some light into the potential of religious affiliation to influence the marriage process. King, in his study of the courtship of an early nineteenth-century aspiring entrepreneur, David Whitehead, showed that religious suitability was the dominant factor in the match, influencing Whitehead's choice of partner, and in providing the rhetoric within which the courtship, largely via letters, was conducted. Whitehead, apparently confident of his ability to provide for a wife, explicitly rejected any economic motive to the match, insisting he was marrying for love.⁷⁷

Hurren and King, using the records of the coronial court to examine the courtships of ordinary people, have challenged Gillis's view that the nature of courtship changed around the middle of the nineteenth century, from one of relative freedom to choose a potential partner, to a more ritualised process. They concluded that 'change over time ... is remarkably muted', pointing to a lack of parental supervision of courtship across the century.⁷⁸

We turn now from individual marriage decisions to the role of family and friends in the marriage process. The structured and public nature of courtship in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries described by O'Hara seems to have given way to a more limited role for kin and the community in the marriage process, particularly but not solely among the gentry and propertied classes. However, though family and friends had become less important in the early phases of courtship, once marriage became a realistic prospect, they might well intervene to help or frustrate the process, for instance in providing or withholding resources, or in using information about the prospective partner's character.⁷⁹ One

⁷⁶ E. Griffin, 'Sex, Illegitimacy and social change in industrialising Britain', *Social History* (2013) pp. 151, 160-1; 'A conundrum resolved? Rethinking courtship, marriage and population growth in eighteenth-century England', *Past and Present* (2012), pp. 137-8, 162-3.

⁷⁷ S. King, 'Love, religion and power in the making of marriages in early nineteenth-century rural industrial Lancashire', *Rural History* (2010), pp. 16-17, 20.

⁷⁸ J. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, p. 233; E. T. Hurren and S. A. King, 'Cohabiting couples in the 19th century Coronial Records of the Midlands Circuit' in R. Probert (ed.), *Cohabitation and Non-Marital Births in England and Wales, 1600-2012* (Basingstoke, 2014) p. 123.

⁷⁹ King, 'Chance encounters', pp. 34-5, G. Frost, *Promises Broken: Courtship, Class, and Gender in Victorian England* (Virginia, 1995), p. 75.

manifestation of the tension between the couple's desire for a more private marriage and the interests of family and friends was the trend, noted by Outhwaite, to conduct the marriage ceremony away from the public gaze, through the use of marriage licences and clandestine marriages.⁸⁰ Both allowed couples to avoid publishing banns, and to marry away from their home parish; and thus both were used to evade parental permission. Clandestine marriages, illegal though valid, were used by all classes in society; marriage licences however were costly, and tended to be used by the better sorts.

Until the introduction of Hardwicke's Marriage Act in the mid eighteenth century the exchange of vows in the present tense (a contract *per verba de praesenti*) was all that was necessary for a couple to be indissolubly joined in matrimony, though the couple were not fully married, and their children, unlike those of a clandestine marriage, were not legitimate, and had no rights of inheritance. If however a marriage did not follow a contract *per verba de praesenti*, one of the parties could compel the celebration of the marriage in church. The passing of the Act in 1753 removed the power to compel celebration of such a contract, and had the effect of making all marriages not conducted according to the rules of the church both illegal and invalid.⁸¹ Several feminist writers have claimed that the Act was 'a most cruel law for the fair sex', removing any redress for seduction upon a promise of marriage.⁸² More recently, Probert has argued, partly from the evidence of litigation, that contracts *per verba de praesenti* had had become virtually unenforceable well before the time of Hardwicke's Marriage Act, which only applied to all couples the procedures which the majority already chose.⁸³ And even before the passing of the Act, proof of the existence of a valid contract had to be supported by evidence from at least two plausible witnesses, evidence rarely available for promises made in the heat of seduction.

⁸⁰ Outhwaite, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 86; 92-3.

⁸¹ R. Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 221.

⁸² See for instance E.T. Bannet, 'The Marriage Act of 1753: "A most cruel law for the fair sex"', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (1997), pp. 233-54.

⁸³ R. Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, pp. 33-4.

Some writers have argued that informal marriages were the usual custom among the poor, who were unwilling to pay the cost of a church marriage, and were unconcerned about inheritance or the legal status of their children. Parker has said that 'local practices meant many, if not most, adults in an area might not be recognised by the civil law as married'.⁸⁴ Stone thought that customary unions may have been common in remote areas (such as Wales and the south-west of England), but, pointing to the lack of court records or of any large deficit in figures from marriage registers, believed them to be rare elsewhere.⁸⁵ However Probert, in a thorough examination of the evidence for the existence of informal customs, such as 'hand-fasting', or 'broomstick weddings', has found it to be based on misconceptions and ungrounded inferences, and concluded that marriage in church was the norm.⁸⁶ Moreover the recurrent attempts made in parliament to reform the law relating to marriage were clearly aimed principally at clandestine rather than customary marriages.⁸⁷

Some historians have taken the view that it was not uncommon for couples to cohabit during the nineteenth century. Frost maintained that 'cohabiting couples were a normal part of the landscape' between 1800 and 1850 and, though Reay was somewhat more cautious, he tentatively estimated the proportion at possibly 15 per cent of couples in a group of Kentish villages in the nineteenth century.⁸⁸ Again, these views have been challenged by Probert, who found that 'such claims tend to lack precision', with writers sometimes assuming that failure to find evidence of marriage equated to cohabitation.⁸⁹ In an extensive study, she concluded that during the period 1770-1900, 'the overwhelming majority of couples sharing a home had gone through a formal ceremony of marriage; that only a tiny proportion of

⁸⁴ S. Parker, *Informal Marriage, Cohabitation and the Law, 1750-1989* (Basingstoke, 1990) p. 4.

⁸⁵ L. Stone, *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford, 1990) pp. 64-5.

⁸⁶ Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, pp. 68-112.

⁸⁷ Outhwaite, *Rise and Fall*, in Chapters 11 and 12, describes parliamentary attempts to reform the law relating to marriage over the period 1733-53.

⁸⁸ G. Frost, *Living in Sin: Cohabiting as Husband and Wife in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester, 2008), p. 124; B. Reay, *Microhistories*, p. 209.

⁸⁹ R. Probert, *University of Warwick School of Law Legal Studies Research Paper No. 2012-01 'A Banbury Story: cohabitation and marriage among the Victorian poor in notorious Neithrop'*, p. 2; see also *The Changing Legal Regulation of Cohabitation: From Fornicators to Family, 1600-2010* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 62-3.

births outside marriage can be attributed to cohabiting relationships; and that pre-marital cohabitation was extremely rare'.⁹⁰

The argument that Hardwicke's Marriage Act disrupted the marriage practices of ordinary people by removing the power to enforce a contract of marriage has been used to explain the surge in illegitimacy levels in the middle of the eighteenth century. Meteyard argued that the rise in recorded illegitimacy after 1753 'can be ascribed in large part to the effects of Lord Hardwicke's Act, which removed from the clergy the option of registering the children of long-term consensual unions as legitimate'.⁹¹ This argument depends on the twin assumptions that informal marriages remained a significant proportion of all marriages in the years before the passing of the Act, and that their issue were not always registered as illegitimate; but that following its enactment the clergy became much more likely to note in baptismal registers the illegitimacy of children whose parents had not undergone a formal ceremony. But there had never been any legal requirement for children born outside marriage to be registered as illegitimate, and although Hardwicke's Act certainly included severe penalties for clergy who did not carry out its provisions, it is very doubtful that these penalties could be applied to baptisms; certainly Meteyard gave no such examples.

Whatever the impact of Hardwicke's Marriage Act on illegitimacy, Snell has shown that one outcome was a dramatic reduction in the proportion of 'foreign' marriages, in which both partners were resident outside the parish of the marriage, and a rise in endogamous marriages, where both partners lived in the parish of marriage.⁹² As a result, marriage was brought much more within the inspection and potentially the control of the community; whether this resulted in some marriages being disrupted, leading to a rise in illegitimacy, remains a matter of speculation.

⁹⁰ Probert, *The Changing Legal Regulation of Cohabitation*, p. 75.

⁹¹ B. Meteyard, 'Illegitimacy and marriage in eighteenth-century England', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (1980), p. 488.

⁹² K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 177-80.

Courtship, marriage and illegitimacy in a Welsh context

While little has been written about illegitimacy in Wales, courtship has been somewhat better served, much of it written by folklorists whose primary interest was to record the customs of ordinary people. The giving of tokens and gifts was a feature of Welsh courtship; several writers refer to the considerable body of material objects, in the form of love-spoons and other carved objects such as stay busks and lace bobbins, dating from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.⁹³ However evidence of how such gifts were used in the process of courtship, such as that explored by O'Hara for England, seems to be lacking.

Several writers describe *caru yn y gwely* – couples regularly courting in bed, or 'bundling' in English – as the usual mode of courtship among ordinary people in Wales.⁹⁴ This was a recognised local custom which operated according to rules accepted within the community, not merely courting couples being found in bed together. Catrin Stevens, in *Welsh Courting Customs*, identifies it as a long-standing custom, first described by the twelfth century traveller Giraldus Cambrensis, celebrated in the poetry of the late medieval and early modern periods, reported by eighteenth and nineteenth-century travellers in Wales, and castigated by numerous government reports.⁹⁵ The decline of the custom during the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century is ascribed to the rise of respectability, promoted by the nonconformist chapels, and to the decline of the rural way of life, particularly as the greater mobility and freedom of the young brought new patterns of courtship.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, as Rees shows, bundling traditions survived as late as the 1940s in a few rural areas.⁹⁷ The main features of this mode of courtship were that the couple met regularly at night at the girl's residence, commonly in or on the

⁹³ Stevens, *Welsh Courting Customs*, p. 132; T. M. Owen *Welsh Folk Customs* (Cardiff, 1959), pp. 147-8.

⁹⁴ Stevens, *Welsh Courting Customs*, pp. 82-94.

⁹⁵ Stevens, *Welsh Courting customs*, pp. 85-88. Government Reports which referred to bundling include *Report of the Major Commission to Inquire into the Poor Law*, PP 1834; *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales ... in Three Parts. Part I, Carmarthen, Glamorgan and Pembroke. Part II, Brecknock, Cardigan, Radnor and Monmouth. Part III, North Wales* PP 1847 xxvii; *Commission on the Employment of Children Young Persons and Women in Agriculture*, PP 1867-8 xvii; *Royal Commission on Labour. The Agricultural Labourer, Vol. I I, Wales*, PP 1893-4 xxxvi.

⁹⁶ Stevens, *Welsh Courting customs*, pp. 110-2.

⁹⁷ A. Rees, *Life in a Welsh countryside: a Social Study of Llanfihangel yng Ngwynfa* (Cardiff, 1996), p. 86. (First published in 1950, based on fieldwork carried out in 1939-40.) Scourfield also provided evidence of the custom's survival in West Carmarthenshire in the 1920s (E. Scourfield, 'Fact finding in a Welsh Rural Community' *Folk Life* (1962), p. 64).

bed, but also in the kitchen after the family had retired; frequently the relationship was not publicly acknowledged; and in many cases there was some connivance on the part of parents or employers, who might attempt to maintain chastity through the use of physical barriers such as constricting clothing or a bolster on the bed to divide the couple.⁹⁸ In David Jenkins' study of the agricultural community in south Cardiganshire at the turn of the twentieth century, where bundling was still practiced, it was said that 'the parents, and more especially the mother, had a pretty shrewd idea who was visiting the house by night', and the mother had primary oversight of her daughter's courtship.⁹⁹ *Caru yn y gwely* provided a couple with the space for intimacy which was otherwise absent in the cramped homes of the Welsh peasantry. No doubt expectations about the extent of that intimacy varied between communities and over time, but the impression is that full sexual relations were generally avoided at least until a marriage was in prospect.

The custom of night courtship depended not only on tacit acceptance by parents and employers, but also on the freedom of movement accorded to young men. Farm servants slept in a stable loft or barn, to be joined by the farmer's sons when the latter reached their mid-teens, and both were free to roam the countryside at will outside working hours, going courting or forming convivial groups with others in the same circumstances. These were the groups who played traditional practical jokes around the neighbourhood, and were at the heart of shaming rituals.¹⁰⁰

Apart from the isolated example of Giraldus Cambrensis, there is no eyewitness account of bundling in Wales before the late eighteenth century. The main body of evidence for earlier periods comes from literary sources, in the court poetry of writers such as the fourteenth-century poet Dafydd ap Gwilym and the *Hen Benillion*, a series of anonymous poems collected from the seventeenth century onwards.¹⁰¹ The use of poetry as evidence is problematic; a description of a lover

⁹⁸ Stevens, *Welsh Courting customs*, pp. 88-9.

⁹⁹ D. Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community in South-West Wales* (Cardiff, 1971), p. 126.

¹⁰⁰ Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community*, p. 123-4. Some of Jenkins' informants remembered with pleasure the time when they had first moved to the stable loft.

¹⁰¹ Stevens, *Welsh Courting customs* pp. 66-72. *Hen Benillion* (lit. 'old stanzas'), were short individual verses, sometimes forming a series of three or four, first appearing in 17th-century manuscripts, but

knocking at his beloved's window, gaining entry and spending the night with her does not necessarily imply that this was the usual practice; it could be seen as a metaphor for the process of courtship. One would hardly take the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* as evidence of Shakespeare's acquaintance with bundling. Nevertheless, the examples quoted by Stevens from the *Hen Benillion*, which are specific in their detail, and share common features with documented practice in later periods, are at least plausible evidence that bundling in Wales has a long history.

The existence of bundling in parts of Scotland is well documented, but its presence in England is more controversial.¹⁰² The use of the term to describe courting in bed seems to have originated in New England, and to have become current in Britain towards the end of the eighteenth century, though it would not have been used by its Welsh practitioners, the vast majority of whom had little or no English. Macfarlane has said with some force that there was no evidence of bundling in England.¹⁰³ However, as Stevens notes, he seems to have confounded this mode of courtship with fertility testing, and having demonstrated to his satisfaction that the latter was not a feature of courtship in England, asserts that bundling never existed there. Yet in an earlier passage he describes several cases of courtship at night in bed, taken from court records and diaries, which conform to the more usual definition of bundling.¹⁰⁴ Macfarlane's use of the term in the sense of fertility testing seems somewhat perverse, given that it is thought to derive from an attempt to prevent full intercourse through the use of constricting clothing. Adair gives several examples of bundling from across England in the early modern period, and other writers have reported that custom was commonly found in Cumberland.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, it has to be said that the reports of night courtship in Wales and Scotland found in eighteenth-century travellers' tales and in nineteenth-century government reports have no parallel at that period in England, and it seems likely that, whatever the case in earlier periods, the form of bundling found in Wales and parts of Scotland, of regular courting in bed at night by couples in the later

probably existing as spoken or sung poetry long before they were transcribed.

¹⁰² Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, pp. 211-3,

¹⁰³ Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love*, pp. 306-7.

¹⁰⁴ Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love*, p. 298.

¹⁰⁵ Adair, *Courtship*, pp. 163-171, Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, p. 31.

stages of courtship, was not widely practiced in England. Indeed, Reay, in his description of courtship in nineteenth century Blean, suggests that though sexual intercourse between courting couples was common, it was less likely to take place in bed than '... in meadows, up against stiles, in the kitchen of a master's home, at the back of the house, ... in the road'.¹⁰⁶

Clandestine and informal marriage in Wales

As we saw earlier, some writers have suggested that illegitimacy was in part the result of informal unions. Clandestine and informal marriages were said to have been popular in Wales, on account of their speed, convenience, cheapness, and the avoidance of the public nature of a church wedding, evading both parental and community control and the much-disliked calling of banns. According to Brown, 'their number was undoubtedly substantial', though he provides little quantitative evidence of this.¹⁰⁷ Stone gives a somewhat bleak view of the making of marriage in south Wales in his account of an attempt to force a socially inadequate young man into marriage:

'a culture of acute poverty, casual violence and chronic alcoholism in an isolated village society both bound together and broken apart by elaborate kinship networks of intermarrying cousinhood. In all these ways, society in south Wales, as revealed in this case, appears very different than that of England.'¹⁰⁸

Much of the discussion of informal marriage in Wales has relied on the work of W. Rhys Jones, who collected evidence for the practice of 'broomstick marriages' in the Ceiriog Valley.¹⁰⁹ David Howell, for example, relied on the work of Jones in stating that 'the besom marriage ... a public, secular, form whereby both self-marriage and self-divorce were available to couples from the lower orders'.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Reay, *Microhistories*, p. 201.

¹⁰⁷ R. L. Brown, 'Clandestine marriages in Wales', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1982), p. 74-5.

¹⁰⁸ L. Stone, 'Kinship and forced marriage in early eighteenth century Wales', *Welsh History Review* (1995), pp. 363-4. This view has been challenged by Walker, whose study of abduction cases in early modern Wales leads her to conclude that Stone was mistaken in thinking that Welsh society and economy was radically different from that of England; see G. Walker, "'Strange kind of stealing": abduction in early modern Wales', in M. Roberts and S. Clarke (eds.) *Women and Gender in Early Modern Wales* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 54.

¹⁰⁹ W. Rhys Jones, 'Besom Weddings in the Ceiriog Valley', *Folklore* 39 (1928) pp. 150-2 (published under the bardic name 'Gwenith Gwynn'). Howell, Parker and Gillis, for instance, rely on this paper as evidence for customary unions in Wales.

¹¹⁰ D. W. Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth-Century Wales* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 147.

Jones' findings have been undermined by Rebecca Probert, who showed that his deductions, based on assumptions about the style used by a succession of clergymen to record births in the parish of Llansanffraid Glynceiriog, were not firmly based, and crucially that information from the marriage register was not used. Jones' assertion that large numbers of births were to parents not legally married, interpreted by Gillis as a half of all births, was shown to amount at most to six per cent.¹¹¹

Illegitimacy in Wales

Though there is a negligible body of research into illegitimacy in Wales, some reference to the topic can be found within other areas of study.¹¹² The most substantial discussion is to be found within the historiography concerning the 1847 *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, which went far beyond education to enquire into the social and moral condition of the people.¹¹³ It is generally agreed that the Report had profound political and social consequences for Welsh society, following the outrage caused by its 'wholesale condemnation of the morals of the Welsh people', who were, 'in addition to being ill-educated, uncouth, ill-mannered and altogether socially degraded', also 'morally depraved and corrupt'.¹¹⁴ The broader issues are considered in more detail in Chapter 4; here we are concerned with historians' treatment of the Report's claims of the debased nature of Welsh courtship practices and their impact on illegitimacy. Most are content to accept the view of contemporary writers such as Ieuan Gwynedd, who cited statistics published by the Registrar-General showing that Welsh illegitimacy ratios differed little from those for England. There has been no examination of whether, in some localities or at some period prior to the Report, there might have been substance to the Commissioners' claims of high levels of illegitimacy and antenuptial pregnancy.¹¹⁵ John Davies, however, strikes a more sceptical note when

¹¹¹ Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, pp. 84-8.

¹¹² A recent paper by Angela Muir focusses on illegitimacy in two eighteenth-century parishes, Carmarthen and Hawarden (Flintshire). She suggests that the level of illegitimacy which occurred within the context of informal marriage and courtship was possibly higher than that in England and more likely to be accepted (albeit reluctantly) by the local community. See A. Muir, 'Illegitimacy in eighteenth-century Wales', *Welsh History Review* (2013), pp. 351-388.

¹¹³ *1847 Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, PP 1847 xxvii.

¹¹⁴ I. G. Jones, *Mid-Victorian Wales: the Observers and the Observed* (Cardiff, 1992), p. 141.

¹¹⁵ See for instance J. Aaron, *Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Nation, Gender and Identity* (Cardiff, 2007), p. 79, and G. T. Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books: the Perfect Instrument of*

he suggests that the activities of the leaders of Welsh Nonconformity in the years following the report, in their campaigns to improve the moral character of the nation, may be seen as 'evidence that they agreed with its conclusion'.¹¹⁶ Williams provides the example of Ieuan Gwynedd, defending Welsh women's sexual morality to an English public, but using his Welsh-language periodical *Y Gymraes* (*The Welshwoman*) to attempt to reform what he felt to be 'serious deficiencies' of character, and to discourage 'immoral' practices such as courting in bed.¹¹⁷

References to illegitimacy in works on related themes demonstrate how the absence of a body of systematic study of the subject can lead to doubtful judgements. Examples are to be found for instance in a recently published general history of Wales in the second millennium, where two of the contributing authors take rather different views on the topic; the chapter covering the period 1780-1870 restates the view that there was nothing exceptional about Welsh illegitimacy rates, whereas a subsequent chapter, referring to the later nineteenth century, takes another line: 'Frequent pre-marital sex seems to have been common, if not the norm... Though frowned upon and severely punished in chapels, illegitimacy was rife and probably grudgingly accepted'.¹¹⁸ A recent study of Welsh infanticides for the period 1730-1830 by Woodward quotes the relatively high illegitimacy ratio for Wales published in the 1831 Census Abstract, though the growing popularity of Nonconformity in Wales meant that this statistic, derived from Church of England baptismal registers, is unlikely to be a reliable proxy for the bastardy ratio for all births. He goes on to suggest that bastardy did not carry the same social stigma as in England, quoting the view of the Poor Law Commission Report that public opinion in Wales regarded a 'first offence' as 'an accident' or a 'misfortune'.¹¹⁹

Empire (Cardiff, 1998), p. 211, quoting the work of Jane Williams, *Artegall; or Remarks on the Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales* (London, 1848) and E. Jones (Ieuan Gwynedd), *Facts, figures and statements in illustration of the dissent and morality of Wales: an appeal to the English people* (1849).

¹¹⁶ J. Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1994) p. 392.

¹¹⁷ S. R. Williams, 'The true "Cymraes": images of women in women's nineteenth-century Welsh periodicals' in A. V. John (ed.), *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830-1939* (Cardiff, 1991), p. 70.

¹¹⁸ N. Evans, "'As rich as California ...': opening and closing the frontier: Wales 1780-1870' and B. Jones, 'Banqueting at a moveable feast: Wales 1870-1914' in G. Elwyn Jones and D. Smith (eds.), *The People of Wales* (Llandysul, 1999), pp. 136; 158.

¹¹⁹ N. Woodward, 'Infanticide in Wales, 1730-1830', *Welsh History Review* (2007) pp. 96, 112.

Illegitimacy features in the work of Russell Davies, whose social histories of Wales display the picturesque and contradictory in Welsh life from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. The wide range of topics covered in his books includes accounts of sexual activity taken from newspapers, ballads, and travellers' tales. An article on illegitimacy in south-west Wales around the end of the nineteenth century highlights the contrast between the image of rural Wales as a 'land of pure morals' promoted by Welsh Nonconformists with the high levels of illegitimacy in the rural south west, backed up by accounts of failed courtships revealed in the reports of affiliation orders brought before the Carmarthenshire Police Courts.¹²⁰ Here and in his books the discussion of illegitimacy relates the higher levels found in rural areas to the practice of 'bundling'.¹²¹ However his writing tends to be rich in detail, but short on analysis or context; it is frequently unclear whether the events or behaviour described are typical only of Wales, or apply equally in England or elsewhere. For example, the account of the exploits of notable Welsh gentry and industrialists in fathering bastards is entertaining, but little context is given for this behaviour.¹²²

At this point it might be useful to reflect on why the history of illegitimacy in Wales has been neglected, when it has been such a fruitful area of research elsewhere. There are technical reasons for the exclusion of Wales from the demographic studies of the Cambridge Group: as discussed earlier, the patronymic naming system in Wales resulted in a very small pool of surnames, making it virtually impossible to apply the technique of family reconstitution. In addition, from the first half of the nineteenth century, and in some areas rather earlier, the dominance of Nonconformity raises issues about the adequacy of parish baptismal records. Nevertheless, ample opportunities exist among the records of parishes, poor law authorities, the courts and the Register-General for local investigations of illegitimacy. Moreover, as we have seen above, many topics which are the focus of recent research would benefit from such studies. It is tempting to suggest that the

¹²⁰ R. Davies, "'In a Broken Dream': Some aspects of sexual behaviour and the dilemmas of the unmarried mother in South West Wales, 1887-1914", *Llafur* (1983), pp. 24-33.

¹²¹ R. Davies, *Secret Sins; Sex, Violence and Society in Carmarthenshire, 1870-1920* (Cardiff, 1996) pp. 162-3.

¹²² R. Davies, *Hope and Heartbreak: A Social History of Wales and the Welsh, 1776-1871* (Cardiff, 2005) pp. 281-2.

absence of any serious study of Welsh illegitimacy illustrates the combination of denial and collective guilt which greeted the 1847 Report and which has echoed on since in a more general concern for the country's reputation.

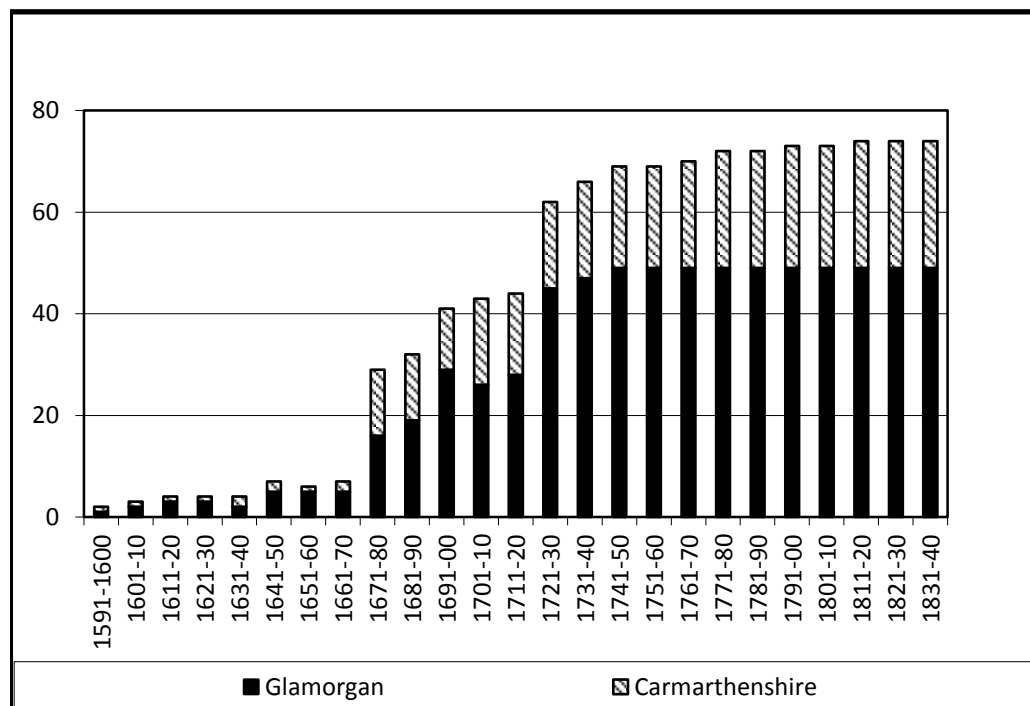
It would be foolhardy to think that any one study could provide a history of illegitimacy in Wales comparable to those which exist for other Western European countries. The objective of this research is to begin to fill the gap, by focussing on the counties of Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, using a wide range of sources to illuminate the subject. The broad questions to be answered are the extent of illegitimacy in south and south-west Wales in the period; what factors determined its incidence; who were the parents of illegitimate children; and how were these children supported and cared for. Among the factors which may have influenced levels of illegitimacy are the growth in Nonconformity and the effects of industrialisation, which both stimulated population migration, giving rise to extreme sex ratios among young unmarried people in the newly-industrialising areas and in the rural parishes from which large numbers of the new industrial workers migrated, and transformed a largely rural and agricultural society to one which was predominantly urban and industrial. A further strand relates to social control: what was society's attitude to illegitimacy; how was it controlled, and by whom; and how was this affected by the decline in the church courts, the introduction of the New Poor Law, and the growth of Nonconformity. Finally there is the question of how Wales compares with other countries in respect of illegitimacy, particularly with England, in view of the common legal and support systems, but also Scotland, where there were some similar rural traditions, relating for instance to agricultural systems and courting customs.

Chapter 3 **Bastardy during the period of the old poor law**

This chapter considers illegitimacy from the earliest period for which reliable information is available, until the introduction of the New Poor Law, using evidence derived from parish baptismal registers and from the records of the old poor law. The first section looks at the choice of period, which is determined at the start by the poor survival of parish records before the late seventeenth century, and at the end by the falling membership of the Church of England as the growing strength of Nonconformity gathered pace in the early nineteenth century. The next section presents the path over time of summary illegitimacy ratios for Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, followed by a discussion of how far the broad trends may be considered to be reliable. Further analyses look at how trends in illegitimacy vary within the region. The focus then turns to the characteristics of the parents of illegitimate children, and the outcomes for children and their parents, including poor law support.

Figure 3.1 shows how many of the 74 selected parishes have baptismal records, either from parish registers or bishops transcripts, in each of the decades from the end of the sixteenth century to 1840. Very few parish registers have survived for the period before the 1670s, particularly in Carmarthenshire. In view of the increase in the numbers of registers available during the 1670s, which between them covered just over half of the sample registration sub-districts, that decade was taken as the starting point for analyses aggregated to the level of county or above, with more disaggregated analyses restricted to the period beginning in 1721, when records for the vast majority of parishes were available, including examples of each registration sub-district.

Figure 3.1 Number of sample parish registers in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire for which baptismal records are available, by decade, 1591-1840



From the early nineteenth century, the level of baptisms can be compared with population numbers. The expectation is, according to Wrigley *et al.*, that births should amount to at least 30 per thousand of the population.¹ More recently, research by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure into nineteenth century occupational structure using parish registers has shown that the baptism rate in England between 1813 and 1820 averaged 30.3 per thousand, whereas in Wales it was 22.9 per thousand.² Table 3.1 shows that baptismal rates in the early nineteenth century for the sample of registration sub-districts (RSDs) used for this study were not far from the notional 30 per thousand of the population, with only Cenarth substantially below this level. However by the 1840s it is evident that large numbers of children were not being baptised in the Church of England, making baptismal registers an unreliable source for the construction of illegitimacy ratios. The point at which the decline in the registration of baptisms renders the data unusable is somewhat arbitrary, and inevitably

¹ D. E. C. Eversley, P. Laslett and E. A. Wrigley, *An Introduction to English Historical Demography from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1966), p. 54.

² P. M. Kitson, L. Shaw-Taylor, E. A. Wrigley, R. S. Davies, G. Newton and M. Satchell, *The creation of a 'census' of adult male employment for England and Wales for 1817*, www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/occupations/britain19c/papers/papers2.pdf

illegitimacy ratios for much of the early nineteenth century are likely to be rather less reliable than those for the second half of the eighteenth, particularly in Carmarthenshire. Taking the data set as a whole, the 1830s, where the rate had fallen to 18.5 baptisms per thousand of the population, seems the last decade likely to provide usable estimates of illegitimacy ratios. This period coincides with the

Table 3.1 Baptisms (annual average) per 1000 population in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire

Glamorgan RSDs							
Years	St Nicholas	Maesteg	Margam	Neath	Llansamlet	Gower	All Glamorgan districts
1801-10	25.4	22.2	29.9	26.6	33.5	33.6	28.5
1811-20	22.1	22.3	27.0	24.9	28.6	31.7	26.2
1821-30	26.3	22.0	27.3	18.3	26.7	29.1	24.8
1831-40	27.9	15.6	20.5	15.5	19.9	25.5	20.5
1841-50	22.2	11.4	11.3	13.0	12.9	21.8	14.6
Carmarthenshire RSDs							
	Pembrey	Llangathen	Llangyn-deyrn	Cenarth	Upper Tywi Valley	All Carm'shire districts	All districts
1801-10	25.2	24.7	25.9	9.5	32.5	23.3	25.9
1811-20	23.6	23.4	24.1	7.9	29.2	21.3	24.1
1821-30	22.9	19.4	18.4	7.1	24.8	17.9	21.8
1831-40	15.4	17.7	13.7	7.3	19.8	14.3	18.5
1841-50	8.6	15.4	9.4	4.5	14.0	9.8	13.3

Sources: Census 1801-51, parish registers

introduction of the New Poor Law. Although the latter took effect from 1834, the old systems of providing out-door relief to mothers of illegitimate children persisted during much of the second half of the 1830s in the study area. Only Swansea and Cardiff had workhouses with sufficient accommodation for the new system; most of the eight unions to which the sample parishes belonged did not complete their new workhouse buildings until 1838; and even then illegitimate children and their mothers were not always the first to be admitted.³ Thus ending the period of this first stage of the study at 1840 makes sense in both statistical and historical terms. In Chapter 5, which looks at the statistics of illegitimacy in the period of the New

³ Llandovery Workhouse was completed in 1838, but illegitimate children and their mothers were not admitted until after September 1839 (TNA, MH12/15937).

Poor Law, we will examine the consistency between illegitimacy rates derived from parish registers and those obtained from the civil registration system.

The illegitimacy ratio in south Wales, 1671-1840

As Figure 3.2 shows, the paths of the illegitimacy ratios for sample parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire were broadly similar, increasing throughout most of the eighteenth century, and declining from 1805, but with some differences in timing and level. The illegitimacy ratio for Carmarthenshire grew throughout the eighteenth century, and was consistently higher than that for Glamorgan, by an average of over 2 percentage points; it fell less rapidly in the early nineteenth century, so that the divergence between the two series increased. In Glamorgan however, the bastardy ratio was static or falling during the first three decades of the eighteenth century.

Figure 3.2 Illegitimacy ratios for Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire from parish records, 1671-1840

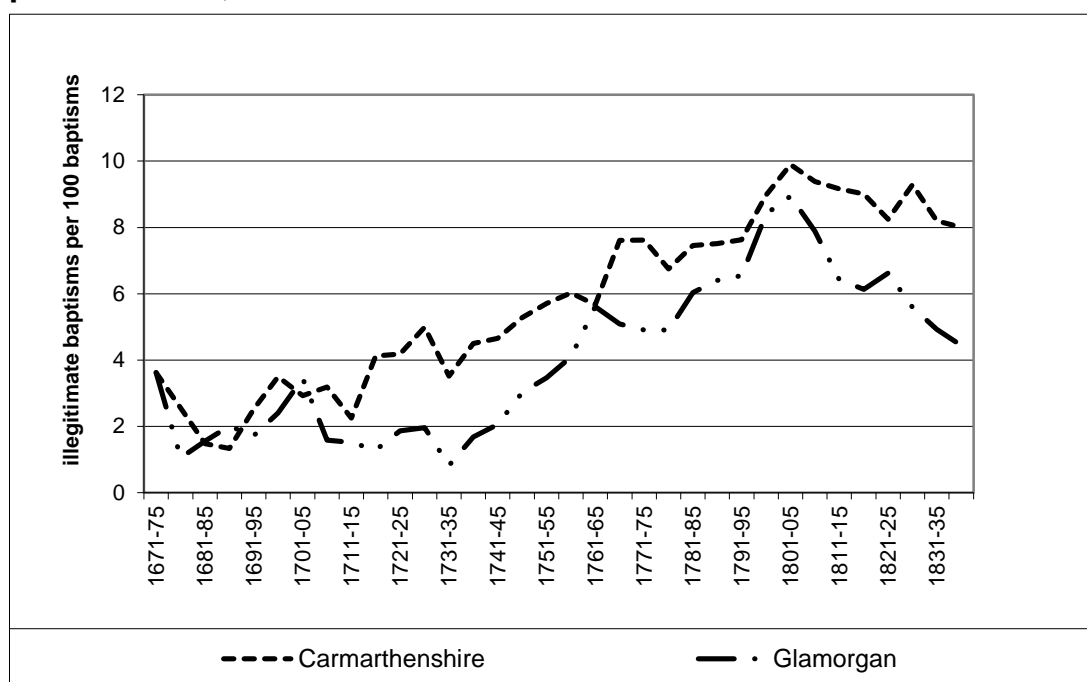
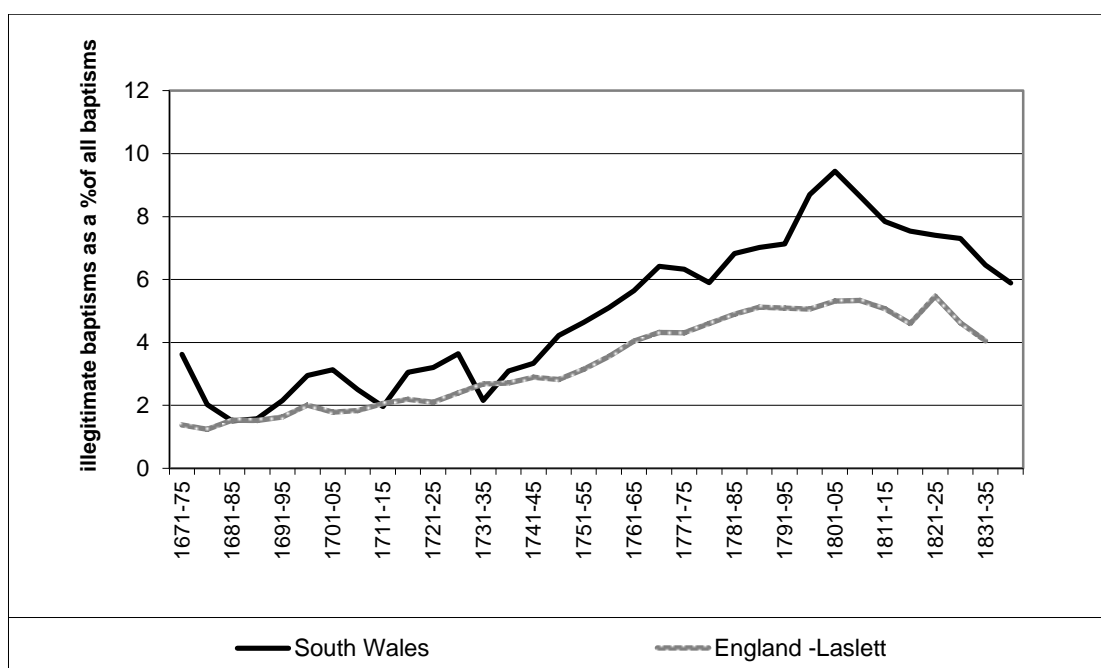


Figure 3.3 compares the illegitimacy ratio for the two south Wales counties taken together with that for England from Laslett et al.⁴ From the late seventeenth

⁴ Data for England from P. Laslett, K. Oosterveen and R.M. Smith (eds.), *Bastardy and its comparative History* (London, 1980), pp. 14-15.

century until the middle decades of the eighteenth century the ratio for south Wales moved upwards at a similar rate to that for England, though more erratically, but from the 1740s the two series diverged as the ratio in south Wales accelerated, so that by 1801-05, the illegitimacy ratio was almost 4 percentage points greater in south Wales than that in England. After 1800 both series show some decline, though that for England is less pronounced.

Figure 3.3 Illegitimacy ratios for south Wales and England from parish records, 1671-1840

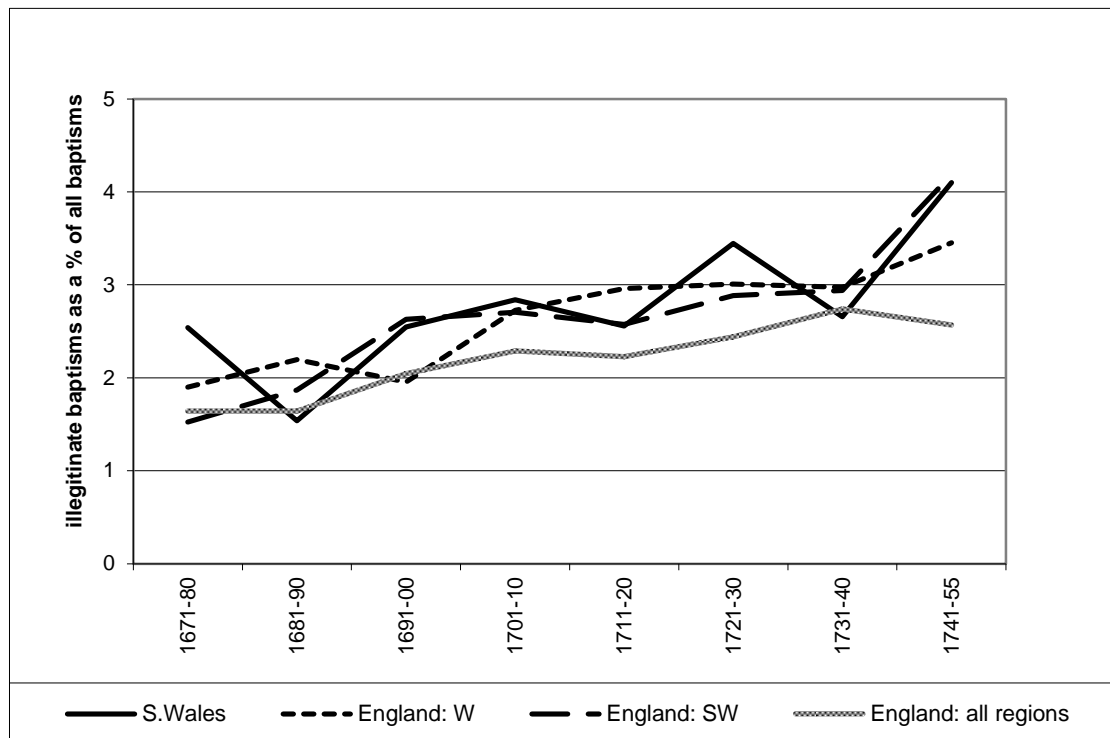


The illegitimacy ratio in south Wales up to the mid-eighteenth century can be compared with those of English regions in the early modern period provided by Adair. Figure 3.4 shows that, for the periods for which Adair's work overlaps with the current study, the West and South-west regions of England, which are located closest to south Wales, also have the closest illegitimacy ratios.⁵ It is unclear whether this similarity of illegitimacy ratios points to a shared culture of illegitimacy,

⁵ R. Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 1996), p. 50-63. Distance between illegitimacy ratios for different regions is measured by squared differences between the series. As mentioned earlier, Adair's definition of illegitimacy is wider than that used here, though in his estimate the resulting inflation of the illegitimacy ratio was not large (Adair, *Courtship*, p. 33).

as suggested by Blaikie in the context of Scotland.⁶ We will return to this point in Chapter 7.

Figure 3.4 Comparison between illegitimacy ratios for south Wales and English regions, 1671-1755



Note: Source of English data: Adair.

Reliability of the data

The consistency in very broad terms with the temporal path of illegitimacy in England, as estimated by Adair and Laslett et al., offers reassurance that the picture for south Wales shown in Figure 3.2 has some validity. Before looking at the findings in more depth, it is pertinent to consider the reliability of these statistics in more detail. Laslett discussed ‘how far the changes observed were changes in the habit of registering illegitimate births rather than changes in their frequency’.⁷ He laid out the chain of circumstances which might intervene between sexual contact and the registration of an illegitimate birth; in practice those factors which have most influence on the recording of bastardy are the propensity of parents (usually the mother) to baptise an illegitimate child, and of the clergy (or parish clerk) to

⁶ A. Blaikie, ‘Scottish illegitimacy: social adjustment or moral economy?’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (1998), p. 221.

⁷ Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, p. 48.

note the child's illegitimacy. If these remained relatively consistent throughout the period studied, then the broad picture of changes in the incidence of illegitimacy would be valid, though the true absolute level might differ somewhat from that estimated. Laslett's principal argument for the validity of his findings was that, for the contrary to be true:

Almost every parish clerk in England would have had to find himself compelled by conscience or community opinion, or by both, to set down as illegitimate more and more each year of those births which were in fact of that description.⁸

For Laslett's sample of up to 98 parishes, drawn from across England, this seems a strong argument, though it does not take into account whether variations over time in popular attitudes towards illegitimate children and their mothers might have affected the latter's propensity to have their children baptised, in some way which had a systematic effect on recorded illegitimacy ratios. In the current study, which covers a relatively small area, from which are sampled a group of parishes within 11 districts, such an argument is weaker; there might well be some degree of consistency over time between nearby parishes in changes in recording practices, and also in changing attitudes towards unmarried mothers which might affect whether their children were baptised.

It is notable that although there seems never to have been any requirement to record illegitimacy in parish registers, this was generally the practice.⁹ The parish had an interest in bastardy; the infant might well become chargeable to the parish, and churchwardens were responsible for presenting parents of bastards to the church authorities, until these ceased to take an interest around the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁰ The importance that the community placed on baptism more generally is reflected in the provision made by overseers of the poor for the baptism of pauper children, legitimate and illegitimate alike. There were incentives for parents of an illegitimate child to have it baptised; evidence of birth and parentage would be important for an illegitimate child, in particular as evidence of settlement, since an illegitimate child obtained settlement in its birth parish. Thus

⁸ Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, p. 50.

⁹ Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, p. 49

¹⁰ The last recorded prosecutions for bastardy, fornication, adultery and incontinence in the ecclesiastical courts of Llandaff and St David's were 1762 and 1755 respectively – see Chapter 6.

there do not seem to be strong grounds to think that illegitimate children were any less likely to be baptised than were legitimate children.

Nevertheless, there is plenty of evidence that some illegitimate children were not baptised. The records of the ecclesiastical courts of Llandaff and Carmarthen in respect of bastardy include the names of parents whose illegitimate children cannot be found in the baptismal record. Of the relatively small numbers of bastardy cases brought to the courts, possibly two fifths had not been baptised in the parish of the parents' residence. Further evidence of unbaptised illegitimate children can be found in burial registers, poor law records, and in a variety of other sources, including the information provided by the diary of William Thomas, a schoolmaster from the Vale of Glamorgan, who reported numerous illegitimacies in the parishes of the Vale between 1762 and 1795. In all of these sources it is possible to find illegitimate births which are not recorded in parish registers, though the omissions may frequently be due to the infant's short life.¹¹ It would be risky however to extrapolate these findings to all baptisms. Clearly not all parents of bastards were brought before the church courts; those who were may have been the most notorious, whose behaviour most offended the community, and it would not be surprising if they were also more likely to have neglected to baptise their children. Nevertheless, the evidence above demonstrates that at the very least, illegitimacy was not always consistently recorded in the sample of parishes chosen for this study. A general level of under-recording however merely reduces the estimated level of the illegitimacy ratio; more problematic would be evidence of systematic under-recording which varied within the region or changed over time.

Examination of the sample of baptismal registers shows that in a few parishes there were quite lengthy periods during which no illegitimacies were recorded, mainly in the first half of the eighteenth century. The majority of these parishes were in the districts of Gower and St Nicholas. Although this was a period in which the rate of illegitimacy was low generally, and parishes in these districts tended to have lower levels of illegitimacy over the whole period than others in the

¹¹ W. Thomas, *The Diary of William Thomas 1762-1795* (Cardiff, 1995) mentions among many examples Jane Nicholas of Wrinstone, Wenvoe, who had five illegitimate children by four fathers, the last born in 1762, none appearing in the baptismal registers (pp. 53, 60, 61).

sample, it seems likely that some systematic under-recording took place, probably more through the style of recording than an omission of the baptism itself. Several parishes omitted the mother's name:

John the son of William David

a style which was more likely to lead the clergyman to neglect to note the child's illegitimate status than a more detailed format, such as one which included the phrase 'and Mary his wife' or similar. In addition, the original registers for several of these parishes are missing, with records substituted from bishops' transcripts, where there may well have been some incentive to omit the illegitimacies recorded in the register, in order to avoid having to present the parents at the ecclesiastical courts. In three parishes, St Nicholas in Glamorgan, and Cenarth and Llanegwad in Carmarthenshire, there were periods where the number of baptisms was sufficiently large that the likelihood of no illegitimate births was very small. Details are given in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Sample parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire with gaps in recorded illegitimacies

Parish	Periods without recorded illegitimacies		Illegitimacy ratios	
	dates	baptisms	preceding period	following 5-year period (per cent)
St Nicholas	1721-80	327	..	4.1
Cenarth	1701-40	281	..	5.9
Llanegwad	1701-25	637	..	0.1

A further possible distortion in the overall bastardy ratios might result from the increasing numbers of parishes included in the dataset, which as Figure 3.1 shows, rose from 29 in 1671-80 to 43 in 1701-10 and 62 in 1721-30, only reaching the full 74 in 1811-20. If parishes with early records had illegitimacy ratios which were consistently higher or lower than those of parishes whose records survived only from a later period, then the trend in the illegitimacy ratio would be distorted. In order to test whether the paths of illegitimacy ratios shown in Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3 were significantly affected by either under-reporting of illegitimacy, or by changes in the make-up of the sample of parishes over time, series were constructed which included only parishes with a complete run of years and no

apparent gaps in recorded illegitimacy. Figure 3.5 and Figure 3.6 show that although there are small differences between the two series the underlying picture is the same.

Figure 3.5 Illegitimacy ratios for Glamorgan: all sample parishes compared with 'consistent' parishes, 1671-1840

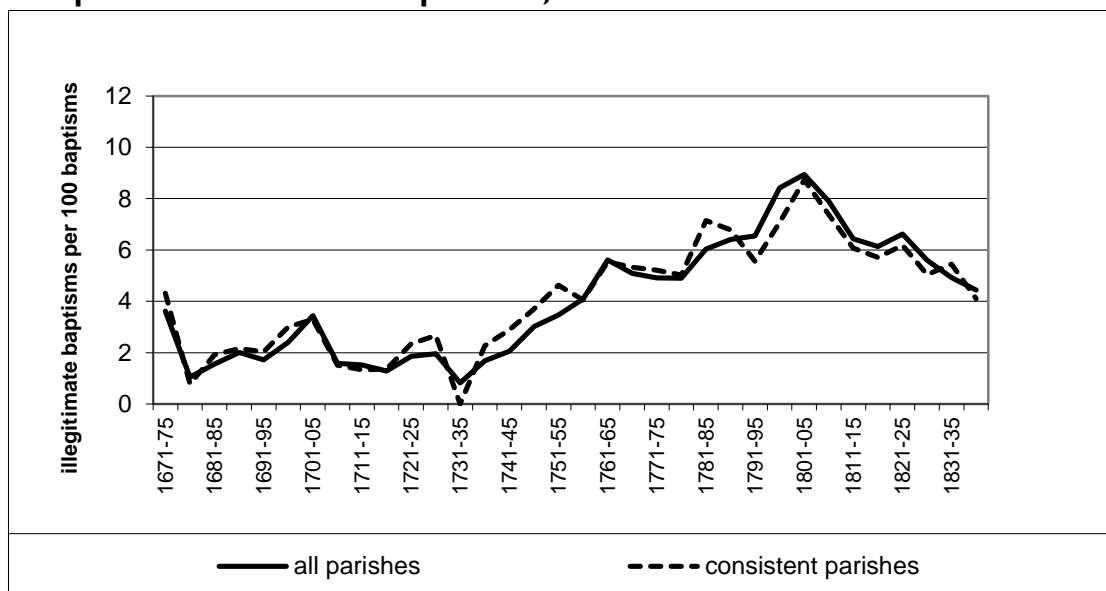
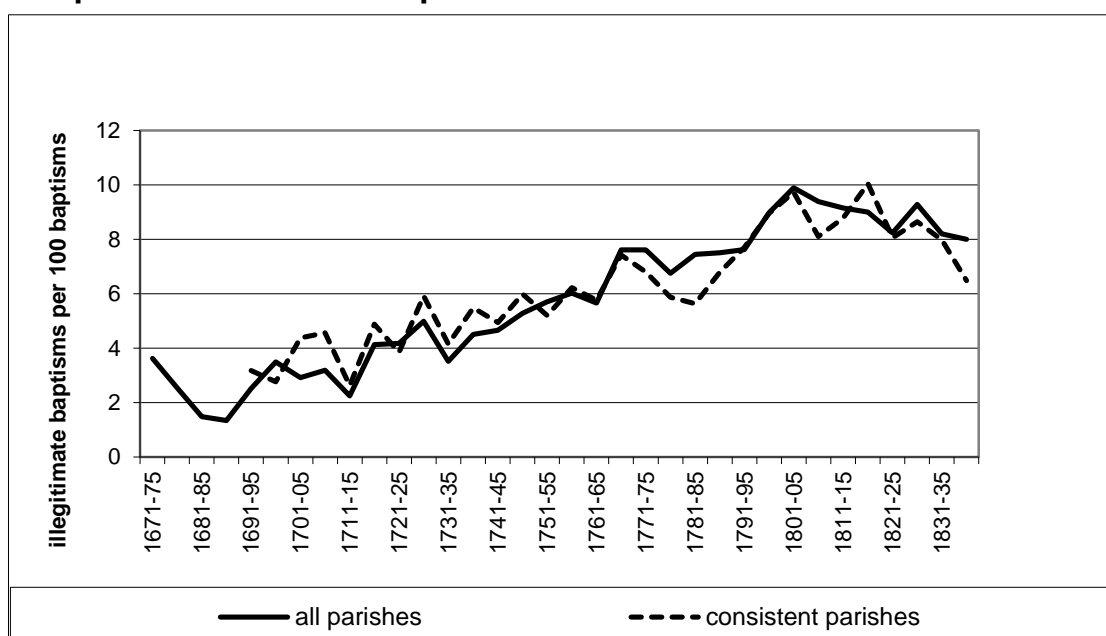


Figure 3.6 Illegitimacy ratios for Carmarthenshire: all sample parishes compared with 'consistent' parishes: 1671-1840



Thus although factors such as unreported illegitimacies or inconsistencies in recording may somewhat distort the results, and in particular give rise to an

underestimate of the true bastardy ratio, the effect is probably small, and has little impact on its broad path over time. We therefore need to look elsewhere for explanations of the characteristics of the bastardy ratio in south Wales.

Patterns of illegitimacy within south Wales

Further disaggregation into registration sub-districts, shown in Appendix D Figures D1-6 for Glamorgan and D7-10 for Carmarthenshire, shows a yet more varied picture. Though all districts saw a rise in the illegitimacy ratio between the beginning and end of the eighteenth century, and most a decline thereafter, there are marked differences in levels and in the timing of the increase. Gower and Llansamlet stand out from other Glamorgan districts on account of their low levels of illegitimacy. It is perhaps not surprising to find Gower in this category; the peninsula is somewhat isolated from the adjoining land mass, and has long had a distinct cultural tradition, mainly English-speaking, with strong ties with the West Country, thought to be the result of settlement from south-west England in the Anglo-Norman period.¹² Llansamlet was quite different in character, Welsh-speaking and industrial, with early exploitation of coal reserves, and the introduction of copper manufacture in the 1730s. At the other extreme, Maesteg, then a mainly agricultural district, had high levels of illegitimacy, exceeding 8 per cent of baptisms over seven decades. The profiles of illegitimacy in Margam, Neath and St Nicholas lie somewhere in between. There was less variation among the Carmarthenshire districts, with illegitimacy ratios for Cenarth and Pembrey rather lower than average, and those in the Upper Tywi Valley somewhat higher. It is probably also the case that Carmarthenshire districts were more homogenous in their economic and social makeup than those in Glamorgan.

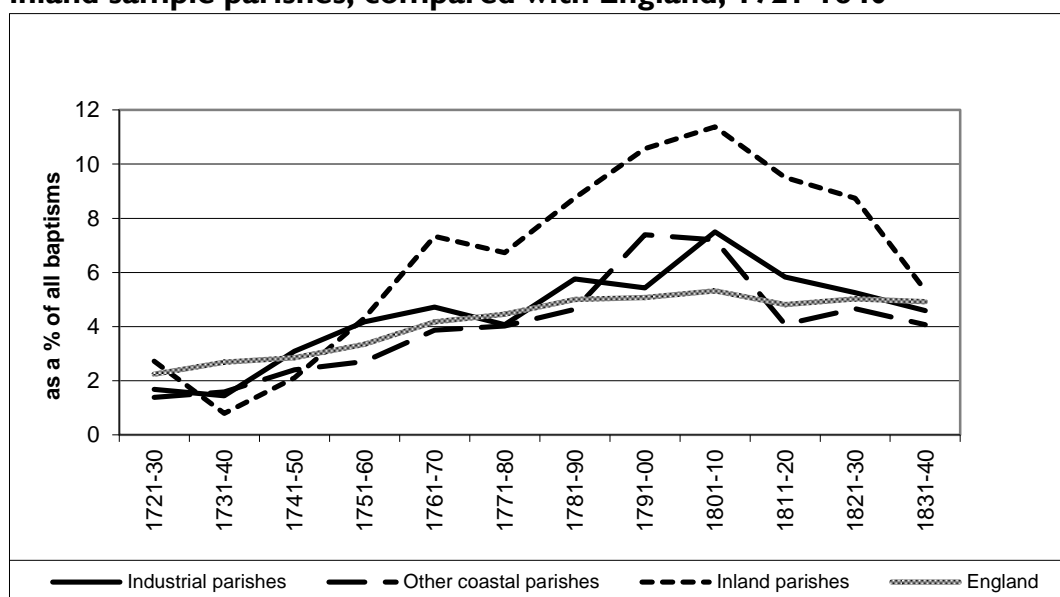
The grouping of parishes used for these comparisons is somewhat arbitrary, developed as part of the administrative structure of civil registration in the 1830s and thus not in use until the end of the period considered here. There are other groupings which potentially might reveal more about the factors associated with varying levels of illegitimacy, though for the period covered by this analysis, there is

¹² G.H. Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 70.

a dearth of information which could be used to distinguish the economic, social and cultural characteristics of the parishes.

One distinction which can be made is geographical, between coastal and inland parishes.¹³ The south Wales coastal parishes tended to be more open to outside influences, through the medium of coastal trade, than those inland, where road communications were poor. A greater proportion of people spoke English, partly in consequence of trade links, and in some areas as a result of deliberate immigration, as in Gower. The Glamorgan coastal parishes can be further sub-divided between those which were mainly industrial in character and the remainder. A further division of the inland parishes into upland and lowland might have revealed whether their different agricultural economies had any impact on illegitimacy ratios, but in practice this distinction could not be made, as few parishes were entirely confined to one category or the other. Figure 3.7 shows that the illegitimacy ratio

Figure 3.7 Glamorgan: illegitimacy ratio in industrial, other coastal and inland sample parishes, compared with England, 1721-1840



for inland parishes was substantially higher than that for coastal industrial or other coastal parishes.¹⁴ Illegitimacy ratios for the latter two series were in fact not

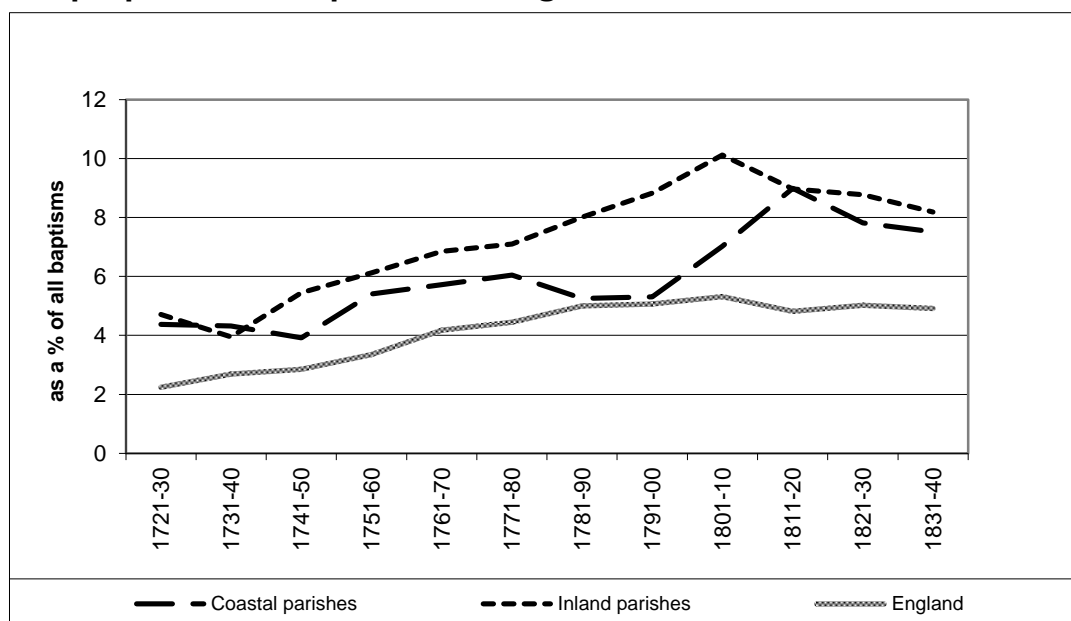
¹³ Jenkins noted the geographical diversity of the area, including the contrast between the barren uplands of Glamorgan and the fertile Vale of Glamorgan (G. H. Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales* (Cambridge, 2007), pp, 87-8).

¹⁴ The parishes classified as industrialised here are Aberavon, Margam, Neath and Llansamlet.

markedly different from that for England except around the turn of the eighteenth century. Thus the major part of the difference between Glamorgan and England in illegitimacy ratios can be accounted for in the higher ratios found in inland parishes.

Industrialised parishes in Carmarthenshire were not separately identified, since those with some industrial development still retained a predominantly rural character. As can be seen in Figure 3.8, illegitimacy ratios were again higher in inland parishes, though the difference is not as marked as for Glamorgan, and both series are higher than that for England. There is clear evidence here of an association between levels of illegitimacy and particular economic and cultural characteristics: higher rates in inland, Welsh-speaking areas, lower rates in Anglicised coastal areas.

Figure 3.8 Carmarthenshire: illegitimacy ratio in coastal and inland sample parishes, compared with England, 1721-1840



Adair, noting the different underlying pattern of illegitimacy in the lowlands and highlands of England before the mid-seventeenth century, questioned whether any national statistics for that period can be meaningful.¹⁵ A similar point might be made in respect of aggregate figures for Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire during the period of this study. However the variation between the two counties in the patterns of illegitimacy is inextricably linked, since employment opportunities in

¹⁵ Adair, *Courtship*, p. 64.

Glamorgan encouraged in-migration and facilitated marriage and hence had the effect of legitimising some births conceived extra-maritally in Carmarthenshire. There is a better case for separating out the coastal parishes of Glamorgan from the upland areas, though more work needs to be done on establishing the boundaries of the coastal region.

Up to this point, illegitimacy ratios in the two Welsh counties have been compared with ratios for England as a whole, and for Adair's regional groups (Figure 3.4). How do south Wales' county ratios compare with those for English counties and parishes? The data collected by King for small samples of parishes in three counties, Lancashire, Wiltshire and Somerset, during the period 1734-1849 show that illegitimacy in Carmarthenshire followed a strikingly similar path to that for Lancashire up to the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Over the same period, the paths of the illegitimacy ratios for Wiltshire and Somerset were lower than those for Carmarthenshire and Lancashire, and broadly similar to that for Glamorgan as a whole, though that for inland Glamorgan was substantially higher than all three English counties. However in the second quarter of the nineteenth century English ratios continued to rise, whereas the two Welsh county ratios fell, further evidence of the different evolution of illegitimacy in south Wales during this period.¹⁶ Evidence from the small number of published series of illegitimacy ratios for English parishes in the decades between 1750 and 1820 suggests that from 1780 to 1820 ratios for Carmarthenshire and inland Glamorgan parishes lay at the higher end of the range found in England; while a majority of south Wales' parishes had ratios over 8 per cent during this period, this was true for only a minority of English parishes.¹⁷ However, none of the parishes in the south Wales sample had ratios as high as that of the weaving township of Culceth in Lancashire, which reached well over a quarter in the 1840s.¹⁸

¹⁶ S. King, 'The bastardy-prone sub-society again: bastards and their fathers and mothers in Lancashire, Wiltshire and Somerset, 1800-1840', in Levene *et al.* (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, pp. 72-3.

¹⁷ English examples from Laslett *et al.*, *Bastardy*, pp. 96-7, pp. 124-5; G. Wyatt, 'Bastardy and prenuptial pregnancy in a Cheshire town during the eighteenth century', *Local Population Studies* (1992), p. 42; S. Scott and C. J. Duncan, 'Interacting factors affecting illegitimacy in preindustrial northern England', *Journal of Biosocial Science* (1997), p. 155. The smallest south Wales parishes – those with an average of fewer than 10 baptisms a year – have been excluded from this analysis.

¹⁸ G. N. Gandy, 'Illegitimacy in a Handloom-Weaving Community: Fertility Patterns in Culceth, Lancashire, 1781-1860', unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1978, p. 35. Illegitimacy ratios in the south Wales sample do not exceed 16 per cent, except in a few small parishes where

The broadly similar paths of illegitimacy ratio in Carmarthenshire and Lancashire from the 1730s to about 1820 prompts the question of what else the two counties had in common. There were similar socio-geographical features: hilly, sometimes mountainous, countryside, numerous river valleys and communities isolated by difficult travel conditions; and both were home to growing Nonconformity. Moreover the description of illegitimacy in Lancashire as ‘ingrained into the local demographic and socio-economic landscape’ might equally apply to Carmarthenshire.¹⁹ But society in Lancashire was fast becoming urbanised and industrialised while Carmarthenshire remained very largely rural and agricultural throughout the period.

To summarise the results of the parish register analyses:

- From 1671 to 1740 or thereabouts, the differences between England and south Wales in illegitimacy ratio were small, and well within the variation found among the English regions by Adair.
- From the middle of the eighteenth century the illegitimacy ratio rose faster in the two south Wales counties taken together than in England; from around 1800 it began to fall, and though the English ratio started to decline at about this time, the rate of decline was not so fast, and was not sustained.
- Within the sample of south Wales’ parishes the pattern of growth from the mid-eighteenth century followed by decline in the early nineteenth century was strongest in upland Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire. By contrast, the path of the illegitimacy ratio in the coastal and industrial parishes of the Glamorgan sample was not very different from that in England. In Carmarthenshire, the difference between coastal and inland illegitimacy ratios was not as marked as in Glamorgan, and the two series tended to converge in the early years of the nineteenth century.
- During the period 1780 to 1820 – the period of peak illegitimacy ratios – most parishes in Carmarthenshire and inland Glamorgan had ratios at the higher end

Anglican baptisms had been severely depleted by the rise of Nonconformity.

¹⁹ King, ‘The bastardy-prone sub-society again’ in Levene *et al.* (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 83.

of the English range, whereas most parishes in coastal and industrial Glamorgan were generally rather closer to the English average.

It is difficult to relate the picture described above to any of the established theories which seek to explain changes in the levels of illegitimacy. There is little evidence here for a connection between rising rates of illegitimacy and industrialisation, as advanced by Edward Shorter; rather the contrary. Nor does the rise in illegitimacy rates from the mid-eighteenth century take place in a period of improving economic conditions in the inland parishes of south Wales, as the 'courtship intensity' hypothesis would suggest; and theories based on changing sexual practices among the young as a result of new ideas about the body and gender seem inappropriate for remote Welsh parishes. However 'courtship frustration' might be a credible explanation for the rise in the illegitimacy ratio during the social tensions of the second half of the eighteenth century, and goes some way to explaining the decline in the early decades of the nineteenth century, particularly in Glamorgan, where employment opportunities were improving with the growth in mining and metal manufacture.

Another component of change within south Wales during the later eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century was migration from rural areas to the metal works and coalfields, which quickened towards the end of the eighteenth century and continued throughout much of the following century. Differential rates of migration of women of single and married status tended to increase the bastardy ratio in rural areas and reduce it in industrial areas without any change in the underlying illegitimate fertility rate, as the movement of men and their families to the industrial areas reduced the numbers of legitimate children born in rural areas. The principal destination of migrant labour from south Wales and beyond in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was Merthyr. The 1851 census shows that migrants from Carmarthenshire played a very substantial part in the growth of Merthyr, accounting for a similar proportion of male heads of household in Dowlais as Glamorgan-born men (both 26%). Though the surviving men who migrated during the first few decades of the nineteenth century made up only a small proportion of the population in 1851, nevertheless it is reasonable to

assume that similar migration patterns might have been in place during the first half of the nineteenth century. We may therefore qualify the conclusion of the last paragraph by adding that migration from Carmarthenshire to Glamorgan tended to offset some of the reduction in the Carmarthenshire illegitimacy ratio brought about by easier access to marriage, while migration into Glamorgan of recently married women tended to diminish the ratio there.

The impact of migration on illegitimacy was more complex than the mere arithmetical effect on the ratio. Availability of work in the industrial areas might facilitate marriage for a man from a rural parish with a pregnant partner, thus avoiding fathering a bastard; or he might move there to avoid his paternal responsibilities. Women left in rural parishes with a falling sex ratio and declining potential courtship opportunities might run a lower risk of illegitimacy through a lack of partners; alternatively they might become willing to embark on sexual relations at an earlier stage in their relationships. In addition, the foregoing analysis makes the assumption that illegitimacy was usually the result of a failure of courtship. It is also possible that illegitimacy occurred where there was no intention to marry, for instance that in the new settlements which grew up around coal mines and metal works, couples were inclined to cohabit rather than marry. We will consider later whether there is any support for these arguments when we examine the characteristics of parents of illegitimate children.

The possibility must also be considered that the observed change in the path of the bastardy ratio in south Wales during this period is at least partly an artefact of the recording process, though it is difficult to construct hypotheses which might have produced this effect. The most likely candidate is Nonconformity, which affected the population at large to a greater extent than in England; the growth in the numbers of adherents during the eighteenth century had by the early nineteenth century made a significant impact on membership of the established church, and consequently on the numbers of Anglican baptisms. One might suppose that by and large, those who left the church to follow a Nonconformist cause were the more virtuous members of society, those less likely to bear bastards, but this would tend to increase bastardy ratios derived from parish registers, rather than reduce them.

It is possible that the uncertainty about denominational allegiance which the revival produced tended to distance many of the population at large from the established church, and that those without sufficient commitment to become members of a Nonconformist cause nevertheless became less likely to have their children baptised in the Church of England. It is difficult to believe that this alone could be responsible for the path of the bastardy ratio at the turn of the eighteenth century, but it might have played a part in muddying the waters.

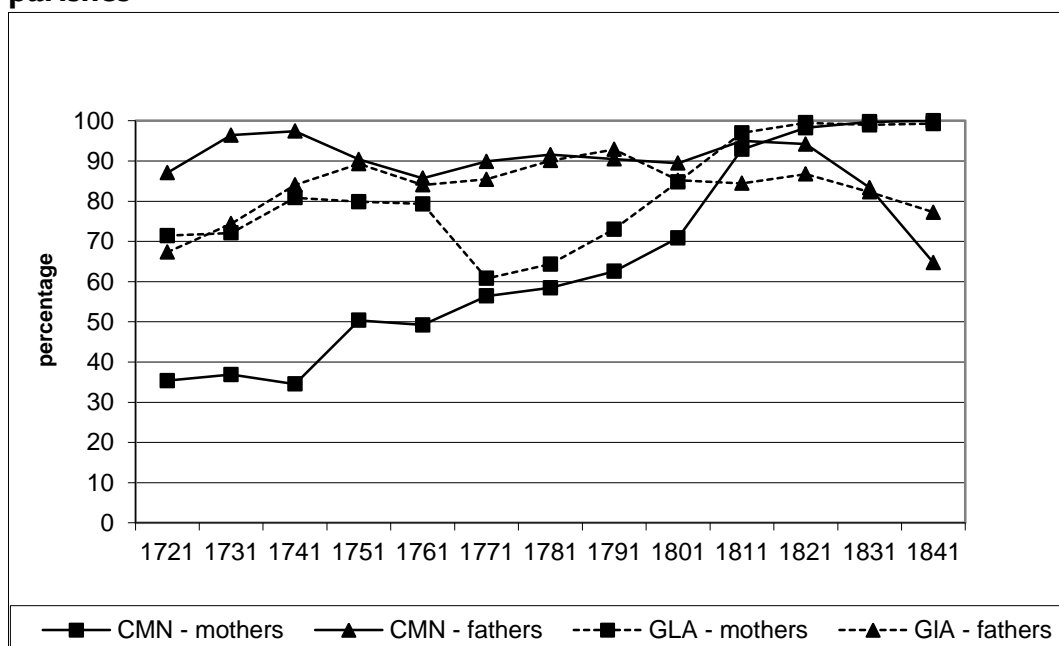
In summary, while there are credible explanations for the fall in illegitimacy at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is harder to explain why illegitimacy had grown so strongly in the previous half century. We turn now to the information about parents of illegitimate children found in parish registers to see what light that might cast on the issues.

The parents of illegitimate children

Who were the parents of illegitimate children? Some information can be gleaned from baptismal registers, and from nominal linkage with poor law and ecclesiastical records. Although parishes were required to keep a book for the recording of baptisms, the form of the records was not prescribed, and parishes varied widely in the amount of information recorded. In the eighteenth century, registers for the parishes considered in this study rarely recorded much beyond the parents' names, particularly in the earlier part of the century. Indeed in many parishes there were quite lengthy periods during which the mother's name was not recorded, even when the child was illegitimate (and only her name was known with certainty), possibly reflecting the father's legal responsibility for the child's upkeep. Even after Rose's Act, which introduced printed baptismal and burial registers in 1813, asking for parents' names, abodes and descriptions of their occupation or status, the information provided was often incomplete.²⁰ Figure 3.9 shows the proportion of parents of illegitimate children who were named in baptismal

²⁰ The Parochial Registers Act, 1812 (52 Geo.III c.146), known as Rose's Act, introduced printed baptismal registers with columns labelled 'Abode' and 'Quality, Trade or Profession'.

Figure 3.9 Named parents of illegitimate children in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, as a proportion of all illegitimate baptisms in sample parishes



registers, in sample parishes in Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan, from 1721 to 1850. There is a marked difference between the two counties. In Carmarthenshire only a minority of mothers were named at the start of the period, with the proportion gradually increasing to nearly complete coverage by the start of the nineteenth century; in contrast around 90 percent of Carmarthenshire fathers were named during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but the proportion declined after the introduction of the New Poor Law removed responsibility for the child's upkeep from the putative father. In Glamorgan differences between recording practices for fathers and mothers during the eighteenth century were less marked; from the 1830s the pattern was similar to that for Carmarthenshire, one of a near universal provision of mothers' names and a declining identification of fathers. In both counties however naming practice seems to have been very different from the English examples given by Oosterveen and Smith, where fathers were much less likely to be named and mothers rather more likely, than in either Welsh county.²¹ Naming practices in England were however by no means uniform. Over the period

²¹ K. Oosterveen and R. Smith, 'Bastardy and the family reconstitution studies of Colyton, Aldenham, Alcester and Hawkshead', in Laslett *et al.*, *Bastardy*. Muir, in her study of illegitimacy in Hawarden in Flintshire and St Peter, Carmarthen in the eighteenth century, found that over two-thirds of entries named the father. A. Muir, 'Illegitimacy in eighteenth-century Wales', *Welsh History Review* (2013), pp. 361-3.

1538-1750, Adair found a marked contrast between his eastern region, where around a quarter of register entries named fathers, with the north-west, where fathers were named in 88 per cent of illegitimate registrations in the period to 1650, falling to 52 per cent in the later period. He hypothesised that before 1650 these differences reflected 'a genuinely different courtship regime' in operation, in which parents of illegitimate children in the north-west were more likely to be involved the marriage process than were parents of illegitimate children elsewhere.²² If this hypothesis is correct, the implication is that not only did a similar courtship regime operate in south Wales, but that it endured rather longer, eroding only in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Later chapters will investigate the factors which contributed to this erosion.

Information about the parents' abode was also rarely recorded during much of the eighteenth century, except where they resided outside the parish of baptism. Parents' abode had no particular legal significance for illegitimate children, since the latter took their settlement from their parish of birth; more likely its recording reflected the 'culture of local xenophobia' which Snell described in *Parish and Belonging*.²³ During the eighteenth century, it would appear that only a small proportion of parents resided outside the parish in which their illegitimate child was baptised, but from the beginning of the nineteenth century increasing numbers, particularly of fathers, lived further afield. However as information on abode was not consistently recorded until the introduction of printed registers, extra-parochial baptisms may well be under-recorded, and for that reason the discussion below covers only the period from 1813. No analyses have been compiled for Glamorgan mothers, where abode had not been consistently included in the transcription used for this study. Similar considerations apply to information about occupation or status, considered later. Thus parish registers cannot tell us much about parents of illegitimate children born in the eighteenth century, though they are more informative about nineteenth-century parents.

²² Adair, *Courtship*, pp.78-9.

²³ K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), Chapter 2.

Table 3.3 Abode of parents as a percentage of all those with recorded abodes, in sample parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, 1813-1840

	Glamorgan ¹	Carmarthenshire	
	fathers	fathers	mothers
Same parish	70.9	73.2	85.6
Metal working districts	2.0	4.7	1.4
Rest of Glamorgan	23.9	1.9	1.1
Rest of Carmarthenshire	-	15.4	10.3
Other	3.2	4.8	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	790	1044	915

As Table 3.3 shows, about a quarter of the fathers of illegitimate children baptised in Glamorgan had an abode elsewhere in the county, or in the metal-working districts of north-east Monmouthshire. Fathers of illegitimate children baptised in Carmarthenshire were more likely to live outside their own county than were the fathers of Glamorgan-baptised children, no doubt reflecting the greater employment opportunities in Glamorgan. Nevertheless, the proportion was small, and does not suggest that large numbers of fathers were trying to evade their responsibilities by moving to the industrial districts. Not surprisingly, since baptism was most likely to take place in the mother's parish, a high proportion of Carmarthenshire mothers had an abode in the parish of baptism. This proportion increased over time, from 82 per cent in 1813-20 to 89 per cent in 1831-40. Probably most of the 14 per cent of mothers who had an abode outside than the parish of baptism were in service there. Just under 10 per cent of couples gave the same address; they were for the most part either pairs of servants, or master and servant.

Table 3.4 Occupation of fathers of illegitimate children in sample parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, 1813-40

	Glamorgan	Carmarthenshire
Total number of cases	958	1,369
No information about father	140	374
Fathers with occupations	818	995
<i>as a % of total:</i>		
Farmers/ farmers' sons	17.9	21.1
Retail trade, handicrafts	17.4	18.2
Manufacturing	4.4	1.7
Mining and quarrying	8.0	3.7
Other labourers	37.5	18.9
Capitalists, bankers, professional and other educated men	4.2	5.8
Servants	6.1	26.7
Other	4.6	3.9
	100.0	100.0

As with abode, analysis of occupation shown in Table 3.4 has been restricted to the period 1813-1840. In both counties, information for mothers was incomplete, often left blank, or status – single woman, daughter, wife or widow – given instead. In Carmarthenshire, mothers were more likely to have their occupation recorded, but even so this covered only 29 per cent of women named in the registers; nine tenths of these were described as servants. A further 23 per cent were described by their status. Among those mothers for whom there was some description in the relevant column, the proportion labelled by status rather than occupation increased from 34 per cent in 1813-20 to 65 per cent in 1831-40; though this may to some degree reflect declining opportunities for unmarried women to find employment outside the home, it may also indicate a perception by the clergyman or clerk filling in the register that the transgressive status of a single or widowed mother was a more relevant description than her occupation. Cases where the woman was described as someone else's wife were very rare, as were instances of 'supposed wife' and similar descriptions indicating uncertainty about a couple's marital status.

Although the terms 'farm servant' or 'servant in husbandry' were used for some fathers, that distinction has not been made here; it is evident that many of the other servants were also agricultural servants, as their residences were for the most part farms, rather than the gentry houses which would have employed male domestic servants. The most common combination of occupations was for both parents to be servants, accounting for nearly half of all cases where both occupations were recorded.

Table 3.5 compares the occupations of fathers of illegitimate children with those of all adult men in the same sample of parishes in the 1831 census. Some of the differences in the distribution of occupations between sample and population are life-cycle effects, as fathers of illegitimate children are likely to have been younger on average than the population of all adult males, and most of those who were servants in their twenties would have moved to other occupations later in life, probably mainly to labouring. The numbers of servants recorded in the census is so low, particularly in Carmarthenshire, that it seems likely that agricultural servants were included elsewhere, probably with agricultural labourers. Thus for the purposes of comparison it makes sense to combine labourers and servants. With this proviso, the pattern of employment of fathers of illegitimate children is seen to be broadly similar to the adult male population. More labourers and servants, and fewer farmers, fathered illegitimate children than would be expected from their numbers in the population of the Carmarthenshire sample of parishes; again this could be a life-cycle effect, but it is not apparent in Glamorgan. A higher proportion of fathers of illegitimate children were classified as 'capitalists, bankers, professional and other educated men', than were the adult male population as a whole in either county sample – more than twice as many in the case of Carmarthenshire - though the numbers are small. Overall, and allowing for uncertainties of occupational definitions and life-cycle effects, the pattern of fathers' occupations was fairly close to that of adult men as a whole, suggesting that fathering an illegitimate child was not the behaviour of a single class of men, a finding echoed by that of Black in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century London, but contrasting with Reay's study of rural Kent, where both fathers and mothers were

disproportionately from labouring families.²⁴ The lack of occupational information for women makes it difficult to determine whether parents came from the same class.

Table 3.5 Comparison of occupations of fathers of illegitimate children in sample parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, 1813-40, with men aged 20+ from 1831 census (percentages)

	Glamorgan		Carmarthenshire	
	Fathers of illegitimate children	Men aged 20+, 1831 census	Fathers of illegitimate children	Men aged 20+, 1831 census
Farmers/ farmers' sons	17.9	18.0	21.1	28.3
Retail trade, handicrafts	17.4	20.3	18.2	22.8
Manufacturing	4.4	3.5	1.7	1.6
Labourers	45.5	50.9	22.6	40.2
Capitalists, bankers, professional and other educated men	4.2	2.8	5.8	2.7
Servants	6.1	1.0	26.7	1.0
Other	4.6	3.4	3.9	3.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>of which:</i>				
Servants & labourers	51.6	51.8	49.3	43.6

Higher status fathers of illegitimate children are of some interest, both because of their role in administering the poor law, and, more widely, as leaders of society whose behaviour might influence others. The range of rank and occupations is wide, including the landed gentry, industrialists and the professions, particularly lawyers and surgeons. Where a description is given for the mother, it is almost invariably that of servant. The Carmarthenshire landed gentry seem to have been more likely to father illegitimate children than those in Glamorgan, and they tended to be of higher status, including several High Sheriffs.²⁵ Many of the fathers of

²⁴ J. Black, 'Who were the putative fathers of illegitimate children in London, 1740-1810?' in Levene *et al.* (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 64; H. Reay, *Microhistories: Demography, society and culture in rural England, 1800-1930* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 188-9.

²⁵ Among notable fathers of bastards, Francis Lloyd of Glyn and George Philipps of Coedgain were High Sheriffs of Carmarthenshire in 1717 and 1770 respectively; several members of the Gwynne family of Glanbran were High Sheriffs of Brecknockshire between 1761 and 1807 (though it is not always clear whether the High Sheriff and the bastard father are the same person or father and son); John Llewellyn of Great House, Welsh St Donats and John Nathaniel Miers, of Ynyspenllwch were High Sheriffs of Glamorgan in 1789 and 1808 respectively.

bastards among the Carmarthenshire gentry, particularly those from the Tywi valley area, were connected by social, business and family links, whereas no obvious groupings are apparent among their equivalents in Glamorgan.

The circumstances within which the illegitimacy occurred are varied. Several gentry fathers, like Stephen Jones, surgeon and landowner of Ystrad, Llandovery, seem to have confined their amorous adventures to periods outside their marriage.²⁶ A few avoided marriage altogether, such as George Philipps of Coedgain, MP for Carmarthenshire at the time of his death, who fathered at least eight children by five women.²⁷ Leyshon Hopkin Davy, gentleman, and Elizabeth Lawrence, of St Brides Minor, Glamorgan, are unusual in that they seem to have delayed their marriage until after the birth of their seventh child in 1832; no other examples of marriage similarly postponed have been found among this group.²⁸ There is evidence among wills of provision for illegitimate children and, occasionally, their mothers. In 1785, George Philipps left legacies amounting to £900 and a yearly income totalling £100 to his eight illegitimate children and the mother of the three youngest.²⁹ Stephen Jones, whose only legitimate child died in infancy, left his estate to one of his illegitimate sons, who by 1875 had become sufficiently respectable to be included in lists of the county gentry.³⁰ Other fathers were less generous; in 1776 James Hugill of Llandingad left £5 a year to support his illegitimate daughter, not a great deal more than the prevailing poor law maintenance rates.³¹ Not only the gentry, but also some professional men who fathered illegitimate children might be involved with the administration of the poor law; towards the end of the period considered in this chapter, William Edmondes of Cowbridge, Glamorgan, reputed father of an illegitimate child, acted as clerk to the local Poor Law Guardians.³² The behaviour of this group suggests that they saw bastardy as primarily an economic rather than a moral issue; fault lay with those men who

²⁶ Baptisms: Llandingad parish register, 1816-1838; marriage: 1838 (*Cambrian* newspaper, 26 May 1838).

²⁷ Llangunnor baptismal register, SD/1785/171

²⁸ St Brides Minor baptismal register, 1822-36.

²⁹ NLW, SD/1785/171

³⁰ T. Nicholas, *Annals and Antiquities of the Counties and County Families of Wales*, 1875, p.292.

³¹ Information from the will of James Hugill's father, NLW, BR/1776/36

³² Coychurch baptismal registers, 1838.

sought to avoid their responsibility to maintain their bastards, rather than with their creation in the first place.

Many of the higher class fathers of illegitimate children were responsible for several illegitimate births, 'repeaters' in the terminology used by Laslett et al.³³ In considering illegitimate births among the population as a whole, the small pool of names in common use prevents the compilation of meaningful statistics about the numbers who had more than one illegitimate child. The problem is not just one of falsely linking two different individuals of the same name, but also of overlooking a valid link because of the frequent occurrence of the name. For example, six baptisms of illegitimate children were recorded in the parish of Ilston, Gower, with a mother named Ann[e] David/Davies between 1808 and 1825, two of them in March and May 1808.³⁴ In the absence of any other information, and given the span of years and closeness of two of the dates, it would be reasonable to assume that at least two women were involved, and possibly more. However in each case the father was named as John Morris. Even with the gentry, it is often difficult to distinguish whether two instances of the same name are indeed the same person, or a father and son. The example of Anne Davies and John Morris illustrates another problem: that 'repeaters', both male and female, are much more likely to be identified as such when the same partner is involved.

Nevertheless, while it is impossible to quantify the proportion of parents of either sex who had more than one illegitimate child, it seems clear that most parents of illegitimate children, both male and female, had only one, and the number who had more than two was very small indeed. It is possible to gain an impression of changes over time, and to compare patterns in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, using a relatively cautious identification of 'repeaters'; this analysis suggests that the incidence of 'repeaters' was rather higher in Carmarthenshire than in Glamorgan, and that this higher level persisted for a longer period than in Glamorgan. Although 'repeaters' contributed a little to higher levels of illegitimacy in the late eighteenth century, this was not a significant factor in the increase, in contrast with some

³³ See for instance K. Oosterveen, R.M. Smith and S. Stewart, 'Family reconstitution and the study of bastardy: evidence from certain English parishes', Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, pp. 86.

³⁴ Ilston baptismal register, 1808-25.

English studies.³⁵ The incidence of repeaters in both counties declined between 1800 and 1820, a decade before the decline in the overall illegitimacy ratios for the two counties, possibly suggesting that the growth of opportunities for employment had an earlier impact on repeated illegitimacies. The problems of Welsh surnames and the lack of detail in parish registers rule out any attempt to search systematically for familial and locational links between parents of illegitimate children. In rural areas, a few farm names recur as the abodes of parents, suggesting lax supervision by some employers, and familial links between ‘bastard-bearers’ (particularly sisters) are sometimes evident, but this hardly amounts to evidence of the ‘bastardy-prone sub-society’ found for instance by Laslett and King.³⁶

A group of particular interest is that of couples who had several children together, and apparently no other partners. They illustrate a variety of relationships which conform neither to the conventional “accident of courtship” model of illegitimacy nor to formal marriage. They fall into three broad groups.³⁷ The first group, those who eventually married each other, may have delayed marriage for economic reasons, or they may have felt no particular pressure to marry. Anne Howells and Morgan Davies of Llanddeusant, Carmarthenshire, had four children together but apparently continued to live at their respective parents’ farms for several years before they married and moved in with Morgan’s parents; possibly they had hoped to start married life in a farm of their own, but were unable to find the necessary resources.³⁸ William Thomas gives several examples of couples who cohabited before marriage, though no children are mentioned, for example:

30 December 1764. This day was published two admirable Banns in St. Andrews Church, vizt. between William Morgan and Margaret ...after leading a life together as man and wife this three Quarters of a year or more, also between Thomas Water, Carpenter, and Mary Lewelin ... and after his Banns

³⁵ See for instance K. Oosterveen, R. M. Smith and S. Stewart, ‘Family reconstitution and the study of bastardy: evidence from certain English parishes’, in Laslett et al., *Bastardy and its Comparative History*, p. 87.

³⁶ Laslett, ‘The bastardy prone sub-society’, Laslett et al., *Bastardy*, pp. 217-240, King, ‘The bastardy prone sub-society again’ in Levene et al. (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, pp. 84-5.

³⁷ See G. Frost, *Living in Sin: Cohabiting as Husband and Wife in Nineteenth-Century England*, (Manchester, 2008), p. 3, for a slightly different categorisation of cohabitation.

³⁸ Llanddeusant baptismal register 1835-42; marriage register 1843; 1851 census: HO107/2470 ED 1d ff194

was published between he and Elizabeth Webb ... with whom he lived a year or more as man and wife.³⁹

The second group were those who were unable to marry because of legal prohibitions. This included people in existing marriages who also had a lover, separated couples, and those in a prohibited relationship, such as brother- and sister-in-law. The ecclesiastical courts of Llandaff and St David's have several examples of prosecutions of people living together in prohibited relationships, described as 'incest', for example Jane Bennet of Llantwit juxta Neath, who had a child with her late husband's brother in 1799.⁴⁰ However it is probable that the majority of cases in this group were of married men who kept mistresses. With divorce virtually impossible, some wives attempted to obtain a 'divorce from bed and board', which allowed separation but not re-marriage, but many simply lived with the situation. As the Glamorgan poet James Turberville wrote:

*Mi ddala bunt mewn ceinog,
Y caiff y meistres wybod
Fod y meistr ar y Graig
Yn cadw gwraig cymydog.*

I will bet a pound to a penny
That the Mistress will know
The Master at the Graig
Keeps a neighbour's wife.⁴¹

The last group is of those who were free to marry but chose not to. Although there were many examples in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of people who had principled objections to marriage, there is no evidence of such cases in this sample. For some the inhibiting factor is likely to have been the disparity in social class of the two partners, such as the case of Adam Verity, surgeon and widower, who according to the 1841 census lived in Coity, Glamorgan, with his legitimate children, while Elizabeth John, the mother of his three illegitimate children, lived with them in St Brides.⁴² George Philipps, referred to earlier, is another example of someone who chose not to marry; the suspicion is that he found relationships with his servants more convenient, allowing him to lead an

³⁹ William Thomas, *Diary*, p.127.

⁴⁰ NLW, LL/CC/G 1570, 1570a.

⁴¹ J.H. (ed.). 'Reminiscences of old inhabitants of Cardiff.' *Cardiff Records: volume 5* (1905), pp. 316-331.

⁴² 1841 census: HO/142/02/006, HO/1422/48/36

active public life without the expense and distraction which a wife of his own class might have brought.⁴³

In summary, most illegitimate children were 'singletons', both of whose parents were recorded in the register and came from a similar background and location; 'repeaters' were responsible for only a small proportion of illegitimate children. The majority of mothers were single or widowed. Fathers' occupations largely reflected those of the community at large, whereas mothers of gentry and similar status appeared to be entirely absent. These parental characteristics suggest that most relationships fell within the definition of courtship, loosely drawn to include situations where only one of the partners intended marriage. Relationships which fell outside this definition included cohabitation, which seems to have been relatively uncommon, and the keeping of mistresses by the gentry and professional men, which seems to have resulted in a higher rate of illegitimacy than in the community as a whole. The circumstances surrounding much illegitimacy, particularly the widespread acknowledgement of paternity, and the choice by some couples to marry at a time which suited them rather than following early indications of pregnancy, suggests that there was a good deal of toleration of illegitimacy within the community, at least when the child was unlikely to be a burden to the ratepayers.

Support for illegitimate children

So far the focus has been on the parents of illegitimate children; we now turn to the question of the outcomes for the children themselves. If the child survived early infancy (potentially more dangerous for illegitimate children than for the legitimate), who brought him/her up, and who bore the cost? Was care provided by the mother, extended family, by an unrelated carer or in an institution? A substantial proportion, sometimes the majority, of illegitimate children in this study who survived early infancy were brought up without support from parish relief, as is clear from a comparison of the numbers of illegitimate baptisms and the numbers

⁴³ George Philipps was successively Sheriff of Carmarthen borough (1767), High Sheriff of the county (1770), Mayor of Carmarthen (1773) and MP for Carmarthen borough (1780-84). W. R. Williams, *The Parliamentary History of the Principality of Wales, 1541-1895* (1895).

relieved. Nevertheless, even parents who expected to be able to provide for their children from their own resources might find that they attracted the attention of the parish officers, ever vigilant to avoid a charge on the poor rates, and might modify their actions accordingly. In practice it is difficult to discover much in this period about mothers and children who survived without support from the poor law. Some information can be gleaned about mothers who later married, or natural children who appear in their fathers' wills, but for the most part this is fragmentary, and often untypical. We have to wait until the period of the New Poor Law, and enumerators' reports from the early censuses, to get a more rounded picture of their lives.

Poor Law provision for illegitimate children

The old poor law system of support for illegitimate children derived from a series of Acts passed between 1576 and 1601, which laid a duty upon the parish to ensure that its poor were supported and cared for. The parish was to appoint overseers of the poor, to collect the poor rate and to relieve those in need. In the case of illegitimate children, the parish was empowered to recover its costs from the child's parents. The law provided punishments to deter illegitimacy; from 1610, either parent could be sentenced to be whipped, and women unable to support their illegitimate children could be sent to the House of Correction for a year. A number of changes between 1732 and 1744 formalised the process of identifying the child's father and arranging for its support. Henceforth a woman pregnant with a bastard likely to become 'a burden on the parish' was required to declare the fact and to name the father before two magistrates. A filiation order set out the weekly sum needed to maintain the child, and the contributions required from each of the parents, though the mother's was usually waived if she cared for the child. If the father failed to maintain the child, he could be gaoled. An alternative was a bond whereby the father (or possibly another relative) agreed to take over the maintenance of the child himself; failure would render him liable to pay the parish a substantial sum, as shown in the extract below from a bastardy bond dated 1814 concerning the child of John Morgan and Mary Thomas, born in the parish of Llangynwyd:

... we John Morgan of Rhiw-Meele, Thomas Jenkins of Brith-Tyr and Rees Bowen of Blaen-Lloyd, all in the parish of Cadoxton near Neath in the county

of Glamorgan Yeomen are held and firmly bound unto Thomas Evans of Dyffryn in the parish of Langonoyd in the said County Yeoman in the sum of Fifty pounds...[having agreed with] the said John Morgan for the future nursing cloathing bringing up feeding and maintaining of the said Female Bastard child at his own proper cost and charges from the day of the date hereof, for and during the term of the natural life of the said Bastard Child at and for the price or sum of Twenty seven pounds...⁴⁴

An illegitimate child took its place of settlement from its parish of birth; this encouraged parish authorities to attempt to remove to another parish unmarried pregnant women who might impose a burden on the poor rate. The practice, which had obvious consequences for the health of mother and child, was made illegal by the 1732 Act, which forbade the removal of pregnant women or mothers within a month from the birth of their child.

In the Tudor and early Stuart period, the parish was concerned to enforce church discipline in respect of bastardy as well as dealing with its economic consequences. Both parents were liable to be punished by the ecclesiastical courts for fornication, through undergoing a public act of penance, and as we have seen they risked penalties under civil law if they were unable or unwilling to support the child. By the late eighteenth century church courts had largely ceased to bring charges of fornication.⁴⁵ Although the civil punishments of detention and whipping were still on the statute book, parishes tended to use them sparingly, for instance in cases where a women had several illegitimate children, or where her behaviour offended the community in other ways, as the replies to the questionnaires sent to parishes by the Commissioners enquiring into the state of the poor laws show.⁴⁶

For illegitimate children who were supported by the parish, vestry books and poor law accounts provide some information, but although some documentation has survived for about two-fifths of the sample parishes used in this study, long runs of years are rare, and extant records of the vast amount of paper generated by

⁴⁴ GRO P82/29/21.

⁴⁵ R. B. Outhwaite *The Rise and Fall of the English Ecclesiastical Courts, 1500–1860*, (Cambridge, 2006), p. 84.

⁴⁶ *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, Appendix (B.1) *Answers to Rural Queries*; Appendix (B2) *Answers to Town Queries I* (PP 1834 xlv. Of the 47 replies from Welsh parishes which provided answers to this question, nearly sixty per cent said that women were seldom or never punished for bearing illegitimate children, and a further 24 per cent said that punishment was restricted to a third or subsequent offence.

bastardy cases involving the poor law authorities are scanty. The majority of the surviving material dates from the period 1780 to the 1830s. Notwithstanding the patchy nature of the records, it is possible to gain some impression of the proportion of illegitimate children supported by the poor law, who cared for them, and at what cost to the parish.

Overseers of the Poor

Overseers of the poor were the cornerstone of the old poor law system. Their duties were extensive, including compiling a list of 'substantial householders' from which subsequent overseers could be selected; collecting the parish rates, paying relief to the poor according to vestry decisions; accounting for these sums; and ensuring that the provisions of the poor laws, particularly relating to settlement, removal and bastardy, were applied so as to minimise costs to the parish. Patricia Crawford suggests that contemporary advice urged overseers 'to regard themselves as civic fathers ... acting as the parent or guardian of those who are in an infant state', and emphasising the importance of hard work and discipline for those on relief.⁴⁷ A substantial farmer, who was accustomed to take paternal responsibility for his indentured servants and apprentices as well as for his immediate family, might thus view the duties of overseer as an extension of his domestic role into the public sphere. In some parishes these duties were combined with those of churchwarden; in others the two posts were separate. Many parishes were divided into hamlets, each of which had their own churchwardens and overseers of the poor. In most parishes in the sample the unit for which an overseer was responsible was quite small, in terms of numbers of people, though the geographical area was not always compact. The parish of Penmark, in the Vale of Glamorgan, with 3,395 acres and a population of 424 in 1801, was divided into two hamlets, each of which had an overseer; the post of churchwarden was generally separate. At the other extreme, Llangadog, Carmarthenshire, with 15,642 acres and 1,821 people in 1801, comprised three hamlets, each with two overseers who combined the post with that of churchwarden. In rural parishes overseers were generally the larger farmers, often taking turn according to a predetermined rota of properties. The rotation would occasionally fall on a householder who by reason of gender or

⁴⁷ P. Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England, 1580-180* (Oxford, 2010), p.197.

advanced age might be unable to fulfil all the duties of overseer, and in such cases a substitute would be appointed, either formally or as the occasion demanded.⁴⁸ In the early nineteenth century overseers of sample parishes generally had responsibility for a few hundred people, though some had much greater loads. Merthyr Tydfil for instance, a single parish with a population of 12,500 in 1811, appointed a salaried general overseer in 1812, at £130 a year.⁴⁹

Workhouses, poorhouses and out-door relief

Parishes could support illegitimate children through out-door relief, paid to the mother or another carer, or in a parish workhouse or poorhouse. Few parishes in south Wales maintained workhouses, although they were empowered to do so, either singly, or in combination with neighbouring parishes, by Knatchbull's Act (The Workhouse Test Act) in 1722-3. A parliamentary report of 1777 recorded only 19 workhouses in Wales, compared with nearly 2,000 in England. Accommodation in most of these was very limited; the 11 workhouses recorded for Pembrokeshire together had a capacity of only 102 places. Two of the Glamorgan workhouses were more substantial, with space for 100 inmates at Swansea, and 200 in Cardiff. Laugharne, the only workhouse listed in Carmarthenshire, had accommodation for 6 paupers.⁵⁰ Nevertheless by the eve of the New Poor Law there were probably many more parishes with buildings which could be used to house the poor; for instance Llantrisant workhouse, which was described in 1836 by George Clive, the Assistant Commissioner for south Wales, as large but ill-managed, had opened in 1784.⁵¹ There are occasional references in overseers' accounts to poorhouses; Penmark in Glamorgan seems to have had a poorhouse in the mid-eighteenth century, since the account book records a payment in the year 1754-55 '... for a quart of ale for raising the ladder to the poorhouse', and in Cenarth, a resolution was recorded in the vestry minutes for 1763 to take a house 'at a moderate rent for the reception of the paupers', though by 1800 it was found necessary to replace it by 'a proper house for the poor of the

⁴⁸ W.E. Tate, *The Parish Chest* (Chichester, 2000), p. 33.

⁴⁹ Grant, R. K. J., *On the Parish* (Glamorgan Archives, 1988), p.61.

⁵⁰ *Report from the Committee appointed to inspect and consider the Returns made by the Overseers of the Poor, in pursuance of Act of last Session. Reported by Thomas Gilbert, Esq. 15th May 1777, (HC 1777).*

⁵¹ TNA, MH 12/16246.

parish'.⁵² Gilbert's Act In 1782, which provided for the setting up of workhouses for the aged and infirm, and children, may have stimulated interest in providing accommodation for the poor across Wales, but, as A.H. Dodd comments in the context of North Wales, these were in the main poorhouses 'intended and used merely as a more economical means of paying the house-rents of paupers', rather than places where paupers were put to work.⁵³ In Carmarthenshire, several parishes recorded resolutions to build poorhouses or workhouses in this period, for example in Llandefaelog (initial agreement to build 1788; in operation from 1795) and Llangadog (agreement to procure a house 1792, in operation from 1793). Pembrey, which had previously provided cottages for the parish poor, resolved in 1824 to put £10 aside to establish a fund to build a poor house, though no evidence has been found that it was built. Elsewhere in Glamorgan, the vestry book for Llansamlet recorded in 1819 a payment for insuring 'the new poor house at Lanlas to the value of £100 at the Norwich Union Office', and in 1838 noted that an abandoned illegitimate child was residing there.⁵⁴

The Llandefaelog vestry resolved in 1795 that 'No paupers [to be] relieved by this Parish without they are willing to partake of the parish charity by coming and living in the almshouse – excepting out of this order such poor widows & her children who may be deemed proper objects of further indulgence'. Other pauper children were relieved in the almshouse, as a resolution dated 1797 shows: 'also agreed that the children now nursing with Evan John and John Ely shall be immediately sent to the Almshouse & there to be taken care of by the paupers relieved there'.⁵⁵ The overseers' accounts for Llangadog show that during 1793-4 relief to the poor was provided by contractors, with many paupers relieved in the workhouse. The contract was continued during 1794-5, but abandoned the following year, with the overseers resuming responsibility for relieving the poor, though the workhouse continued in operation.⁵⁶ Notwithstanding these few attempts to encourage or even force paupers to seek relief in the workhouse, it is

⁵² GRO, Fonmon Castle Estate papers D/D F vol. 79; CRO Cenarth vestry minutes.

⁵³ A. H. Dodd, 'The old poor law in North Wales', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (1926), p. 122.

⁵⁴ GRO, P/60/CW/69.

⁵⁵ CRO, Llandefaelog Vestry Book.

⁵⁶ CRO, CPR/45/18.

clear that the vast majority of illegitimate children in the study area who were supported by the parish received out-door relief.⁵⁷

Payments in support of illegitimate children

Steven King, in the chapter which he contributed to *Illegitimacy in Britain*, described the confusion of Charlotte Eastwood, who, having been awarded maintenance from her child's father, wrote to the overseer of the poor in the township of Billington, Lancashire, to clarify whether she was to receive the money from him, or direct from her child's father.⁵⁸ Those who today investigate surviving poor law material may find themselves in similar confusion about the operations of the system as it applied to bastardy. As Charlotte needed to know with some urgency, through what channel was the money paid? How were payments made by the father through the overseer recorded in the accounts, if at all? Was the sum intended to contribute, at least in part, to support the carer as well as the child? More widely, how generous were the payments, and how did this vary; and how significant were payments relating to bastardy in the context of overall parish relief?

One may imagine that overseers might have preferred in many cases to pay an allowance to support the child and to seek reimbursement from the parent(s), rather than have the parent(s) pay the carer directly, since the former procedure avoided disputes about what had been paid. If the payments and their reimbursement took place in the same accounting period, then it might not be thought necessary to record these balancing transactions in the accounts; but inevitably there would from time to time be delays in parents' payments that straddled accounting periods, and in such cases one would expect to see these late payments recorded as income in the accounts for subsequent periods. However in most of the sample parishes for which overseers' accounts were available, no payments by parents are recorded. Only in the hamlet of Cwmdau, Llangynwyd, over the period 1821 to 1836, do the accounts show regular income from several

⁵⁷ The borough of Cardiff was an exception, maintaining a relatively large workhouse which if fully occupied must have housed a substantial proportion of the town's paupers. Some of the inmates included unmarried mothers. Between 1817 and 1833 the workhouse was given as the address at baptism of ten illegitimate children, though these represented only a small proportion of the total number of illegitimate baptisms in that period.

⁵⁸ S. King, 'The bastardy prone sub-society again: bastards and their fathers and mothers in Lancashire, Wiltshire and Somerset, 1800-1840', in Levene et al. (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, pp. 66-7.

fathers. Elias Treharne, for example, made payments which substantially offset the sums paid out by the overseers to support his child.⁵⁹ A few other parishes show occasional payments by parents, for instance in Wenvoe where the accounts for the six months to May 1810 show payments of £6 by Jane Robert 'for her base child' and of £1 by William Yule (father) 'for Mary Rogers' child'.⁶⁰

Much of the discussion of poor relief for bastards gives the impression that the maintenance was generally paid to mothers. Thomas Nutt, for instance, in his contribution to *Illegitimacy in Britain*, says that although mothers as well as fathers were liable to support their child, 'by the eighteenth century it was almost certainly the case that the mother, as the expected primary carer, would be the recipient of an allowance on behalf of the child'.⁶¹ The same assumption is made in one of the Queries put to parishes by the Commission of Enquiry into the Old Poor Law in 1832: 'What is the allowance received by a woman for a bastard, and does it generally repay her, or more than repay her, the expense of keeping it?'. Margaret Lyle, in her analysis of replies to *Rural Queries* from English parishes, implies that the allowance was received by the mother.⁶² However in many of the parishes in this study, the mother does not seem to have been 'the expected primary carer'. In several, the majority of illegitimate children supported by the parish were nursed by someone else, as in Betws, Glamorgan, where in 1777, Thomas David agreed to keep Thomas the son of Esther Loyd at 1/6 per week. That this was common for illegitimate children in Wales is confirmed by the replies to *Rural Queries*. Some 21 of the 52 parishes who replied to the relevant question mentioned mothers putting their child to nurse or in the poorhouse, as compared with England, where the comparable ratio was 21 out of over 800 parishes. Occasionally among the sample parishes payments were recorded as being made to grandparents, as in Penmark in 1761 when a shilling was paid 'to William James for a bastard child of his daughter'. Several cases in the accounts for Llangathen and Llanddeusant involved maternal or

⁵⁹ GRO, P/82/14.

⁶⁰ GRO, P/51/1.

⁶¹ T. Nutt, 'the paradox and problems of illegitimate paternity in old poor law Essex', in Levene et al. (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p.102.

⁶² *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws*, Appendix (B.1), *Answers to Rural Queries*, pt. I (PP 1834 xlv); M. A. Lyle, 'Regionality in the late old poor law: the treatment of chargeable bastards from Rural Queries', *Agricultural History Review* (2005), pp. 141-157.

paternal grandparents, including one child who lived with each set of grandparents in turn.⁶³ Less frequently, fathers might raise their children. In 1792 John Eastons agreed to look after and maintain his illegitimate child, then aged about two years, who was 'at present nursed by Magdalen John on the charge of the parish of Bettws'. In 1832 the Llancarfan Vestry agreed that 'Thomas William [should] take the child that is kept by Morgan Francis now chargeable to the parish to his own care being his own child', the boy then being around three years old.⁶⁴ However in most cases no relationship is mentioned. Some carers were clearly regulars who took in a succession of children, and many children had a succession of carers.

Several parishes seem to have had a preference for the child to be put out to nurse, threatening to withdraw relief unless the mother gave up her child to the overseer or the poorhouse. The Llancarfan Vestry Book for 1782 notes that 'our overseer shall pay no more money towards the maintenance of the said Bastard [i.e. the child of Mary Samuel] because the mother refused to deliver the said child to our said overseer'. In Pembrey the Vestry resolved in 1806 that Francis Hall's base child should be 'put to proper nurse, or if the mother will not give the child up, no more allowance'.⁶⁵ Susannah Rees seems initially to have fallen foul of the Llanddeusant vestry but was eventually given charge of her child. In August 1824 the vestry paid her costs for caring for her dying pauper mother, but in November demanded that all her mother's possessions be returned to them, and provided support for her child only on condition that nothing was paid to her, otherwise she would be sent to the House of Correction. The child was boarded out until November 1825, when Susannah was awarded a shilling a week for her keep, rising in March 1830 to two shillings for the two of them. The Llanddeusant vestry book gives several other examples of family members looking after illegitimate children, not just mothers, but also maternal and paternal grandparents, as mentioned above. Out of 21 cases between 1824 and 1836 where the carer was identified, ten were the mother or another family member. One of these mothers also cared for a couple of other, apparently unrelated, illegitimate children. However, many of the

⁶³ GRO, Fonmon Castle Estate D/D F vol.79; CRO, Llanddeusant Vestry Book, CPR/6/13.

⁶⁴ GRO, P/77/3 & P/36/13.

⁶⁵ GRO P/36/13; CRO, Pembrey Vestry Book.

remaining illegitimate children in Llanddeusant had a succession of carers.⁶⁶

Elsewhere there are examples of children clearly identified as remaining with their mother, but their numbers are small compared with those who were put out to nurse. In addition there were large numbers where the child's carer was not identified.

Nutt suggests that by the eighteenth century, although both parents were liable to support their child, 'The financial burden ... was expected to fall upon the father'.⁶⁷ The requirement for mothers who did not nurse their child to contribute certainly seems to have lapsed in England towards the end of the old poor law period. Few English parishes replying to '*Rural Queries*' recorded payments by mothers, though rather more reported that mothers were generally responsible for clothing their children. In Wales however, almost a third of the parishes which replied recorded payments by mothers to the overseers.⁶⁸ An entry in the Llansamlet Higher Vestry Book for 1823 confirms that some mothers were expected to make contributions: 'Order the overseer to give notice to Harriet Brown and Jane Roberts to keep and maintain their base children at 18d. otherwise to appear before the magistrates'. Two Carmarthenshire parishes, Llangathen and Llanddeusant, took legal action against mothers who were unwilling to contribute towards the support of their children, in 1811 and 1823 respectively.⁶⁹

Llanarthne: a case study

As mentioned earlier, very little remains of the vast amount of documentation which the poor law system generated in the study area. Only the Carmarthenshire parish of Llanarthne has enough surviving poor law papers to give a detailed view of the workings of the system. Even these are not complete, as demonstrated by the overseers' accounts, which refer to a filiation order, a removal and several warrants for which no other documentation now exists. A few of the documents relate to years before 1800, after which the coverage is fuller. Details for the period from 1800 are given in Table 3.6.

⁶⁶ CRO, Llanddeusant Vestry Book.

⁶⁷ T. Nutt, 'the paradox and problems of illegitimate paternity in old poor law Essex', in Levene *et al.* (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p.103.

⁶⁸ PP 1834, xlv.

⁶⁹ GRO, P/60/CW/69; CRO, CPR/6/13, Llanddeusant Vestry Book.

Table 3.6 Numbers of illegitimate children identified from parish registers and poor law documents, Llanarthne, 1800-36.

	Number of records	Additional cases	Cumulative number of children
Baptisms	175		175
Burials	24	7	182
Filiations	26	15	197
Warrants to apprehend fathers	10	6	203
Bonds of indemnity	15	6	209
Mentioned in overseers' accounts	32	17	226
Surviving children			202

Source: Llanarthne parish registers and Poor Law documents

Poor law records added some 24 per cent to the number of illegitimate children found in baptism and burial registers for the period 1800-36. King carried out an analysis of illegitimate children detected in four parishes in Lancashire, which showed a very similar percentage of additional children found in bastardy and other poor law records, though an additional 55 per cent were found in overseer and pauper letters and in out-parish relief books, sources which are not available for Llanarthne.⁷⁰ However mothers of illegitimate children in Lancashire, typically textile workers, were much more likely to reside outside their parish of settlement than those from Llanarthne, who as farm servants were usually returned home when their pregnancy was discovered, so that the potential for illegitimate children from Llanarthne to have been the subject of pauper letters or out-relief books is much lower.

The death rate for illegitimate children in Llanarthne, estimated from the figures for burials at around 11 per cent of the illegitimate children identified above, is substantially lower than might be expected.⁷¹ It seems likely that some deaths are missing; perhaps the children were buried elsewhere, or their burials unrecorded,

⁷⁰ King, 'The bastardy-prone sub-society again', in Levene et al. (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 74.

⁷¹ Alys Levene, reviewing the relevant literature, found that mortality rates for illegitimate infants were up to twice that of legitimate infants. See A. Levene, 'The mortality penalty of illegitimate children: foundlings and poor children in eighteenth-century England' in Levene et al. (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 34.

which might have happened if both mother and child had died and were buried together. Marriages were identified for 12 of the couples, taking place from 19 days to nearly 4 years after the child's baptism. The figures above cannot be used to calculate the overall proportion of illegitimate children relieved by the parish, as overseers' accounts are missing for the period 1813-1828.

Table 3.7 looks separately at the two periods for which accounts have survived. This shows that only a minority of illegitimate children obtained relief from the parish, though the proportion was close to a half in the later period. If contacts with poor law officers other than the receipt of relief, such as filiation proceedings or warrants to apprehend putative fathers, are taken into account, the proportion of recorded surviving illegitimate births which were the concern of poor law officials exceeds 50 per cent in the later period. Even in the case of those children whose support was not the subject of documented intervention by the parish, the actions of the mother or her family, or the child's father, may have been affected by the actions of parish officials, or at the very least been motivated by a desire to avoid the public embarrassment of being brought before the justices. As a result, some parents or their families would have made private provision for the child; other couples eventually married. It is noticeable that there were five marriages of parents after the birth of their child in 1829-37, compared with none in the earlier period. Thus in the case of Llanarthne it seems very likely that towards the end of the old poor law period, the intervention of parish officials, or the threat of it, would have influenced the outcome of well over half of all illegitimacies or potential illegitimacies.

Table 3.7 Numbers of illegitimate children relieved by the parish of Llanarthne, 1800-12 and 1829-37

	1800-12	1829-37
Baptisms of illegitimate children	57	50
Records of additional illegitimate children	15	26
All recorded illegitimate children	72	76
Recorded deaths in infancy	13	3
Marriage of parents	-	6
Surviving children, excluding those whose parents married	59	67
<i>of which:</i>		
receiving regular relief	12	25
other involvement with poor law officers	3	16
Percentage receiving relief in overseers' accounts	20	37
Percentage otherwise involved with poor law officers	5	24

Source: Llanarthne parish registers and Poor Law documents

The documentation for Llanarthne offers some clues as to how parish officers made use of the processes available to them. Just over half of the 13 warrants naming putative fathers which gave an address were used to apprehend men living in Glamorgan (specifically, Merthyr Tydfil or Llangyfelach).⁷² Filiation orders were more likely to name putative fathers with addresses within Carmarthenshire but outside Llanarthne, who comprised just over half of the 23 men with addresses. This contrasts with fathers' addresses among all baptisms of illegitimate children in Llanarthne, which were much more likely to be within the parish.⁷³ The implication is that putative fathers living far from the mother's home parish (whatever their original parish) were unlikely to cooperate with the overseers of the poor unless the latter used the force of the law; and possibly that fathers were more ready to make provision for their illegitimate children voluntarily when they lived within the same communities.

⁷² CRO, PR/35/17.

⁷³ CRO, PR/35/14.

Most of the 13 men with stated occupations who were the subject of filiation orders in Llanarthne were farmers. There were far fewer labourers than might have been expected from their numbers among all fathers of illegitimate children in Llanarthne. This probably reflects the fact that as farmers were more able to pay and less likely to abscond than labourers, it was thought more worthwhile to take proceedings against them. Although farmers also predominated among the 22 men with stated occupations who signed bonds of indemnity, there was a wider range, from servants to gentlemen.⁷⁴ It seems likely that the co-signatories of the servants who guaranteed to pay sums of £40 or even £60 if they defaulted on their maintenance payments were men of greater financial substance. In one of these cases a co-signatory was the father of the child's mother.

Filiation orders stated the amounts to be paid, sometimes split between parents. The 23 filiation orders surviving for Llanarthne between 1809 and 1834 show 21 orders for weekly payments of 24 pence and two for 18 pence. Nine of the mothers were required to make contributions if they were not nursing the child, of between three and twelve pence, with the most usual sum being six pence. In practice, where a link can be made between the people named in the filiation order and the overseers' accounts, the amounts actually paid by the overseer were a good deal less, at between 9 pence and 18 pence per week. For example, the filiation order for the child of Anne Evan and William Hughes dated 2 March 1833 (some 9 months after the child's birth) specified that the parents should pay 24 pence a week. This amount was paid for the first 13 weeks, but was subsequently reduced to 18 pence; in 1834 there was a further reduction to 9 pence a week, at which level it continued for several years.⁷⁵ This raises the question of whether the sum paid by the parish represented the total relief, or whether it was given in addition to payments made by one or other parent directly to the carer. The lack of clarity about the total amount received by the carer needs to be borne in mind when considering the generosity or otherwise of the payments recorded in the parish accounts. A further consideration is the level of additional help given by parishes, usually in the form of clothing.

⁷⁴ CRO, PR/35/17.

⁷⁵ CRO PR35/15.

Overall, the costs to the parish of Llanarthne of illegitimacy were not large, as Table 3.8 indicates. During the seven years from 1829-30 to 1835-36, they were always less than 8 per cent of total expenditure. The largest item by far was regular weekly maintenance, amounting to nearly 95 per cent of all parish spending on illegitimacy. The costs associated with administering the system in respect of illegitimacy – warrants or other legal documents, overseers' journeys to magistrates or to apprehend unwilling parents – were generally a small proportion of the outlay. Costs from the birth itself, that is payments made to a midwife and relief granted for lying in, were relatively low, suggesting that the parish paid for these costs in only a minority of cases. At first sight this contrasts with evidence from filiations, where arrears for couples filiated within two months from the birth averaged £1 8s, suggesting that the parish had initially paid these costs. The implication is that in most cases the arrears were paid promptly and not recorded in the annual accounts.

Table 3.8 Costs of illegitimacy, Llanarthne, 1829-30 to 1835-36 (£)

	Mainten- ance	Clothing etc.	Lying in etc.	Baptism & burial	Poor law administ- ration	All costs relating to illegitimacy	Total expend- iture
1829-30	37.45	1.74	0.00	0.00	0.00	39.19	775.72
1830-31	41.55	1.32	0.00	0.00	0.50	43.36	688.09
1831-32	41.00	1.85	0.00	0.00	0.45	43.30	729.16
1832-33	53.11	0.68	3.83	0.05	0.25	57.92	916.52
1833-34	50.36	0.20	0.58	0.00	1.48	52.61	893.10
1834-35	44.89	3.91	1.00	0.00	0.75	50.55	880.44
1835-36	57.02	3.45	0.00	0.00	0.00	60.47	956.68
Total, 1829-36	325.38	13.15	5.40	0.05	3.43	347.40	5839.71
% of total expenditure on illegitimacy	93.7	3.8	1.6	0.0	1.0	100.0	

Source: Llanarthne vestry minute book, PR35/15

Systems of support for illegitimate children in south Wales parishes

The next section examines how the system of poor relief that operated in Llanarthne applied to other parishes. It analyses numbers of children supported by the parish compared with the total number of illegitimate children, and the cost of

relief to illegitimate children in relation to total expenditure. This analysis is restricted to 17 parishes which had accounts covering a good range of years, in which spending on illegitimate children could be clearly identified.⁷⁶

It is evident that the weekly amount paid in respect of individual pauper bastards varied with the age of the child. It was at its highest around the period of confinement, when it was presumably intended to support the mother as well as the child. The sum was reduced a few weeks after birth, and then generally remained stable, except during periods of general reductions in relief, until the child was aged around 7 years. This pattern did not reflect the costs of supporting the child, which would tend to increase with age until s/he became economically active.

The information about customary weekly levels of relief provided in overseers' accounts and vestry minutes has been used to provide a picture of overall levels over time, covering the period 1756-1837 and shown in Figure 3.10. They have been compiled from the usual rates paid, ignoring any higher sums given during confinement and reduced rates for older children.⁷⁷ The few years after the introduction of the New Poor Law were included because it was clear from overseers' accounts that the new law had little impact on levels of relief or the way in which it was paid until the newly-built workhouses were opened, which was mostly after 1837.⁷⁸ As we have seen, there is evidence that some parental contributions did not appear in the accounts, so that the payments recorded do not necessarily represent the full rate of relief paid to the child's carer.

The rates paid vary greatly between parishes, and the county averages are somewhat affected by the changing mix of parishes; but overall there seems to have been a broad pattern of increasing payments during the late eighteenth century followed by a decline and then stabilisation. The peak in the Glamorgan average occurs in the second decade of the nineteenth century; the Carmarthenshire series

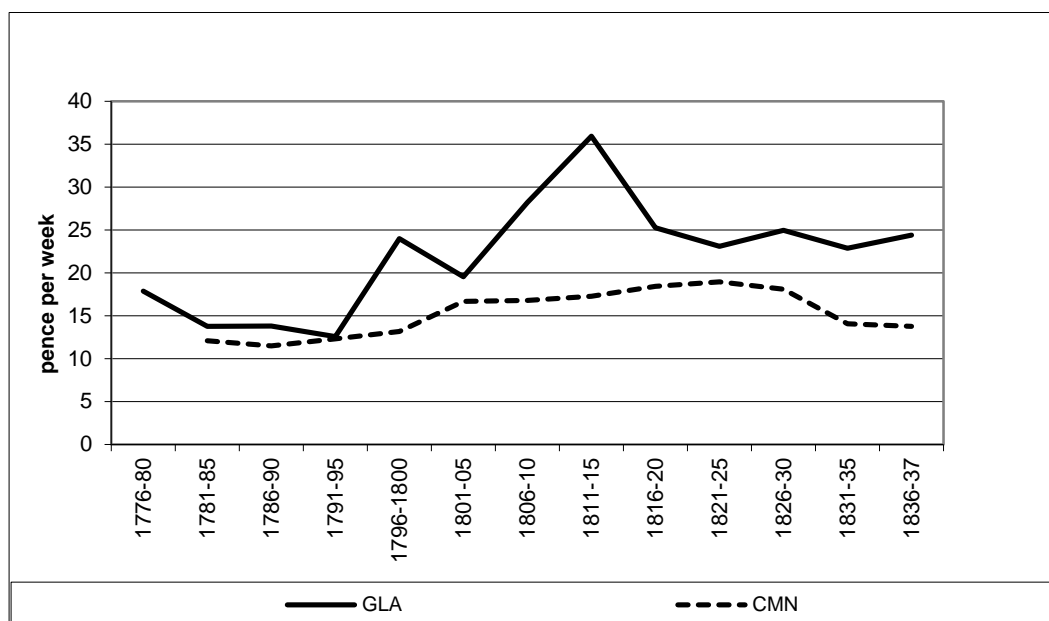
⁷⁶ The parishes were Wenvoe, St Georges, St Nicholas, Llanharan, Bettws, Baglan, Llansamlet and Llanrhidian in Glamorgan and Llanarthne, Llangathen, Llanegwad, Llandefaelog, Llangadog, Llandeusant and Cilycwm in Carmarthenshire.

⁷⁷ Appendix table D1 shows the amounts paid and numbers of children relieved.

⁷⁸ Many areas were slow to implement the New Poor Law; for instance King found that it was not fully in place in the north of England until the 1840s (S. King, *Women, Welfare and Local Politics 1880-1920: 'We Might Be Trusted'* (Eastbourne, 2010), p. 5.

lags by about 15 years. On average, rates were higher in the Glamorgan sample than in Carmarthenshire. It would appear that overseers in Carmarthenshire were more successful in holding back the pressures for higher levels of relief during the Napoleonic Wars than were those in Glamorgan.

Figure 3.10 Average weekly amounts paid for illegitimate children in sample parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, by county, 1776-1837

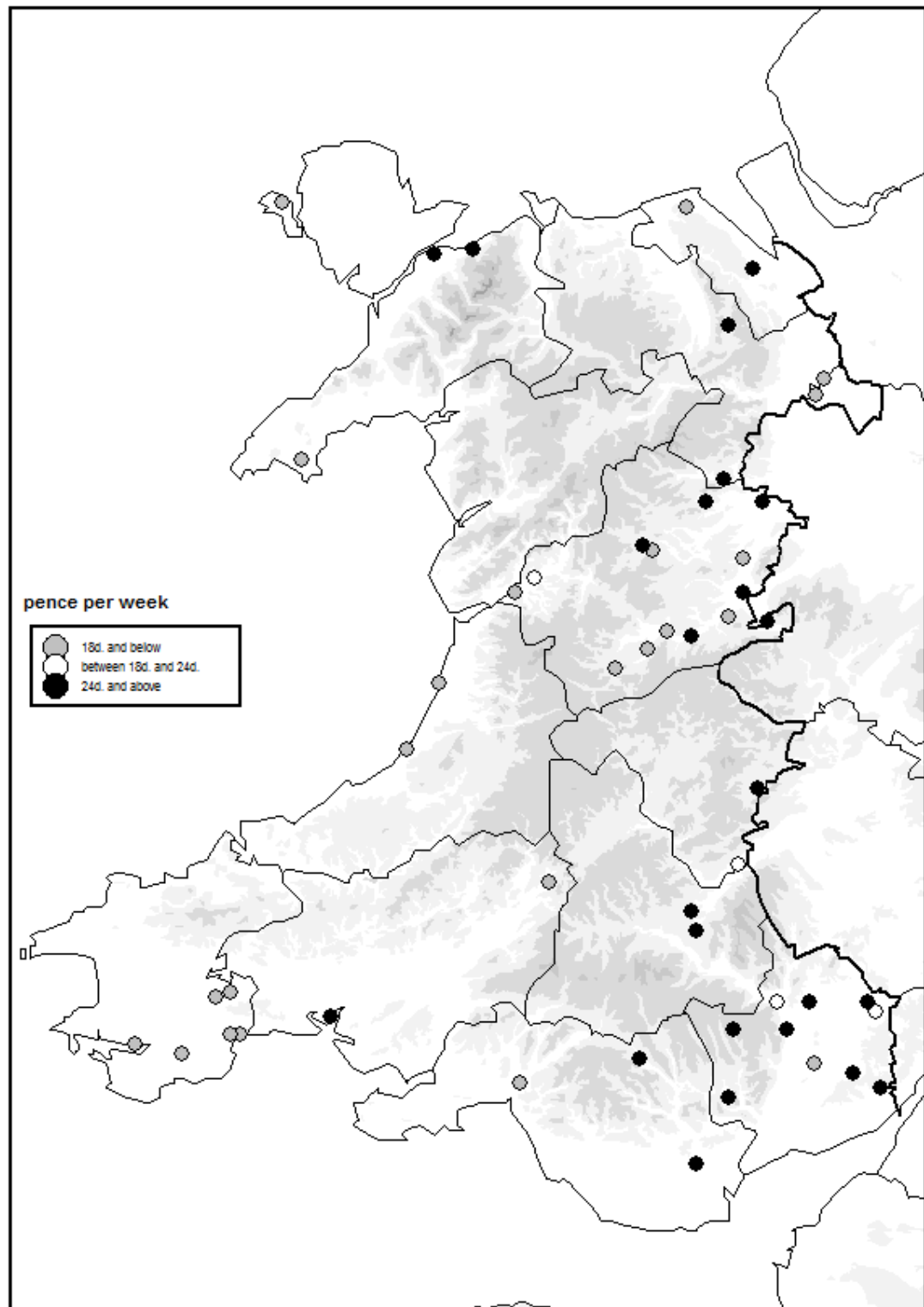


Sources: See Appendix D, Table D1.

Margaret Lyle's analysis of weekly allowances paid by English rural parishes in support of illegitimate children reported to the Royal Commission enquiring into the administration and practical operation of the old poor law shows how these varied at the end of the old poor law period. Around 85% of parishes paid somewhere between 18 pence and 24 pence, with peaks at these two amounts. Payments were most generous in a region comprising the south-east of England excluding Norfolk and parts of Suffolk, where the most usual payment was 24 pence or sometimes more. They were least generous in the remaining south east, and in a region covering the area from the west of the Pennines down to the Welsh border as far as north Herefordshire, where the majority of parishes paid 18 pence a week

or less.⁷⁹ In Figure 3.11, Lyle's methodology has been applied to those Welsh parishes which replied to the Commissioners' enquiries, including the five additional

Figure 3.11 Amounts awarded for chargeable bastards, Welsh parishes responding to *Rural and Town Queries*

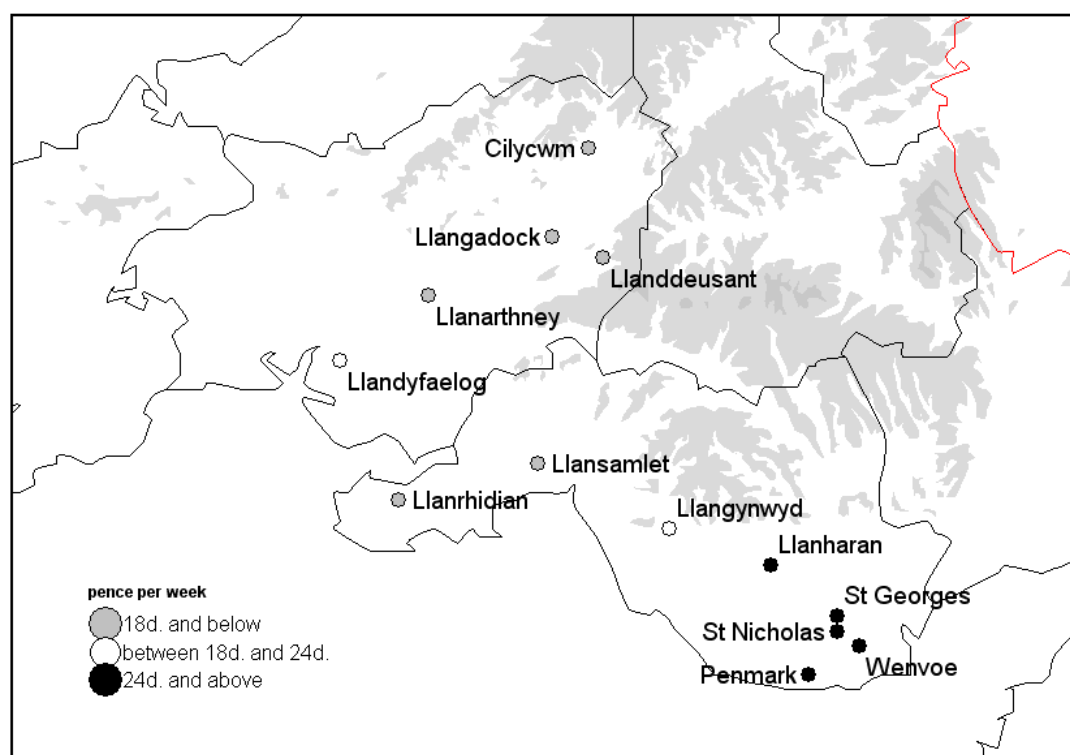


⁷⁹ M.A. Lyle, 'Regionality in the late old poor law', *Agricultural History Review* 53 pp.145-9.

parishes which were included in the *Town Queries*.⁸⁰ Though the sample, at 51 parishes, was small, with a geographical distribution which was not representative of Welsh parishes as a whole, the information supplied suggests that allowances tended to be higher along the English border and in the south-east. Allowances in north-east Wales, mostly of 24 pence, contrast with those in the adjoining English side of the border, which were generally 18 pence or less.

A similar analysis was undertaken for allowances actually paid in the parishes of this study, averaged over the period 1825-1835, shown in Figure 3.12. These are not exactly comparable with awards, since as we have seen, overseers might vary allowances and some portion might be paid direct by parents. Nevertheless, the figure below confirms the pattern of higher allowances in the south-east of the study area, around the time of the introduction of the New Poor Law.

Figure 3.12 Average amounts awarded for chargeable bastards from overseers' accounts, selected south Wales parishes, 1826-1835



⁸⁰ BPP, 1834, XLIV.

Conway Davies, in his discussion of the old poor law in Carmarthenshire, has emphasized the wide range of local variation found in the administration of the Poor Law within the county, and the importance of understanding the local context when assessing the policies applied.⁸¹ This possibly applied with even more force in Glamorgan, with its wider variation in social and economic conditions. Thus the variation in payments of relief is likely to have reflected the range of living standards, with more generous payments being made in the more prosperous south-east of Glamorgan. In other words, the level of relief was determined by relative rather than absolute standards of poverty.

Differences in the treatment of illegitimate children and their parents among parishes went wider than the generosity or otherwise of allowances. Some parishes were more vigilant in their pursuit of parents who sought to evade their responsibilities, or more punitive, for instance more readily committing them to the House of Correction. The overseers for Llangathen paid around 14 per cent of their outlay on bastardy on the legal and other expenses of ensuring that parents took responsibility for supporting their children. Journeys to the industrial districts of Glamorgan in search of putative fathers were common, and could be time-consuming, for instance 'to David William constable 5 days at Neath attempting to apprehend Richard John 16 shillings ... [and] ... self at Neath 6 days upon the same occasion 18 shillings'. Their quarries often evaded them, as did Thomas Morris in 1793, said to be in Pembrey, where '[the Llangathen overseer was] informed he had gone to sea'.⁸² Finding putative fathers in the populous industrial districts could evidently be a challenge. In 1790 the parish of Llandefaelog found it necessary to agree that 'the person who will shew the reputed father [of Margaret Roger's child] or be an assistant in apprehending him shall also be gratified'. However overseers' readiness to make long journeys, without usually seeking help in identifying the father, suggests that in most cases he was well-known to them. Expenses incurred on these journeys were usually itemised in the accounts, but in 1792 this task was perhaps too onerous for the Llangathen overseers, who merely noted 'allowed

⁸¹ C. Davies, 'Aspects of poor law provision in Carmarthenshire prior to 1834' in K. Gramich and A. Hiscock (eds.), *Dangerous Diversity: the Changing Faces of Wales*, (Cardiff, 1998), pp.121-4

⁸² CRO, CPR/6/13.

churchwardens etc. for 42 days spent in apprehending putative fathers'.⁸³ In Llanddeusant, also in Carmarthenshire, where overseers were similarly vigilant in pursuing parents and sometimes punishing them with spells in the House of Correction, the impression is given that grandparents of illegitimate children played an active part in proceedings. There is clear evidence, as described above, that grandparents were often the primary carers. In addition the way in which many children are named in relation to a grandparent ('illegitimate child of the daughter of Margaret Morgan Lewis', for example) suggests that they may have been active in negotiating with overseers over the fate of their grandchildren.⁸⁴

In contrast, the Wenvoe overseers seem to have spent very little time or money on securing financial support from parents. Allowances were among the most generous here, and seem in most cases to have been paid to mothers, rather than the child being put out to nurse. Many of the mothers seem to have obtained relief on their own account after their children ceased to qualify. In spite of this apparent generosity, the proportion of illegitimate children supported by the parish was not particularly high, at around 4-5 a year, or about 40 per cent of the illegitimate children in the relevant age group.⁸⁵

It is evident that there was a great deal of variation in the type of poor law regime found across south Wales, from grudging and punitive, for instance in Llandefaelog, to relatively generous, as in Wenvoe. There seem to have been two patterns of provision. In the relatively prosperous Vale of Glamorgan, payments were more generous, amounting to 24 pence per week or more, generally paid to the mother. Elsewhere, in the mainly upland parishes, payments were below 24 pence per week and often substantially lower. Many of these parishes seem to have expected that mothers would work rather than care for their child, leaving the child to be cared for by a grandparent or other kin, or by an unrelated carer. Here mothers might sometimes contribute financially to their child's support. In comparison with Lyle's regional categorisation, the level of payments in the Vale of Glamorgan correspond to those of the south-east region of England, whereas

⁸³ CRO, CPR 6/13.

⁸⁴ CRO, Llanddeusant Vestry Book.

⁸⁵ GRO, PR/62/14.

payments in the rest of the study area more resemble those of the north-west and south-west regions of England.

Conclusions

Analysis of baptisms from parish registers shows that up to the mid-eighteenth and from the mid-nineteenth century the level of illegitimacy in south Wales fell within the regional variation found in England. However it diverged from that in England between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, particularly in inland parts of south Wales. Here, illegitimacy rates first rose faster than in England, and then, from the start of the nineteenth century, declined more rapidly. Fathers' occupations were similar to those of the male population as a whole, though there was some evidence that the gentry and professional classes were more likely to father bastards than were the rest of the male population. Evidence suggests that couples were for the most part of similar status and that much illegitimacy occurred within recognised courtship practices. There was no evidence that 'bastardy-prone' groups within society were responsible for a significant part of the eighteenth-century increase in illegitimacy; the most likely explanation in an era of difficult economic circumstances and rapidly rising population was 'courtship frustration'. Declining illegitimacy in the first half of the nineteenth century was linked to industrialisation and the associated growth in male employment opportunities, which eased the transition to marriage.

Within the region, illegitimacy ratios grew fastest in Carmarthenshire and upland Glamorgan; ratios in the coastal parishes of Glamorgan differed little from those in England. A similar divide between upland parishes and those in the coastal plain was observed in poor law support for illegitimate children, not just in the relative generosity of payments in the coastal plain, but also in the different expectations of mothers' roles. The correspondence is not exact; in Gower, which had exceptionally low illegitimacy ratios, payments were also low, usually 12 pence or 18 pence per week, though there were only two parishes with surviving records. Thus it would seem that a broad cultural divide in south Wales, between inland Welsh-speaking pastoral districts, and coastal areas where both Welsh and English

were in use, with mixed arable and pastoral farming, was reflected both in the levels of illegitimacy, and in the way the poor law was applied. We will look more closely at this cultural divide in later chapters.

Chapter 4 Illegitimacy from 1834

The period covered in the previous chapter, determined mainly by the quality of data from parish records, coincided closely with that of the old poor law. The introduction of the New Poor Law in 1834, which resulted in significant changes in the laws of bastardy, provides a convenient starting point for this chapter. Here we examine the changes in the law, and their early impact, particularly in south Wales. The first part looks at the objectives of the bastardy clauses in the New Poor Law with a particular focus on south Wales, including their contribution to the exceptionally high levels of civil unrest in the region in the following decade, and the government enquiries which ensued. The next part of the chapter assesses the impact of the introduction of the New Poor Law on illegitimate children and their parents, as revealed by poor law reports and similar material. The analyses relate mainly to the poor law counties of Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan, which are compared with Wales as a whole and with England, using rates per thousand of the population, or, where appropriate, related to annual numbers of illegitimate births.¹ Snell has argued that there were regional cultures of welfare, among which Wales was an extreme example; this section investigates whether this includes the treatment of single mothers and their children.² Finally, the chapter investigates the micro-history of illegitimacy around the middle of the nineteenth century, examining the circumstances of individual mothers and children, through the linkage of census, baptism and poor law records. The census provides a snapshot of illegitimate children of varying ages within their families, allowing us to examine such issues as family structure and maternal employment. The findings are compared with similar studies in Scotland and England.

The Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 (PLAA)

The 1834 *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws* included a chapter devoted to

¹ Early Poor Law reports show Monmouthshire in England, though it was later included in Wales. Here the two countries are shown on a consistent basis, with Monmouthshire in Wales.

² K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 256-61.

the problems supposedly created by the bastardy laws. The remedies for the problems of bastardy proposed in the Report seem to rely more on the authors' prior convictions about its causes, rather than on the voluminous evidence which had been collected through surveys and provided by individuals. Mothers of illegitimate children were characterised as cunning manipulators of the old poor laws and men as their innocent victims, rather than as victims of seduction, false promises of marriage or adverse economic circumstances. They were portrayed as exploiting the system to obtain a comfortable income:

In most cases the sum [paid by the parish] is as great, in many it is greater, than that for which a child can be put out to nurse, or than that which would be allowed by the parish if it were legitimate and its father dead. To the woman, therefore, a single illegitimate child is seldom any expense, and two or three are a source of positive profit.³

The report contains several quotations from Stephen Walcott, appointed as an Assistant Commissioner to collect evidence from North Wales. In his view

Bastardy... is a growing evil in Wales. [The poor laws] hold out to [the mother] ... in many instances, the powerful aid of parish officers in obtaining a husband; ... they encourage perjury on the woman's part, to the injury and disgrace of innocent persons; they convert into vagrants and dissolute characters, many of the industrious.⁴

His evidence included a statement, which in its essentials was to be reiterated in later government reports, from 'a gentleman' who in conducting marriages among the lower orders had found that 'in forty-nine out of every fifty marriages that he had been called on to perform in his parish ... the female was either with child, or had had one and many affirmed this of nineteen out of twenty cases'.⁵ Though Walcott advocated repeal of the bastardy laws to counter these 'evils', he recognised that this might be thought in Wales to be too harsh, 'from the appearance of hardship in punishing one, whose fall a national custom may have greatly contributed to effect', a reference to the Welsh custom of *caru yn y gwely* (courting in bed), which was discussed in Chapter 2.⁶

³ *Report from HM. Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws* PP 1834 xxxvii, p. 93.

⁴ *Poor Law Commission Report*, p. 97.

⁵ *Poor Law Commission Report*, p. 97. The problems of record linkage in a Welsh context, discussed earlier, make such claims difficult to substantiate.

⁶ *Poor Law Commission Report*, p. 97.

The architects of the new legislation believed that the old poor laws had to a large degree caused poverty through encouraging indigence. In future the able-bodied poor were to be persuaded to support themselves by making relief more unpleasant ('less eligible') than the alternative, and provided only within the workhouse:

all relief whatever to able-bodied persons or to their families, otherwise than in well-regulated workhouses ... shall be declared unlawful, and shall cease, in manner and at periods hereafter specified⁷.

In addition the Act included clauses specifically intended to discourage illegitimacy, by making an illegitimate child 'what Providence appears to have ordained that it shall be, a burthen on its mother'; and, if she was not able to support her child from her own resources, to receive relief in the workhouse.⁸ No longer would unmarried mothers have the right to obtain maintenance from the father of their child, though the poor law authorities could recover their costs from the father through an action in quarter sessions, as long as evidence of his paternity could be independently corroborated.

The bastardy clauses were highly contentious, opposed both by high Tories and radicals. Some alterations were made during the passage of the legislation through Parliament, including removal of the requirement for the mother's parents to support her and her child if she was unable to do so herself. The clause which provided for Poor Law Unions to recover costs from fathers through an action at quarter sessions did not long survive intact. Following a report by the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Relief of the Poor, which complained that 'affiliation actions in Quarter Sessions were both costly and offensive to public decency', actions were returned to petty sessions in 1839.⁹ Public opinion continued to view the lack of any civil remedy for the mother of an illegitimate child against its father as a grave injustice, but the poor law commissioners were adamant that such a provision would act as a punishment to the father and thus undermine the whole spirit of the bastardy clauses. Sir Edmund Head, assistant Poor Law Commissioner, who was prompted by 'the great misapprehensions which ... still

⁷ *Poor Law Commission Report*, p. 146.

⁸ *Poor Law Commission Report*, p. 197.

⁹ U. R. Q. Henriques, 'Bastardy and the New Poor Law', *Past and Present* (1967), p. 117.

exist as to the intention and effect of the old and new bastardy laws', to produce in 1840 a report on the Law of Bastardy, concluded that:

affiliation, and the consequent power which it conveys on the woman, is an aid instead of a check to vice and seduction, and that in its way implies just as gross an encroachment of the privileges of marriage as the untested claim to relief does on the rights of property.¹⁰

Historians have characterised the bastardy clauses as Malthusian in inspiration, citing 'the constant invocation of "the natural state of things" and the "inefficiency of human legislation to enforce restraints placed on licentiousness by Providence"'.¹¹ The clauses have generally been judged to have failed to reduce illegitimacy, at least in the short term, and, through their unpopularity, to have put wider poor law reforms at risk.¹² In the longer run, however, Nutt considered that some success in reducing illegitimacy was achieved by changing attitudes, 'repositioning the status of mothers as both morally blameworthy and welfare dependent'.¹³ The success of the New Poor Law in abolishing out-door relief for the able-bodied (including single mothers) has been questioned, with Snell for example arguing that in many unions poor law officials exploited exceptions in the regulations so that out-door relief remained the rule rather than the exception, as it was under the old poor law.¹⁴

Implementation of the New Poor Law in South Wales

George Clive was appointed as Assistant Poor Law Commissioner for South Wales at the beginning of 1836. He began his work in Monmouthshire, going on to Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan. The first poor law unions (PLUs) in the study area were formed for Carmarthen in June 1836 and Cardiff in September of the same year. All of the remaining unions covering Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan had been created by July 1837. Progress was delayed by disagreements about

¹⁰ *Sixth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, xvii, 1840, Appendix B, p. 95.

¹¹ Thomas Nutt, 'Illegitimacy, paternal financial responsibility, and the 1834 Poor Law Commission Report: the myth of the old poor law and the making of the new', *Economic History Review* 2010, p. 357; Lisa Forman Cody, 'The Politics of Illegitimacy in an Age of Reform: Women, Reproduction, and Political Economy in England's New Poor Law of 1834', *Journal of Women's History* (2000) p. 134.

¹² Henriques, 'Bastardy and the New Poor Law', p. 126.

¹³ Nutt, 'Illegitimacy, paternal financial responsibility, and the 1834 Poor Law Commission Report', p. 358-9.

¹⁴ Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp. 247-9, p. 338.

boundaries, such as demands for two further unions at Cowbridge and Caerphilly.¹⁵ Only two existing workhouses, in Swansea and Cardiff, were of a size to provide indoor relief for the expected numbers of paupers, and that in Cardiff was soon decreed to be unfit for purpose. The first new workhouse in the study area opened at Carmarthen in 1837, with most of the remainder following in the next two years, though progress was delayed by arson at Llandovery (1838) and Narberth (1839).¹⁶ The workhouse at Merthyr did not come into operation until 1853, and the guardians of Lampeter Union resisted building a workhouse until the Poor Law Board threatened to dissolve the Union in 1874.¹⁷

The introduction of the New Poor Law in the southern parts of Glamorgan seems to have taken place with relatively little resistance. Correspondence between the Cardiff Union and the Poor Law Commission in the early years was mainly concerned with the processes of setting up the union and appointing staff.¹⁸ There was acrimonious debate about the need to build a new workhouse, but after this was resolved in mid-1837, together with a dispute about the appointment of an auditor, the subsequent history of the Cardiff Union was, as Ian Dewar commented, 'calm and uneventful'. Queries about the application of the PLAA to paupers, and petitions to vary the regulations in individual cases, were rare. The impression given is of a relatively well-run union, and the same can be said of the Bridgend and Cowbridge Union.¹⁹

Clive's experiences in Carmarthenshire were very different. He was not favourably impressed by the people he met, saying in a private letter to Thomas Frankland Lewis, chairman of the Poor Law Commissioners: '...this it is in the Co. of Carmarthen, nothing but jobbing and dishonesty among the gentry, and ignorance among the farmers.'²⁰ Elsewhere he described the situation in Carmarthenshire as

¹⁵ I. Dewar, 'George Clive and the establishment of the New Poor Law in South Glamorgan, 1836-38', *Morgannwg* (1967), p. 51.

¹⁶ D. J. V. Jones, *Rebecca's Children: A Study of Rural Society, Crime, and Protest* (Oxford, 1989), p. 273.

¹⁷ The Lampeter PLU was situated in Cardiganshire but included a small number of parishes in Carmarthenshire.

¹⁸ TNA: MH12/16246.

¹⁹ I. Dewar, 'George Clive', pp. 63 and 68.

²⁰ TNA: MH 32/12, letter dated 24 November 1837.

producing, both in the farmers and the labouring classes a state of feeling entirely analogous of that existing in the most deeply pauperised districts. In many parishes the farmers are in the habit of looking to the rate to make up the deficiency of wages and I have several times heard the word “roundsman” used. Large sums are paid to the rents of able bodied men. Relief is given to them regularly after the third child ... Marriages are contracted at the earliest possible period, and yet illegitimate children are extremely numerous, the 25 parishes comprising the Carmarthen Union are now supporting nearly 400 bastards.²¹

However he expected much improvement from the implementation of the new laws: ‘Of this I am certain, that your more stringent regulations as to relief, as soon as the workhouses are completed, will be everywhere in my district received with joy by the intelligent few, and with submission by the pigheaded many’.

Unrest in South Wales

Clive’s optimism proved to be misplaced. The introduction of the New Poor Law in south Wales could hardly have come at a time when the peasantry were less receptive to change, and its effect was simply to add to the list of deeply resented grievances. The events which took place between 1839 and 1847 were to shape Welsh social and political life for the remainder of the century. Beginning with attacks on tollgates in south-west Wales, and exploding into violent disturbances from the middle of 1843, the unrest led to two government commissions of inquiry. Since the new bastardy laws and the supposed Welsh tendency towards illegitimacy were bound up in these events, a brief summary is appropriate here.²² The cumulative impact of economic circumstances and a series of government reforms combined to convince tenant farmers across West Wales that their way of life was threatened as never before. They feared that the New Poor Law would prove more expensive than the old, adding to the already heavy burdens of high farm rents, increased charges resulting from the commutation of tithes, and tolls from the increasing numbers of gates, on minor as well as major roads. Though the protests against toll gates started in 1839, with occasional actions during 1842 and early 1843, the bulk of the disturbances, amounting to a

²¹ *Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, 1836, xxix Pt. I. Vestry books show that several Carmarthenshire parishes discussed the setting up of roundsmen systems, for example the Llangadog Vestry Book, which contained a proposal for such a scheme in 1818, with small numbers of men paid for work in the 1817-8 accounts (CPR49/19).

²² The key works on the Rebecca Riots are D. J. V. Jones, *Rebecca’s Children: A Study of Rural Society, Crime, and Protest* (Oxford, 1989) and D. Williams, *The Rebecca Riots* (Cardiff, 1955).

revolt of the tenant farmers, occurred during June to October 1843. While toll gates provided much of the focus of the ritualised actions carried out by 'Rebecca' and her followers, other grievances, including the bastardy laws, were also the subject of direct action. David Jones described how 'as a first step Rebecca tried, by threatening letters and visits, to ensure that the male seducer married the pregnant girl'. Where this was not possible, illegitimate children were removed to the care of their putative fathers, thought to be 'in line with old Welsh law which gave equal status to a man's legitimate and illegitimate children'.²³ Carmarthen workhouse, the most tangible symbol of the New Poor Law, was attacked by a rioting mob in June 1843.²⁴ The well-attended meetings organised by farmers during the summer months of 1843 were more orderly occasions, often with petitions which included clauses relating to the poor laws. At a meeting held on 20 July 1843 at Cwmifor, Llandeilo Fawr, Resolution 4 proposed a 'Total alteration of the Poor Law'; and a gathering of ratepayers at Llandefaelog on 6 Sep 1843 discussed a list of grievances which included 'Poor Law: The old law was better in the case of bastardy than the new'.²⁵

As activity by Rebecca's supporters died down towards the end of 1843, a commission to enquire into the causes of the riots was set up under Frankland Lewis (former chairman of the Poor Law Commission), reporting in March 1844.²⁶ Witness after witness from across the counties of south Wales, magistrates, clergy, landowners, tenant farmers, guardians and overseers, gave evidence that the bastardy clauses were not working. Most illegitimacy was said to occur within the context of courtship. The new laws had reduced the likelihood that in the event of a pregnancy, a young man would marry or otherwise support his child, while having no discernible effect on the courtship behaviour of young women. According to Rev. Henry Davies, of Narberth

Women in this part of the country are generally servant girls; they know nothing about the law; they never read or think much about it, and the man generally promises the servant girl that he will marry her.²⁷

²³ Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, p. 269-70.

²⁴ Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, p. 219-221.

²⁵ H.T. Evans, *Rebecca and Her Daughters* (Cardiff, 1910), pp. 97 & 165.

²⁶ *Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry for South Wales*, PP 1844 xvi (henceforth '1844 Report').

²⁷ 1844 Report, Minutes of Evidence, p. 202.

Large numbers of young women who would previously have expected to marry, or to receive support from their child's father, were thus pauperised. William Thomas of Llanfihangel Abercywyn in Carmarthenshire knew of

many young women who, having been unfortunate, have been ordered into the workhouse, have tried it, and been compelled to leave and are now starving about the country in a naked state ... allowed to wander about in a state of destitution.²⁸

The predatory women of the 1834 Report on the bastardy laws, ready to destroy the future of innocent young men to marry or obtain a comfortable allowance, were nowhere in evidence, though many witnesses found it repugnant that, in the words of Bruce Pryse, a magistrate from Merthyr Tydfil, 'now [the fathers] snap their fingers at you, and not one of them pays'.²⁹ Frankland Lewis was obliged to conclude that the new bastardy laws had tended to

increase demoralisation in the female part of the community. As a result the woman is left with all the temptations to a life of vice to which her circumstances are calculated to expose her³⁰

an admission which was the more significant for coming from someone so closely associated with the new laws.

The Poor Law Commissioners, who had seen much of the evidence given to the enquiry, presented their own report to Sir James Graham in January 1844, proposing a legal remedy for the mother of an illegitimate child, irrespective of whether she was a pauper. She would have the right to summon the putative father at petty sessions, and if she could prove evidence of his paternity, to obtain maintenance for her child. The Commissioners acknowledged that 'the desire of obtaining an efficient legal remedy against putative fathers is particularly prevalent in Lancashire, Yorkshire and the other northern counties and ... a similar opinion is generally entertained in Wales'.³¹

In the 1844 Report Frankland Lewis had suggested that a lack of knowledge of English, together with a want of educational facilities, posed serious problems for

²⁸ 1844 Report, Minutes of Evidence, p. 82. There were similar reports from Aberaeron, in Cardiganshire and Narberth in Pembrokeshire (pp. 56 & 103).

²⁹ 1844 Report, Minutes of Evidence, p. 410.

³⁰ 1844 Report, p. 30.

³¹ 'Report of the Commissioners to Sir James Graham, Bart. on the Law concerning the Maintenance of Bastards', Appendix A, no. 7 in the *Tenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, 1844*, xix, p. 5.

government, through 'the obstacles it presents to the efficient workings of many institutions'.³² William Williams, the Carmarthenshire-born member of parliament for Coventry, followed this with a proposal to conduct an enquiry into the state of education in Wales. Three commissioners were appointed, who conducted extensive investigations throughout Wales, reporting in 1847. Their remit was widely drawn, to include the 'character and condition of the people'. This gave the opportunity for discussion of what the commissioners saw as the particular characteristics of the Welsh, not just the perceived problems of the Welsh language for government, but also the morality of the people, and particularly the courting habits of the young. David Jones has suggested that some of the Anglican clergy who had been singled out by Rebecca took their revenge by giving evidence which attacked the character of the Welsh peasantry.³³ For the most part, the evidence given to the commissioners in respect of the sexual habits of the Welsh covered the familiar ground of premarital sexual experience within courtship, for instance 'fornication ... is considered as a matter of course – as the regular conventional process towards marriage', though naturally informants varied in the degree of censure with which they phrased their evidence.³⁴ The commissioners' tendency to heighten the language used to summarise such evidence, and to present this as what Gwyneth Tyson Roberts described as 'plain facts that illustrated the primitive nature of the Welsh people' contributed to the furore which greeted the publication of the Reports.³⁵ Although the overwhelming reaction in Wales was of hostility to the image of Welsh people portrayed in the Reports, the years which followed saw a series of campaigns to promote 'respectable' sexual behaviour and temperance. These activities will be considered in Chapter 6.

Impact of change in the bastardy laws on illegitimate children and their parents in south Wales

The 1844 Report on the disturbances in south Wales gave a graphic picture of the devastating effect on the lives of some illegitimate children and their mothers

³² 1844 Report, p. 36.

³³ D. J. V. Jones, *Rebecca's Children*, p. 358.

³⁴ *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, PP 1847 xxvii, Part 3, p. 335.

³⁵ G. T. Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books: the Perfect Instrument of Empire* (Cardiff, 1998), p. 166.

of ten years of the New Poor Law in the region. This section attempts to find quantitative evidence of the impact of the new laws across the whole population of illegitimate children and their parents in south Wales. The lack of consistent sources of information makes this task difficult. Little information is available from individual unions; although several sets of guardians' minute books have survived, there are few registers of admissions covering the period of this study. The Poor Law Commissioners and their successors, the Poor Law Board, collected copious amounts of statistics, but their tabulations leave much to be desired. Data are sometimes presented at a point in time, and sometimes over a period such as a quarter or year, making comparisons difficult. Much of the analysis is at county level, replaced in later years by aggregation into just three Welsh regions. Here we consider the poor law counties of Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan, which are compared with Wales as a whole and with England, using rates per thousand of the population, or, where appropriate, related to annual numbers of illegitimate births.

The Poor Law Commissioners, confident that the new law would quickly lead to a reduction in bastardy, produced a table in their Second Annual Report to show that the number of chargeable bastards was 13 per cent lower in the year ending March 1836 as compared with the previous year. The decline in Wales, however, was only two per cent, and numbers in some counties rose. Table 4.1 shows a wide variation among Welsh counties in the numbers of chargeable bastards in relation to population, with Glamorgan the lowest, at 2.6 per thousand of the population, and Carmarthenshire towards the upper end, at 8.2 per thousand. Overall, the numbers in Wales were 55 per cent higher relative to the population than in England, and the rates of chargeable bastards in Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire were higher than in any English county.³⁶

³⁶ *Second annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales*, 1836, xxix, Appendix D, p. 506. Westmoreland had the highest rate of chargeable bastards, at 11.2 per thousand of the population.

Table 4.1 Chargeable bastards per thousand of the population, Welsh counties and England, 1836

	Chargeable bastards in year ending March 1836	Population 1831	Chargeable bastards per '000 population
Anglesey	240	48,325	5.0
Breconshire	235	47,763	4.9
Cardiganshire	384	64,780	5.9
Carmarthenshire	828	100,740	8.2
Caernarfonshire	299	66,448	4.5
Denbighshire	574	83,629	6.9
Flintshire	336	60,012	5.6
Glamorgan	331	126,612	2.6
Merionethshire	216	35,315	6.1
Monmouthshire	355	98,120	3.6
Montgomeryshire	980	66,482	14.7
Pembrokeshire	894	81,425	11.0
Radnorshire	417	24,651	16.9
Wales	6,089	904,302	6.7
England	56,092	12,992,885	4.3

Source: *Second Annual Report of Poor Law Commission* Appendix D, p. 506.

When the data underlying Table 4.1 were compiled, few of the chargeable bastards in Carmarthenshire or Glamorgan would have been relieved in the workhouse, as none of the new buildings had been completed, and only the two old workhouses in Swansea and Cardiff were in use. In the meantime, the most significant change for a mother of an illegitimate child was that she no longer had a right to expect relief from its father, until this was reinstated in a modified and restricted form in 1844. In the absence of workhouses, the change might have been expected to lead to a large increase in the numbers of children supported by the parish, since those fathers who under the old laws might have been persuaded to support the mother or marry her would no longer have any incentive to do so. Clive's statement, quoted above, about the large numbers relieved in Carmarthen Union in 1836 suggests that this was indeed the case, though he provides no comparison with earlier periods. The evidence from overseers' accounts in the study area which span the years immediately before and after the introduction of the new legislation is sketchy, covering only five parishes.³⁷ Overall, there was an

³⁷ The five parishes were Llanarthne and Llanddeusant in Carmarthenshire, and Llangynwyd, Penmark

increase of around 10 per cent in the average number of children obtaining relief in these parishes between the three years starting 1830 and the two years beginning 1835, hardly evidence of a major change in the pattern of provision for illegitimate children. It may well be that there was very little change in rural parishes immediately after 1834. Where a father of an illegitimate child had insufficient income to be able to support it, the mother relied on the parish as before; where he was better placed, social pressures might overcome the freedom from responsibility offered by the new law. Such pressures would be particularly strong where the parents came from farming families within the same parish, bound together by kinship and mutual obligations. Nevertheless, evidence given to the 1844 enquiry suggested that many fathers did not have the means to contribute to their children's support, and that some of those who did were not inclined to.³⁸

The opening of workhouses towards the end of the decade seems to have had a substantial impact on the numbers of chargeable bastards in some parts of the study area. In Llandovery Union, out-door relief was provided for 129 illegitimate children in September 1839, just before the workhouse opened its doors to them. Some 66 had been ordered into the workhouse by March 1840, but only 26 were admitted, of whom three were discharged; in addition 55 were in receipt of out-door relief. The Poor Law authorities would no doubt have been gratified to find that more than 50 illegitimate children were no longer supported by the public purse, as Table 4.2 shows, but disturbed that the number receiving out-door relief was more than double that for children relieved in the workhouse. It is possible that some children receiving out-door relief had been born before the PLAA had become law, and were still being supported under the old legislation.

and Wenvoe in Glamorgan.

³⁸ *Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry for South Wales* PP 1844 xvi, p. 229.

Table 4.2 Numbers of bastards in receipt of support in Llandovery Union 1836-40

Parish	Dec. 1836 (start of union)	Sep 1839	ordered to w'house, March 1840	Indoor			Outdoor		total
				admitted	dischar- ged	remain- ing in house	without mother	with mother	
Cilycwm	18	9	7	2	-	2	3	-	3
Llanddeusant	24	25	16	4	-	4	2	5	7
Llandingad	21	17	16	8	2	6	1	-	1
Llanfair-ar-y-bryn	10	14	5	1	-	1	7	1	8
Llangadog	6	6	4	1	-	1	-	2	2
Llansadwrn	4	4	-	-	-	-	3	3	6
Llanwrda	5	3	-	-	-	-	2	1	3
Myddfai	15	14	12	5	-	5	-	1	1
Cynwyl Caeo	24	31	6	5	1	4	18	-	18
Llanwrtyd ¹	5	5	-	-	-	-	4	-	4
Llandulas ¹	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
8 parishes in study	103	92	60	21	2	19	18	13	31
Llandovery Union	132	129	66	26	3	23	41	14	55

Source: TNA MH12/15937

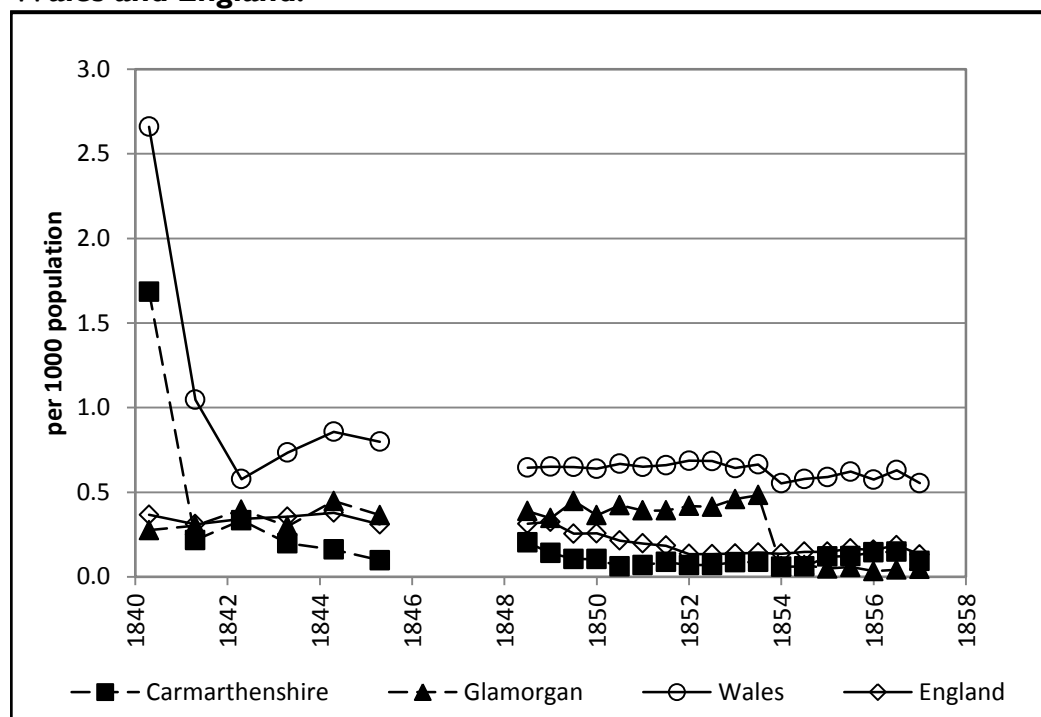
Note 1: Not included among study parishes.

Starting with the Seventh Annual Report, the Poor Law Commissioners, and their successors, the Poor Law Board, produced regular figures of numbers of people receiving out-door relief, analysed by county and by category of pauper. The earlier data were counts taken over a three month period to Lady Day (25 March) but from 1849 the data referred to one day at the start of each half-year, though the change in period does not seem to make a great difference to the level. These counts have been expressed as rates per thousand of the population. In comparing rates between areas or over time it should be remembered that differences may be due to varying duration of time on relief as well as differences in numbers ever having received relief.

Figure 4.1 shows the numbers of mothers of illegitimate children receiving out-door relief as a proportion of the population in Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan, compared with England and Wales, over the period 1840 to 1857. The impact of applying the workhouse test can be seen between 1840 and 1841, when several workhouses opened their doors in Carmarthenshire as well as elsewhere in Wales, and in Glamorgan after 1853, when the workhouse opened at Merthyr

Tydfil. The relatively high rate for Wales as a whole reflects the large number of unions which were yet to build workhouses, particularly in mid Wales. Comparable time series of numbers in the workhouse are not available before 1850, so it is not

Figure 4.1 Single women with illegitimate children on out-door relief, per 1,000 of the population, 1840-57, Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire, Wales and England.



Sources: Annual Reports of the Poor Law Commissioners and the Poor Law Board.

Note: Data from 1840-1845 relate to numbers receiving relief in the quarter ended 25 March of the year shown; from 1848 they represent those receiving relief on a particular day (1 January and 1 July).

possible to tell how much of the fall in out-door relief was offset by admissions to the workhouse, though Table 4.2 shows that in the case of Llandovery Union fewer than a fifth of children receiving out-door relief before the workhouse opened were subsequently admitted. The average number of illegitimate children per mother receiving out-door relief in the period 1850-1857 in Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan were 1.2 and 1.3 respectively, compared with 1.5 for Wales as a whole, and 1.7 for England.³⁹ Though numbers in the two south Wales' counties were small, particularly after all unions had opened workhouses, the disparity between the two counties on the one hand, and Wales and England on the other, was

³⁹ Data taken from the Annual Reports of the Poor Law Board.

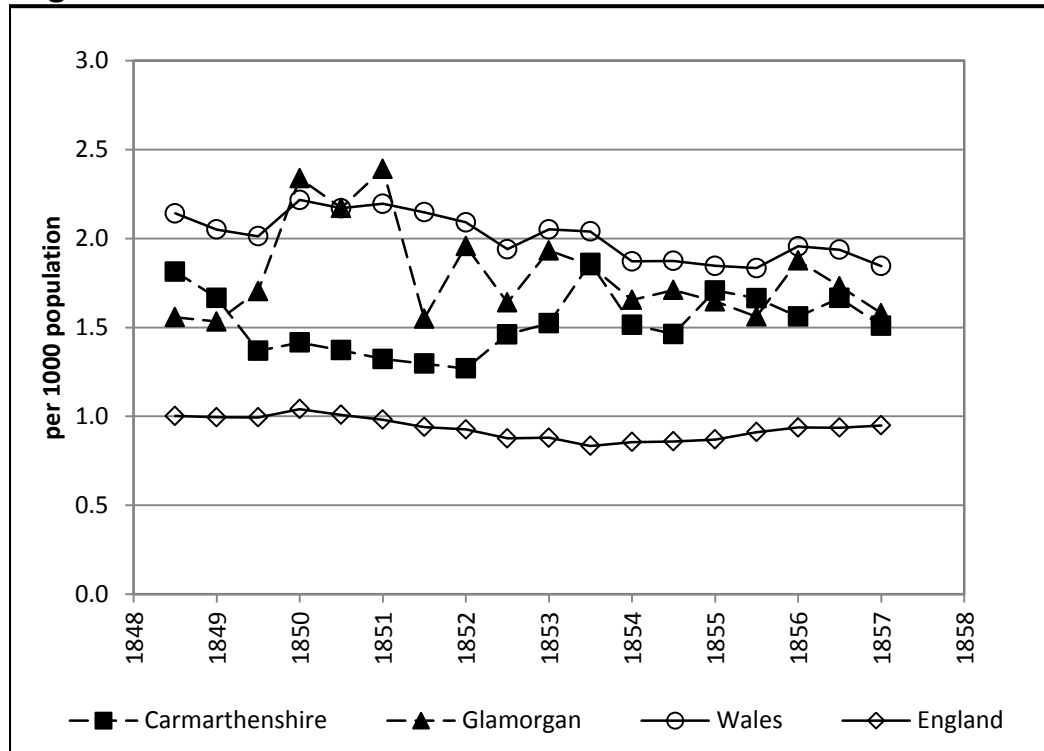
consistent from year to year, suggesting that this was not a random effect. It might be that a reluctance to allow out-door relief in respect of illegitimate children in Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan was particularly strong where mothers had more than one child, or that the strict application of the workhouse test in unions in south Wales discouraged mothers of one illegitimate child from taking the risk of having a second.

The tabular information in poor law reports also recorded the reasons why the able-bodied were unable to support themselves. Most single mothers were categorised as unable to work because of insufficiency of earnings, with smaller numbers suffering from want of work. John Lewis, a Llandeilo Fawr guardian, gave evidence to the 1844 Enquiry that wages in the area were too low for a mother to be able to support her child, and James Bellairs of Haverfordwest quoted the example of ‘a very nice woman now in the workhouse ... of very good character, except that she had the misfortune of having had a child; that girl cannot get £3 wages, and she cannot put her child out for under £2 12s’.⁴⁰

Illegitimate children supported by out-door relief are identified in the poor law reports only if accompanied by their mothers. This is no doubt because the emphasis in early Poor Law reports was on adult paupers and the reasons for their inability to support themselves. No details were given of illegitimate children on out-door relief living with someone other than their mother; from 1850 they were included within the category ‘orphans or other children under 16 relieved without their parents’. It seems likely that illegitimate children made up a substantial part of this group. Figure 4.2 shows that numbers of such children in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire tended to converge from the mid-1850s at slightly over 1.5 per thousand of the population, rather higher than the rate in England.

⁴⁰ 1844 Report, Minutes of Evidence, pp. 177 & 349.

Figure 4.2 Orphans and other children under 16 in receipt of out-door relief without their parents, per 1,000 of the population, 1 January 1849 – 1 January 1857, Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire, Wales and England.



Sources: Annual Reports of the Poor Law Board. Data at 1 January of year shown

At first sight the difference between the rates for England and Wales might be thought to arise from the higher proportion of Welsh poor law unions without workhouses at this period. Indeed the rate can be seen to fall in Glamorgan between 1853 and 1854, when the Merthyr workhouse opened, as it did for single mothers in Carmarthenshire in Figure 4.1. However it is not at all clear why the rate for Carmarthenshire should have increased between 1852 and 1855, nor why rates for both Welsh counties, which after 1853 had workhouses in all poor law unions, were not rather lower in relation to the all-Wales rate. Guardians must have used their discretion to provide out-door relief for these children, possible because of a belief among unions in the two Welsh counties that it was more appropriate for children than the workhouse, or because they thought it was cheaper.⁴¹ It would be a mistake however to think that out-door relief was

⁴¹ Under an exception to the order prohibiting out-door relief made in 1848, guardians were permitted to give out-door relief to an illegitimate child when the mother was in service, if the child

necessarily preferable to the workhouse. Tydfil Thomas presents a harrowing picture of the conditions in which some child paupers were kept before the workhouse was opened in Merthyr Tydfil, farmed out to lodging-house keepers in the more notorious areas of the town.⁴²

Information about illegitimate children in the workhouse began to be provided in the Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Board. Again, figures for illegitimate children not accompanied by their mother were not separately distinguished. However a survey by the Poor Law Board dated 15 March 1849 provides some information about workhouse children, classifying them by age group and sex, and also according to a number of other criteria, including whether illegitimate, orphaned, or deserted, and whether accompanied by the mother.⁴³ Details are provided for the counties of England and Wales and for poor law unions. Table 4.3 summarises the information for illegitimate children. A higher proportion of children in Carmarthenshire workhouses in 1849 were aged seven or over than in Wales as a whole, or in England, and nearly two-thirds of Carmarthenshire children were without their mother, compared to a third in Glamorgan and England, and a half in all of Wales. A more detailed breakdown showed that the proportion of older children not accompanied by their mothers was much larger in Carmarthenshire than elsewhere, even allowing for the higher levels of illegitimacy there. In each area, boys outnumbered girls. Numbers of children in individual workhouses were very variable; Neath and Newcastle Emlyn had only seven illegitimate children each, but Carmarthen and Llandeilo Fawr had 39 and 34 respectively, with the majority of the children aged over six, and not accompanied by their mothers.

was not residing with her (Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p. 249).

⁴² T. Thomas, *Poor Relief in Merthyr Tydfil Union in Victorian Times* (Bridgend, 1992), pp. 62-69.

⁴³ *Children in workhouses. Return of the number of children in the workhouses of the several unions and parishes in England and Wales, on Thursday, the 15th day of March 1849*, PP 1849 xlvii.

Table 4.3 Characteristics of illegitimate children in the workhouse, 15 March 1849, in Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire, Wales and England

	Age group			Sex		Mother		Total
	<3	3-6	7+	boys	girls	in work-house	not in work-house	
<i>(a) numbers</i>								
Carmarthenshire	30	25	67	66	56	46	76	122
Glamorgan	41	27	30	55	43	66	32	98
Wales	277	217	397	497	394	454	437	891
England	4,262	3,533	5,076	6,851	6,014	9,133	3,732	12,871
<i>(b) percentages</i>								
Carmarthenshire	24.6	20.5	54.9	54.1	45.9	37.7	62.3	100.0
Glamorgan	41.8	27.6	30.6	56.1	43.9	67.3	32.7	100.0
Wales	31.1	24.4	44.6	55.8	44.2	51.0	49.0	100.0
England	33.1	27.4	39.4	53.2	46.7	71.0	29.0	100.0
<i>(c) per thousand of population</i>								
Carmarthenshire	0.261	0.218	0.583	0.574	0.487	0.400	0.661	1.061
Glamorgan	0.171	0.112	0.125	0.229	0.179	0.275	0.133	0.408
Wales	0.240	0.188	0.344	0.431	0.341	0.393	0.379	0.772
England	0.285	0.236	0.339	0.457	0.401	0.610	0.249	0.859

Sources: *Children in Workhouses, 1849*, Registrar-General's Reports

The more detailed information underlying Table 4.3 showed that the numbers of boys exceeded those of girls at ages 3 and over, in both counties; and that the numbers of children remained relatively steady in each age group, whereas in England there was a decline with increasing age.⁴⁴ Older children were much less likely to be accompanied by their mother than were infants. It seems possible that some women trying to work and to provide a home for their children found it increasingly difficult as the children grew older; and other care arrangements might have broken down with the passage of time, for example as grandparents became incapacitated or died. Poor law officials were inclined to describe these children as 'deserted' or 'abandoned', but some mothers may have made a more positive choice than those words imply, believing that the workhouse, in spite of its rigours,

⁴⁴ A. Perkyns, 'The admission of children to the Milton Union Workhouse, Kent, 1835-1885', *Local Population Studies* (2008), p. 63-4. Perkyns found that illegitimate children were a relatively small group among children aged over six in Kent workhouses in 1849, with orphans making up the largest group, and the same was true for England and Wales as a whole.

offered their children better opportunities, through free schooling and the provision of employment, than an uncertain hand-to-mouth existence outside⁴⁵.

The information in Table 4.3 (c) shows the numbers of illegitimate children in the workhouse in relation to the population. Variations in the overall rates by area are largely due to differences in illegitimacy rates. However in some cases these differences are larger than would be expected from illegitimacy rates alone, and the more detailed breakdown by age and accompaniment by mother shows marked differences between areas. The higher rate in relation to population in Carmarthenshire is largely due to the excess proportion over the age of six years, a group which overlaps with those children who were not accompanied by their mothers. Although the overall rates for Wales and England were fairly close, as were those by age and sex, children were much more likely to be accompanied by their mothers in England.

Table 4.4, which also uses information from *Children in Workhouses*, shows that nearly three-quarters of children in Carmarthenshire workhouses were illegitimate, compared with rather under half in Glamorgan and Wales as a whole, and less than a quarter in England. The explanation seems to lie in an absence of legitimate, rather than a surplus of illegitimate, children. The number of children in the workhouse in relation to population was much higher in England than in Wales, and in the two Welsh counties, whereas the relative numbers of illegitimate children were the same (in Carmarthenshire) or lower (in Wales as a whole, and in Glamorgan). It would seem that the Welsh preference for out-door relief noted by Snell applied to legitimate children but not to the illegitimate.

⁴⁵ Tanya Evans makes a similar point in the context of admissions to the London Foundling Hospital. T. Evans, *'Unfortunate Objects': Lone Mothers in Eighteenth-Century London* (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 207, and Crompton argued that workhouse children were better cared for than their equivalents outside: F. Crompton, *Workhouse Children: Infant and Child Paupers under the Worcestershire Poor Law, 1780-1871* (Stroud, 1997).

Table 4.4 Illegitimate children in the workhouse as a percentage of all children in the workhouse, 15 March 1849, Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire, Wales and England

	Illegitimate children	All children	Percentage of children who were illegitimate
Carmarthenshire	122	165	73.9
Glamorgan	98	237	41.4
Wales	891	1,922	46.4
England	12,871	54,246	23.7

Sources: *Children in Workhouses*, 1849.

Some mothers of illegitimate children were prepared to use the workhouse as a lying-in hospital. In Neath, for example, 58 per cent of baptisms of illegitimate children in the parish church in the period 1838-60 gave the infant's address as the local workhouse. Table 4.5, based on a return of 1864, compares information about births in the workhouse over the period 1860-62 with all illegitimate births in the same period, showing that rates in Carmarthenshire were substantially lower than those in Glamorgan, and lower in Wales than England, suggesting that Carmarthenshire mothers were particularly reluctant to enter the workhouse.⁴⁶

Table 4.5 Illegitimate children born in the workhouse as a percentage of all illegitimate births, Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire, Wales and England, 1860-62

	Illegitimate births in the workhouse	All illegitimate births	Percentage of illegitimate children born in the workhouse
Carmarthenshire	14	931	5.7
Glamorgan	53	1,676	14.6
Wales	1,059	8,857	12.0
England	22,143	124,205	17.8

Sources: *Return showing the number of bastard children born in the several workhouses in England and Wales*, 1864; Registrar-General's Reports.

A comparison of the information shown in Table 4.5 with that in Table 4.4 in respect of infants under three years suggests different patterns of workhouse occupation in England and Wales. Mothers of illegitimate infants in England were more likely to give birth in the workhouse than were mothers in Carmarthenshire, though on any given day there were likely to be more illegitimate children in

⁴⁶ *Return showing the number of bastard children born in the several workhouses in England and Wales*, PP 1864 lii.

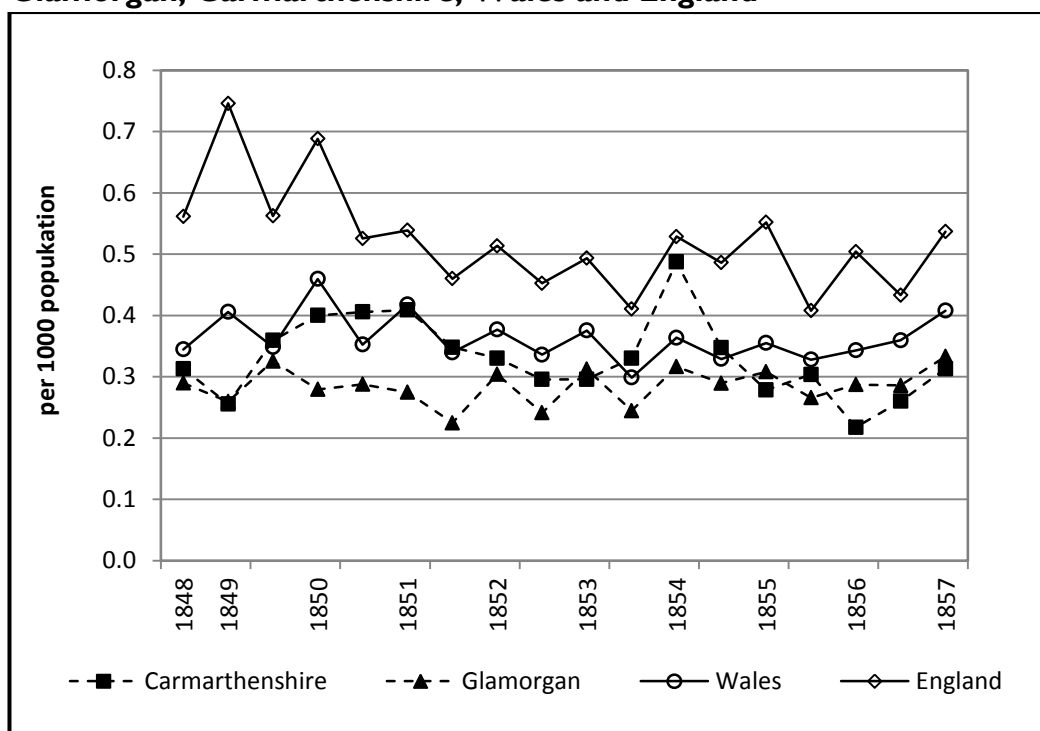
Carmarthenshire workhouses. The implication is that illegitimate infants in Carmarthenshire, and to a lesser extent those elsewhere in Wales, tended to arrive in the workhouse sometime after birth, but to stay there on average for longer periods. Alternatively, there might have been a marked change in the proportions of mothers using the workhouse to give birth between 1849 and 1860, but that seems less likely.

The Poor Law Board published counts of illegitimate children accompanied by their mothers in the workhouse by county from 1848 to 1857, enumerated at 1 January and 1 July. Not surprisingly, numbers for July tended to be lower than those for the preceding January. As Figure 4.3 shows, numbers relative to population were generally higher in England than in Wales, suggesting that the aversion to entering the workhouse was not confined to Carmarthenshire.⁴⁷ Rates were a little lower in Glamorgan than Carmarthenshire, though from July 1854 the two counties had tended to converge below the level for Wales as a whole. As with out-door relief, information about illegitimate children in the workhouse without their mothers was not separately distinguished; the rate for orphans and other children in Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan relieved in the workhouse without their parents was around 0.4-0.6 per thousand in the mid-1850s.

We have seen that the overall impact of the New Poor Law on illegitimate children in Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan was initially to place large numbers on out-door relief with their mothers. The numbers in this group fell away dramatically as workhouses opened across the two counties and guardians refused relief to abled bodied mothers outside the workhouse. By 1 January 1857 only 16 illegitimate children in Carmarthenshire and 17 in Glamorgan were receiving out-door relief with their mothers. Rather more children were relieved with their mothers in the workhouse – 36 in Carmarthenshire and 80 in Glamorgan at the same date. Overall, including orphans and other children not accompanied by their parents, some 274 Carmarthenshire children were supported by the poor rate. This represents a substantial reduction from the situation some twenty years earlier

⁴⁷ Englander said that 'Welsh resistance to the workhouse principle was such that the abolition of out-door relief was too provocative to contemplate'. D. Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in 19th Century Britain, 1834-1914*, (London, 1998), p. 29.

Figure 4.3 Illegitimate children accompanied by their mothers in the workhouse, per 1,000 of the population, 1 July 1848 – 1 January 1857, Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire, Wales and England



when Clive reported that ‘nearly 400’ illegitimate children were supported by Carmarthen Union alone. Table 4.6 shows the average numbers of illegitimate children relieved with their mothers over the period 1854-57, expressed as a rate per thousand of the population, together with rates for ‘other’ children receiving relief (orphans and others living apart from their parents), which give an upper limit to the numbers of illegitimate children relieved apart from their mothers. The period was chosen because after 1853 all unions in Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan had opened workhouses. Rates for children relieved with their mothers are similar in the two counties, but rather higher in England and substantially higher in Wales

Table 4.6 Illegitimate children and orphans and other children by type of relief, per 1,000 of the population, Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire, Wales and England, average 1854-57.

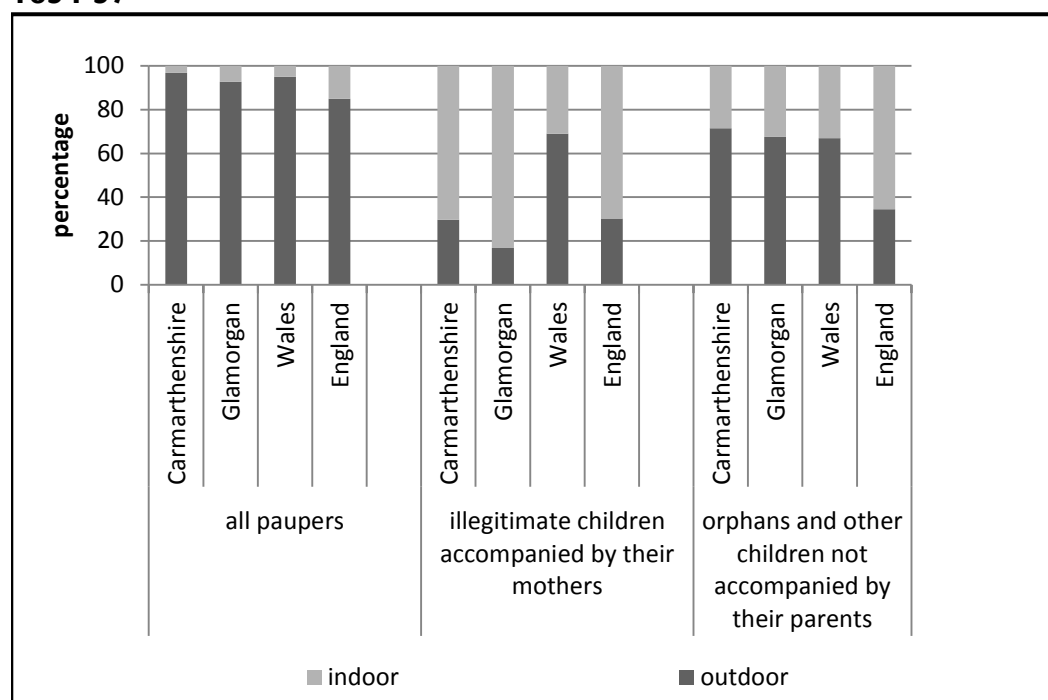
	Carmarthen- shire	Glamorgan	Wales	England
Illegitimate children with their mothers in the workhouse	0.32	0.31	0.37	0.53
Illegitimate children with their mothers on out-door relief	0.14	0.07	0.90	0.27
All illegitimate children relieved with their mothers	0.46	0.38	1.26	0.80
Orphans and other children in the workhouse without their parents	0.62	0.64	0.88	1.45
Orphans and other children on out-door relief without their parents	1.57	1.69	1.88	0.90
All orphan and other children relieved without their parents	2.20	2.33	2.76	2.36
Upper limit to numbers of illegitimate children relieved	2.66	2.71	4.03	3.16

Sources: Annual Reports of the Poor Law Board. Data refer to 1 January.

as a whole. The latter figure reflects the large number of illegitimate children on out-door relief in unions which were yet to open workhouses. In England however, rates were higher than in Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan both for indoor and out-door relief. Once again, we may infer that single mothers in the two counties were less willing to enter the workhouse than were their equivalents in England.

Combining the four categories of children gives a maximum rate of 2.7 per thousand for all illegitimate children relieved in both Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan at the start of 1857. Even allowing for losses from the pool of illegitimate children due to death, marriage of their parents or employment, this figure, compared with annual births of illegitimate children in the two counties of 2.7 and 1.7 per thousand of the population respectively, show that only a small proportion of illegitimate children could have been supported by the poor rate. A comparison with the data for chargeable bastards in 1836 given in Table 4.1 suggests that imposition of the workhouse system had succeeded in denying relief to large numbers of illegitimate children in Carmarthenshire who would have been supported in the absence of a workhouse though the impact in Glamorgan was much less. The workhouse test had succeeded in removing able-bodied mothers of illegitimate children from access to public relief.

Figure 4.4 Recipients of indoor and out-door relief as a percentage of all relief for all paupers, illegitimate children accompanied by their mothers, and orphans and other children not accompanied by their parents, Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire, Wales and England, average 1854-57



Source: Reports of the Poor Law Board

Note: Data at 1 January of each year. 'All paupers' excludes vagrants.

An alternative way of presenting the data underlying Table 4.6 is to look at the proportions relieved inside and outside the workhouse. As Snell demonstrated for 1874-5, a very high proportion of paupers in Wales received out-door relief. In unions with workhouses this was sometimes achieved by ignoring the rules, but more often by classifying paupers to categories for which exceptions were allowed. Figure 4.4 shows the situation in 1854-7, where the proportion for all paupers in Wales was higher than that for England, and even higher in Carmarthenshire. However the picture for illegitimate children accompanied by their mothers was rather different. In Carmarthenshire, some 30 per cent received out-door relief, the same percentage as in England, and the figure for Glamorgan was even lower, at 17 per cent. The higher figure for Wales as a whole of course reflects the unavailability of workhouses in many of the unions. It is difficult to escape the view that in spite of the sympathy towards single mothers expressed at the time of the

Rebecca Riots, the workhouse test was applied to them in a similar fashion in Carmarthenshire as in England, and more harshly in Glamorgan. To put it another way, there was less inclination on the part of guardians to 'bend' the rules in order to provide out-door relief for this group than there was for other groups of paupers, which may reflect a desire to punish mothers of illegitimate children. The position of orphans and other children not accompanied by their parents lies somewhere in between; in Wales and in the two Welsh counties shown here, the majority received out-door relief, whereas in England the majority were to be found in the workhouse. If, as might be suspected, illegitimate children made up the majority of these children, then we can deduce a greater willingness to provide out-door relief for them when they were not accompanied by their mothers, but without some evidence of the make-up of the category this conclusion is risky.

As we saw earlier, Graham's amendment to the poor law in 1844 improved the choices available to mothers of illegitimate children, allowing them to seek financial redress from the father of their child, though corroboration of the relationship was now required. Cases were heard at petty sessions, where intimate details of the couple's relationship were often discussed. In the Neath and Swansea courts, reported in the *Cambrian* newspaper, putative fathers were generally represented, mothers rarely so. Initially, newspaper reports were confined to a bare outline of the case and its outcome, with only the occasional intrusion of gratuitous details, as in the case of Mary Lewis of Oxwich in 1848, who was described as 'a good looking young woman'.⁴⁸ A substantial minority of cases were dismissed, and this seems to have happened more often where the putative fathers were of higher status. In the case brought by Mary Lewis the defendant, Mr William Bevan, 'a highly respectable farmer', was represented by Mr J. R. Thripp. The Bench dismissed the case on the grounds that though the plaintiff had 'lived some years in the defendant's service', her evidence was contradictory. James Kempthorne of Neath, described as an accountant, was also represented by Mr Thripp when Ann Jones brought affiliations proceedings against him. The magistrates dismissed the case, saying that they 'did not believe a single syllable of the evidence given by the witnesses'.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Cambrian*, 21 January, 1848.

⁴⁹ *Cambrian*, 21 April, 1848. In the 1851 census, Kempthorne was described as a solicitor's clerk and

In 1861 a return was made to the House of Commons of the numbers of summonses issued, applications heard, and orders made or refused in bastardy from 1845 to 1859, for the counties of England and Wales. Many counties made incomplete returns, or combined some of the categories requested, so that it is not feasible to compile meaningful aggregates for England or Wales. Indeed the returns for Carmarthenshire included only a handful of years, and covered the whole county only in 1847; as the latter figures were reported to be 'a fair average of the number of orders made during the years enquired after' they have been used in the second part of Table 4.7.⁵⁰

Table 4.7 Average numbers of summonses issued, applications made and orders made or refused in respect of affiliation, Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, 1845-59, and comparison with illegitimate births.

	Carmarthenshire	Glamorgan
<i>total, 1845-59</i>		
Summonses issued	414	2590
Applications made	396	1948
Orders made	323	1654
Orders refused	93	294
Orders made as percentage of summonses issued	78.0	63.9
Orders made as a percentage of applications made	81.6	84.9
<i>annual average 1849-51</i>		
Orders made	105	120
Illegitimate births	311	352
Orders made as a percentage of illegitimate births	33.8	34.1

Source: *Return of the number of summonses issued*, 1861, Annual reports of the Registrar-General.

Over 80 per cent of the applications resulted in orders being made; at the middle of the century these represented about a third of the yearly average of illegitimate births in the two counties. Examples of the sums ordered to be paid reported in the *Cambrian* newspaper for the period 1848-53 ranged between 18 and

Registrar of Marriages. The *Cambrian* shows him acting for the Union on a number of occasions.

⁵⁰ *Return of the number of summonses issued, applications heard, and orders made or refused in bastardy under the statute of the 7 & 8 Vict. c. 101, in consecutive years, from the year 1845 to the year 1859, both inclusive, set out in the order of the several counties of England and Wales*, PP 1861 lv.

30 pence a week, with the median at 24 pence. At Cardiff Petty Sessions, the amounts recorded in a register book of applications for orders in bastardy covering the period 1856-60 were generally higher, with most being set at 30 pence a week.⁵¹ Two small groups of cases in Carmarthenshire in 1849 and 1855 showed weekly awards of between 12 and 24 pence, with a median payment of 18 pence.⁵² The level of awards made, and the differences between Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, are very similar to those shown in Figure 3.12 for the later years of the old poor law. These sums were intended to cover the cost of supporting a child, but not its mother.

This section of the chapter has tried to set a statistical picture of the early years of the New Poor Law in south Wales against the largely subjective evidence given to the 1844 Report on the disturbances in south Wales. It has been shown that once the workhouses opened, numbers of mothers relieved with their children fell quite markedly. One of the consequences of this withdrawal of out-door relief from single mothers can be seen in the large number of children abandoned by their mothers, particularly in Carmarthenshire, which was not offset by any increase in numbers of mothers and children in the workhouse; there were lower rates of relief for the latter group in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire than elsewhere in Wales or in England. Welsh laxity in granting out-door relief to other kinds of paupers was rarely available to mothers of bastards, though poor law publications do not provide sufficient detail to show whether out-door relief was more readily available for their children. The change in the law in 1844 to permit mothers to affiliate their children improved the circumstances of some families.

Illegitimate children and their parents in the community

Chapter 3 looked at the characteristics of parents of illegitimate children up to 1840, derived from parish registers in sample parishes. In the period after 1840 Anglican baptisms continued to decline as a proportion of births, from 30 per cent in 1847-50 to 18 per cent in 1866-70, making registers a generally unreliable source

⁵¹ *Cambrian*, 1847-53; Glamorgan Archives, PSCBI/47/1: Cardiff Petty Sessions Applications for Bastardy Orders, 1856-60.

⁵² CA, Petty Sessions papers. The courts were held at Llangadog (1849) and Llandeilo Fawr (1855).

of information. As well as the declining numbers of baptisms, the proportion in which fathers were identified continued to fall, from 87 per cent in the 1820s to 25 per cent in the 1860s in Glamorgan, and from 94 per cent to 60 per cent in Carmarthenshire over the same period. In Neath the change was abrupt, with the vast majority of fathers named before 1855, and virtually none after. No doubt the new bastardy laws had encouraged a lack of interest on the part of the parish in the father's identity, and an increasing scepticism about the reliability of the mother's attribution. The slower pace of change in Carmarthenshire may indicate a more conservative attitude towards the philosophy of the New Poor Law and also the greater stability of communities in that county, with mothers and their partners more likely to be known to the local clergy.

More information about illegitimate children and their families can be uncovered by linking baptismal and other records with enumerators' returns for the population censuses of 1841-1861. Similar techniques were used to study the living circumstances of illegitimate children by Blaikie, Garrett and Davies in Scotland, and by Reay in Kent.⁵³ Such analyses enable us to investigate the role of kinship support for illegitimate children. The work of the Cambridge demographers has suggested that most English families were nuclear in structure and small in size, and that kinship structures were relatively weak, so that welfare was generally found within the community rather than provided by kin. Though much of this work related to the early modern period, it has sometimes been taken to apply to the nineteenth century. Recently some historians have challenged this view. King, for instance, using evidence from pauper letters relating to eight English counties written in the first four decades of the nineteenth century, has suggested that they demonstrated a wide kinship base, with links that were 'more functional than nominal'.⁵⁴ Reay, who examined three parishes in Kent using family reconstitution, found that most households had strong kinship links within the immediate community, and that it

⁵³ A. Blaikie, E. Garrett and R. Davies, 'Migration, living strategies and illegitimate childbearing: a comparison of two Scottish settings, 1871-1881' in A. Levene, T. Nutt and S. Williams (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain, 1700-1920* (Basingstoke 2005), p. 142-3; B. Reay, *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800-1930* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 207.

⁵⁴ S. King, 'The form and function of kinship amongst the English poor, 1800-1840s', *Annales* (2010), pp. 1147-74.

was not uncommon for families to use an extended family structure as a temporary strategy to weather difficult times.⁵⁵

For the purposes of this exercise, a small group of parishes was chosen from the original sample, covering a range of rural, urban and industrial communities, and was limited to illegitimate children born between 1835 and the date of the 1851 census.⁵⁶ As the aim was to look at the circumstances of children living in the community, those in the workhouse at the time of the census were excluded.⁵⁷ Some children were identified from census records, labelled by the enumerator as illegitimate (although this was not part of their instructions) or listed with a parent who was described as unmarried. The remainder have been identified by linking baptismal and census information. No attempt has been made to find those who had migrated outside the area of study. In assessing the information we need to recognise that some of the circumstances in which illegitimate children were raised make them more readily identifiable; for instance where the child lived with the mother or maternal grandparent and took the father's surname. Identification is more difficult in cases where the father was not named in the baptismal record, where both parents had common names, or where the mother subsequently married someone other than the father, and the child took the stepfather's surname. We should also bear in mind that a census is a snapshot, and the situations recorded there did not necessarily endure for long periods. Grandparents or other kin might die or become incapacitated, and mothers initially caring for their children might later leave them with kin, board them out or abandon them in the workhouse, in order to secure work or to marry.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ B. Reay, 'Kinship and the neighbourhood in nineteenth-century rural England: the myth of the autonomous nuclear family', *Journal of Family History* (1996), pp. 87-104.

⁵⁶ These parishes were Penboyr, Llanarthne and the eight Upper Tywi valley parishes in Carmarthenshire, and Neath, Llangynwyd, St Brides Minor, and four parishes in the Vale of Glamorgan. Details are given in Appendix B. The 1851 census was taken on 30 March.

⁵⁷ Among this small selection of parishes only Neath and Llandovery had workhouses. In the workhouse at Neath on census night 1851 there were six pairs of unmarried mother and infants; the children's ages ranged between one month and two years. At Llandovery there were nine single women and one widow aged between 27 and 46; as inmates were arranged by age rather than family group it was not possible to determine how many of the 30 children were theirs.

⁵⁸ For instance Anne James of Llangadog, living with her one year old son David Evans in 1851, had married by 1861, leaving David to be brought up by others (information provided by J. D. R. Thomas).

The success rate in identifying illegitimate children was not particularly high, as Table 4.8 shows, though it varied a great deal by parish. It proved easier to link baptisms to census entries in Carmarthenshire parishes, possibly because of the stability of these mainly rural parishes compared with those in Glamorgan, which included the town of Neath, and the expanding industrial parishes of Llangynwyd and St. Brides Minor. In total, just over a quarter of illegitimate baptisms were identified in the census, a much lower percentage than that found in the studies by Reay in the Blean, Kent (81 per cent) or by Blaikie *et al.* in Skye (60 per cent).⁵⁹ There were the usual difficulties in uniquely identifying individuals with common names, together with the much lower proportion of Anglican baptisms as compared with the Blean. In Skye, registration data was used in preference to baptisms, a more reliable source not usually available to researchers in England and Wales. In contrast, more illegitimate children were identified from census details alone in Glamorgan. Overall, census entries were found for less than a fifth of the estimated total number of illegitimate children born in the selected parishes.⁶⁰

Table 4.8 Numbers of illegitimate children born between 1835 and 1851 from selected parishes identified in census records for Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire

	Glamorgan	Carmarthenshire
Baptisms of illegitimate children recorded in parish registers between 1835 & 1851	195	261
<i>of which:</i> identified in 1851 census	30	93
Additional illegitimate children identified from census	43	41
All children identified as illegitimate	73	134
Estimated number of births of illegitimate children between 1835 & 1851	450	700
Children identified as illegitimate, as percentage of estimated total	16.2	19.1

Sources: census records, 1841-61; parish registers.

Where were the missing illegitimate children? In addition to the difficulties described above there are other circumstances which prevent identification. Some children – possibly around a quarter – might have died before the date of the census; others might have moved elsewhere. There may have been deliberate

⁵⁹ Reay, *Microhistories*, p. 207; Blaikie, *et al.*, 'Migration, living strategies and illegitimate childbearing' in Levene *et al.* (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, pp.142-3.

⁶⁰ The numbers of illegitimate births in the selected parishes were estimated from the published numbers for the appropriate RSD, apportioned according to parish population.

attempts to hide the illegitimate status of some children, through the mother describing herself as a widow, or the grandmother passing off the child as her own. In addition, many children were described the census as grandchildren, or as 'boarded' or 'nursed' with no apparent blood relationship to the head of household, whose status cannot be determined without access to birth registers.⁶¹ Thus the information presented in Table 4.9 which shows the type of households in which illegitimate children were found, should be read with some caution, as illustrating some the varied circumstances of illegitimate children, with a wide error range attached to the numerical estimates.

Living circumstances of illegitimate children

Table 4.9 shows that over a half of the children lived with their mother, either alone or in households which included other family members. Children living with other family members, particularly grandparents, were found more often in Carmarthenshire, whereas in Glamorgan, households with only mothers and children were more common. In most parishes, the majority of mother and child households were headed by the mother, with no-one else present in the household. A small number included kin other than grandparents (for instance the mother's siblings), but unrelated household members were rare; there is little evidence of mothers taking in lodgers to provide an income. Just under ten per cent of children lived in households which also included a father or stepfather, where there was evidence that the couple had married between the child's birth and the census date. The majority of children living apart from their mothers were with grandparents, or occasionally other kin, such as an aunt. These households were generally much larger than the mother and child households; here the child might grow up in the company of aunts, uncles and cousins. A few single fathers cared for their children; for instance, in 1851 John, the 5 year old illegitimate son of Mary Williams and John Davies, a farmer's son, was living with his father and grandfather.⁶² In a number of cases, amounting to 14 per cent in Glamorgan and 7 per cent on Carmarthenshire,

⁶¹ In a different context, Cooper and Donald showed that it was not unusual for census listings of households to include 'hidden' kin, described variously as domestic servants and lodgers; D. Cooper and M. Donald, 'Households and "hidden" kin in early-nineteenth-century England: four case studies in suburban Exeter, 1821-1861', *Continuity and Change* (1995), pp. 257-78. Birth registers for England and Wales are not available to researchers, in contrast with Scotland.

⁶² 1851 census. HO 107/2470, ED6.

the child's relationship to the head of household was given as 'lodger', 'boarder' or 'nursing', though this does not necessarily preclude a blood relationship.

Mothers of illegitimate children from Glamorgan shown in Table 4.9 who had their children living with them at the time of the census were more likely to be married or widowed than those from Carmarthenshire. This may be, at least in part, because some Carmarthenshire mothers who married following the birth of their illegitimate child migrated elsewhere on or within a few years of marriage. Glamorgan mothers tended to have larger families than those in Carmarthenshire, particularly if all children shown in the census, including those born before 1835 (excluded from Table 4.9) and later legitimate children are included. Again, migration may have played a part. While households in which mothers were the only adult represented a similar proportion in each county, they contained rather more children in Glamorgan, suggesting that economic conditions made it more possible for a single mother to support a family in the Glamorgan parishes, or alternatively that family support was more likely to be forthcoming in Carmarthenshire.

Table 4.9 : Living circumstances of illegitimate children in selected parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, born 1835-51

	Glamorgan			Carmarthenshire					Glamorgan parishes		Carmarthenshire parishes		Carmarthenshire parishes	
	Neath	Llangynwyd & St Brides Minor	Vale of Glamorgan	Upper Tywi Valley	Llanarthne	Penboyr			number	percentage	number	percentage	number	percentage
All households	30	24	6	66	20	16			60	100	102	100		100
With mother:														
mother alone	6	7	-	14	4	5			13		23	22		23
mother & father/ stepfather	4	3	-	5	4	-			7		9	12		9
mother & grandparents/ other kin	4	3	2	17	6	7			9		30	15		29
Not with mother:														
father	1	1	-	2	-	-			2		2	2		2
grandparents	10	4	3	18	4	3			17		25	28		25
other kin	1	-	-	3	2	-			1		5	2		5
boarded illegitimate children	4	6	1	7	-	1			11		8	18		8
All children	39	26	8	80	31	23			73	100	134	100		100
With mother:														
mother alone	15	9	-	20	9	6			24		35	33		26
mother & father/ stepfather	4	3	-	8	5	-			7		13	10		10
mother & grandparents/ other kin	4	3	4	21	8	12			11		41	15		31
Not with mother:														
father	1	1	-	2	-	-			2		2	3		1
grandparents	10	4	3	18	7	4			17		29	23		22
other kin	1	-	-	3	2	-			1		5	1		4
boarded illegitimate children	4	6	1	8	-	1			11		9	15		7

Sources: 1841-61 censuses, parish registers

The tabular information in Table 4.10 hides some family situations more complex than those implied by the headings. Several households included two or more illegitimate children, cousins rather than siblings, living with their grandparents and one of the mothers. Eleanor Jones, a 73 year old widow, was living at Ty'n y Wern, Llanddeusant, in 1851, with her unmarried daughter Mary, Mary's daughter Elizabeth, and Gwenllyan, the illegitimate daughter of Mary's absent sister Eleanor. In 1861, the elder Eleanor Jones was still living at Ty'n y Wern, then accompanied by her daughter Eleanor and Eleanor's four year old daughter, also called Elizabeth, illustrating the fluidity of some living arrangements.⁶³ Other households suggest a

Table 4.10 Mothers living with their illegitimate children in selected parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, by marital status, numbers of children accompanying them, and family size, 1851 census

	Glamorgan		Carmarthenshire	
Mothers:	29		63	
single	16		49	
married	6		9	
widowed	4		5	
not specified	3		-	
Number of children living with mother:		No. per mother		No. per mother
illegitimate	45	1.6	83	1.3
other	19	0.7	14	0.2
all	64	2.2	97	1.5
Family size (illegitimate children):				
one child	21		50	
more than one child	8		13	
Family size (all children):				
one child	15		45	
more than one child	14		18	

Sources: 1841-61 censuses, parish registers

history of bastardy over more than one generation, for example that of Thomas Davies of Bridge End, Cilycwm, who in 1851 headed a household which included his unmarried sister Mary Davies and half-sister Charlotte Williams (Charlotte having been born some time after their mother was widowed), and the sisters' two

⁶³ 1851 census, HO107/2470, ED1; 1861 census, RG9/4118, ED2; Llanddeusant baptism register.

illegitimate children.⁶⁴ These complex households were more commonly found in rural Carmarthenshire parishes than elsewhere.⁶⁵

Around ten per cent of the children in Table 4.9 were described as illegitimate, but not related to the head of household or to another household member. In other households there were unrelated children described as paupers. Several children in each of the categories were living in households where someone else was a pauper, typically a widow. Some of these were no doubt illegitimate children receiving out-door relief, with others supported by filiation payments from the father. There is also the possibility that poor law officials supported some paupers by boarding others with them, a practice redolent of the old poor law, but contrary to the spirit of the new.

Table 4.11 Living circumstances of illegitimate children: comparison of selected parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire with Blean, Kent and Skye

	Glamorgan parishes		Carmarthen-shire parishes		The Blean, Kent ¹		Skye ²	
	1835-61		1835-61		1821-71		1881	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Living with:								
mother only	24	33	35	26	22	18	34	16
mother and father/stepfather	7	12	13	10	42	34	14	6
mother & grandparents or other kin	11	15	41	31	33	27	112	51
grandparents	17	23	29	22	24	20	43	20
father	2	3	2	1	-	-	2	1
other kin	1	1	5	4	1	1	6	2
other	11	15	9	7	-	-	7	3
Total	73	100	134	100	122	100	218	100

Sources: 1 Reay, *Microhistories*, 2 Blaikie, Garrett and Davies, *Illegitimacy in Britain*.

Similar analyses of the living circumstances of illegitimate children using linked census data can be found in studies by Reay and Blaikie *et al.*, shown in Table

⁶⁴HO 107/2470, ED6; Cilycwm baptism register.

⁶⁵ The variety of household arrangements, and the importance of sisters, was also noted in Blaikie, Garrett and Davies, 'Migration, living strategies and illegitimate childbearing' in Levene *et al.* (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p.163.

4.11.⁶⁶ In each study, well over half of the children were living in households which included their mother. A substantial proportion lived in households which contained grandparents or other kin, with the highest proportion in Skye (71 per cent) and the lowest in Glamorgan (39 per cent). Mothers were more likely to have married after their child's birth in the Blean than elsewhere, whereas in the Welsh parishes they were more likely to maintain a household independent of other kin.

Table 4.12 compares the average ages of illegitimate children and their mothers in the sample Welsh parishes with two communities in Scotland studied by Blaikie *et al.*, where on average children living with their mothers were a few years younger than those whose mother was absent.⁶⁷ Age differentials between the two groups of children in Glamorgan parishes and in Penboyr had the same sign as those in the Scottish communities. In Llanarthne there was very little difference between the two groups, and in the Upper Tywi Valley the mean age of children living with their mothers was slightly higher than that for the remainder. The rather different age profile here is somewhat surprising, since the pattern which Blaikie *et al.* found in Rothiemay, of young women going into service outside their home parish, returning pregnant and later leaving their child with grandparents or other kin to return to service, was also typical of some Upper Tywi Valley parishes. The explanation seems to lie in a larger than average proportion of mothers residing with older children (rather than an excess of younger children living apart from their mothers). Some had been widows at the time of the child's birth; others had married; yet more were supporting widowed fathers or living in extended families with a variety of kin. It is noticeable that a larger proportion of mothers were co-resident with their children in Penboyr than in the other Welsh parishes. Though

⁶⁶ B. Reay, *Microhistories*, p. 207. A. Blaikie, E. Garrett and R. Davies, 'Migration, living strategies and illegitimate childbearing' in Levene *et al.* (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 162. Included in the 'mother and father/stepfather' group for Blean are 22 couples whom Reay describes as living in a 'common-law union', on the grounds that he was unable to find a marriage for the couple in local parish registers. However as Probert has shown, absence of evidence of a marriage is not the same as absence of a marriage, so that some or all of the 22 children may have been legitimate (R. Probert, *The Changing Legal Regulation of Cohabitation: From Fornicators to Family, 1600-2010* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 62-3). As a result the 'mother and father/stepfather' group for Blean may be over-stated, by up to 5 percentage points.

⁶⁷ Blaikie, Garrett and Davies, 'Migration, living strategies and illegitimate childbearing' in Levene *et al.* (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 160.

the numbers are too small to draw any firm conclusions, it seems likely that the proto-industrial nature of the area allowed a larger proportion of women to support themselves and their children within the community.

Table 4.12 Average age of illegitimate children, by whether or not their mothers were present in the same household, parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, Rothiemay and Skye.

	Youngest illegitimate child present		Mothers present	
	no.	mean age (years)	no.	mean age (years)
Neath				
mothers present on census night	12	2.6	12	28.9
mothers absent on census night	13	4.4		
Llangynwyd & St Brides				
mothers present on census night	9	3.3	9	34.1
mothers absent on census night	9	5.1		
Glamorgan sample parishes ¹				
mothers present on census night	22	3.1	22	31.2
mothers absent on census night	25	4.5		
Upper Tywi valley				
mothers present on census night	29	3.8	29	34.9
mothers absent on census night	25	3.3		
Llanarthne				
mothers present on census night	14	3.4	14	31.4
mothers absent on census night	8	3.3		
Penboyr				
mothers present on census night	10	5.0	10	36.1
mothers absent on census night	4	7.8		
Carmarthenshire sample parishes				
mothers present on census night	53	3.9	53	34.2
mothers absent on census night	37	3.8		
Rothiemay ²				
mothers present on census night	31	2.4	31	27.8
mothers absent on census night	17	5.1		
Skye ²				
mothers present on census night	160	3.5	160	30.4
mothers absent on census night	58	5.6		

Source: Rothiemay and Skye: Blaikie, Garrett and Davies, *Illegitimacy in Britain*.

Notes:

(1) Figures for Glamorgan include three children and one mother in Vale of Glamorgan parishes.

(2) Figures for Rothiemay and Skye are for mothers and children present in the 1881 census, whereas those for Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire are for children under 10 years born between 1835 and 1851 present in the 1841 or 1851 censuses. The average age given for Skye covers all illegitimate children present.

The mean age of mothers co-resident with their illegitimate children at the time of the census in Neath was rather lower than elsewhere. Average maternal ages at the birth of the youngest illegitimate child tended to be about three years above the average age of marriage of all women in the registration sub-districts in which the sample parishes were located, except in the case of Llanarthne, where they were very similar.⁶⁸ Historians of illegitimacy have used the similarity of age at marriage to age at first birth as support for the idea that illegitimacy was primarily an accident of courtship. There is clearly some confirmation for this in the sample considered here, but there are also examples of situations that lie outside the conventional courtship model, such as cohabiting couples and widows. Mothers in the sample Welsh parishes who were living with their children were on average rather older than those in the Scottish communities. The Scottish and Welsh examples are of course separated by more than thirty years; at a time when average age at marriage was falling, some decline in the mean age of single mothers at the birth of an illegitimate child might also be expected.

Evidence of cohabitation

Table 4.9 includes 16 cases where a mother and child or children were living with a father or stepfather. Ten mothers had married their child's father subsequent to the birth. A further three mothers had married someone who was not their child's father, and three appeared to have been cohabiting with the father. The true number in these groups is almost certainly larger, but many are hidden by the multiplicity of common names, and possibly the steps taken by couples to disguise the nature of their relationship. The suspicion of cohabitation raised by the names of the members of the three households shown in Table 4.9 is readily confirmed by registration data and subsequent censuses, as table 4.13 shows. These constitute a very small proportion of all households, seemingly confirming Probert's view that pre-marital cohabitation was uncommon.⁶⁹ However, as Hurren and King have commented, estimates of the incidence of cohabitation are influenced by the way in which it is defined.⁷⁰ Here cohabiting couples are taken to be parents of

⁶⁸ Mean ages at marriage are shown in Table 5.2.

⁶⁹ Probert, *The Changing Legal Regulation of Cohabitation*, p. 75.

⁷⁰ E. T. Hurren and S. A. King, 'Cohabiting couples in the 19th century Coronial Records of the Midlands Circuit' in R. Probert (ed.), *Cohabitation and Non-Marital Births in England and Wales, 1600-*

illegitimate children who were residing at the same address but not married to each other. In principle this includes couples who went by the same surname, though in practice none were found; they could only have been identified through an exhaustive search of marriage records over a wide area, such as Probert herself used.

In the first case, baptismal records confirm that Sarah Jenkins, listed as a lodger in the house of David Samuel at Wind Street, Neath, was in fact the mother of his children.⁷¹ Although David described himself as a widower in 1851, he appeared to be single at the time of the 1841 census, living in an entirely male household a few miles north of Neath, while Sarah was at Wind Street Neath with her son Samuel and three older children, all four of whom bore the surname Jenkins. Sarah Jenkins thus had at least seven illegitimate children. It seems likely that the couple were not cohabiting in 1845, when Sarah applied for an affiliation order against David, but by 1853 they were married.⁷²

In the second case William Howell is described as Henry Howell's son in the 1851 census, but the relationship of Mary Davies to either of them is not specified. The situation is clarified by the 1861 census, which shows Mary as the head of household, with William and three younger siblings all bearing the surname Davies. Henry Howell is described as a lodger. The change from using father's surname to that of the mother seen here also occurs in several other families between the two censuses. Some mothers may initially have used the father's surname for their child in the hope that marriage might still be a possibility, but eventually have changed to their own name in order to avoid drawing attention to the illegitimacy.

The third case is consistent with a relationship having developed between two people employed in the same household, as a result of their proximity. The parish register records that David Jones and Anne Williams were the parents of Richard Jones, perhaps beginning their relationship when Anne was employed a

2012 (Basingstoke, 2014) p.101.

⁷¹ In this case, and in the one following, the description of 'lodger' hides a closer relationship, similar to the findings of Cooper and Donald ('Households and "hidden" kin').

⁷² *Cambrian*, 17 May, 1845.

servant at Cwmcrynfe. However there are other possible connections; Anne, a widow, might have been John Williams' sister-in-law, and possibly also the mother of William Jones (though the marriage register show her father's surname to have been Hicks, not Rees). A common thread in two of the three cases is that cohabitation was eventually replaced by marriage. In other households containing both parents included in Table 4.9 the couple had married in the period between the birth of one or more illegitimate children and the census.

Table 4.13 Examples of cohabiting couples in selected parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, 1851 census

Neath, H.O.107/ 2463, ED 4d, Wind Street					
David Samuel	Head	Wid.	47	Shoemaker	GLA, Neath
Samuel Samuel	Son	U	11	Spin Winder, Wool	GLA, Neath
Sarah Samuel	Daur	-	8	-	GLA, Neath
Elizabeth Samuel	Daur	U	6	-	GLA, Neath
Noah Samuel	Son	-	4	-	GLA, Neath
Sarah Jenkins	Lodger	-	44	Washerwoman	GLA, Briton Ferry

Samuel, illegitimate son of David Samuel & Sarah Jenkins, was baptised on 24 Mar 1839.

Sarah Jenkin applied for an affiliation order against David Samuel, reported in the *Cambrian*, 17 May 1845.

David Samuel and Sarah Jenkins were married in the second quarter of 1853.

Elizabeth & Noah, children of David & Elizabeth Samuel, born before their parents' marriage, were baptised on 29 October 1855, not described as illegitimate.

Neath, H.O.107/ 2463, ED 4d, Wind Street

Henry Howell	Head	U	32	Carpenter	GLA, Llangennith
Mary Davies	-	Wid.	34	Charwoman	GLA, Neath
William Howell	Son	-	2	At Home	GLA, Neath

In the 1861 census the roles were reversed; Mary Davies was the head of household and William (now Davies) her son. There were three younger children with the surname Davies. Henry Howell was a lodger.

Llanddeusant, ED3/11 Cwmcrynfe

John Williams	Head	Wid.	85	Retired farmer	CMN, Llanddeusant
David Jones	Lab.	U	66	Ag. Lab.	CMN, Llanddeusant
Anne Williams	Servt.	Wid.	45	House servant	CMN, Llandeilo Fawr
William Jones	Nephew	-	7	-	CMN, Llanddeusant
Richard Jones	Nephew	-	4	-	CMN, Llanddeusant

William, natural son of Anne Rees, Cwmcrynfe, servant, was baptised on 5 Mar 1844.

Richard, illegitimate son of Anne Williams, Cwmcrynfe, by David Jones was baptised on 2 Jan 1848.

Anne Williams, widow, & David Jones, labourer, bachelor, were married on 25 Nov 1851.

Sources: 1851 census and parish registers.

It seems unlikely that cohabitation could often have been disguised as marriage in the largely stable face-to-face societies of rural Carmarthenshire or the Vale of Glamorgan, though perhaps this might be more credible in industrial Neath and Llangynwyd. The detailed investigations required to take this thread forward are however beyond the scope of this study. Two points are worth making. The baptismal registers show many cases of couples having more than one illegitimate child together, but very few can be shown to be living together; those individuals who can be found in the census are usually living apart, with their parents.⁷³ Occasionally a baptism records a couple as servants in the same household, but this does not amount to cohabitation. Secondly, reports of cohabitation in south Wales during this period are uncommon. Among the many criticisms of supposed irregular sexual practices contained in the official reports on Wales discussed above, the only mention of cohabitation was in the 1847 Report, in evidence relating to Abersychan, an industrial parish in Monmouthshire.⁷⁴ It seems unlikely that the various authors or their informants would all have missed the opportunity to add to the catalogue of misdemeanours had the practice been widespread.

Employment status of mothers and their household heads

Most unmarried women in south Wales in the mid-nineteenth century employed outside the home were live-in domestic or farm servants, and as these occupations were not usually available to women with children, finding work in these circumstances could be difficult. Table 4.14 shows the occupations of mothers of illegitimate children included in Table 4.9. Where the enumerators' returns show a mother as having a domestic occupation, it is not always clear whether this involved paid employment outside the home. It seems unlikely, for instance, that Rachel Powell of Llangynwyd, a head of household described as a housekeeper, with four unmarried sons aged from one year to 25, three of them employed as miners, found much time for work outside the home.⁷⁵ On the other hand a woman living with her parents and described as a servant might well have

⁷³ For instance, Anne Howells and Morgan Davies of Llanddeusant, Carmarthenshire had four children between 1835 and 1842 but continued to live at their respective parents' farms until they married in 1843.

⁷⁴ According to Rev. Francis Bluett, vicar of Abersychan, 'Persons are often found here living together as man and wife for years, and supposed to be married', *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, PP 1847xxvii, part 2, p. 402.

⁷⁵ HO 107/2461, ED 3.

been employed elsewhere. In compiling Table 4.14 it has been assumed that specific domestic occupations such as laundress and charwomen refer to paid work, and that mothers described as servants, living in households where there were others at home to carry out domestic tasks, were in paid employment outside the home. Just under half of the mothers of illegitimate children appear to have been employed; most were engaged in domestic work as laundresses or charwomen. A small number had skilled trades, presumably acquired before they became mothers, including a furniture polisher of Cwmdau, Llangynwyd parish, and a weaver and spinner, both in the Teifi-side textile village of Penboyr. The expansion of industrial work in Glamorgan seems to have contributed little to the employment of unmarried mothers; just one was working in industry, as a mine cleaner. Carmarthenshire showed a wider range of occupations than Glamorgan, including labouring (both agricultural and industrial) and trading in agricultural goods such as eggs, in addition to employment in textile-related trades. A small number of the mothers without employment were described as paupers, possibly indicating that they were supported by poor relief. Some mothers – including perhaps the one described as ‘independent’ in Table 4.14 – would have received an income from the father of their child, either through an affiliation order or by private arrangement. Probably Elizabeth John, a servant living with her two sons in St Brides Minor in 1841, was supported by the children’s father, Abraham Verity, a widowed surgeon from nearby Coity.⁷⁶ Theodosia Williams obtained an affiliation order for 2/6 per week at Neath Petty Sessions in June 1848 from Daniel Jones, a farmer, the father of her second illegitimate child.⁷⁷ The numbers found to have married after the birth of their child probably understates the true number, since they may be difficult to identify, particularly if the husband was not the child’s father. In Neath, and perhaps elsewhere, prostitution may have provided an income for some mothers, though none of the Neath prostitutes mentioned by name in the *Cambrian* during the 1840s appears among the mothers who make up Table 4.9.

⁷⁶ HO 107/1422/48.

⁷⁷ *Cambrian*, 26 May and 2 June, 1848. The newspaper’s reports show that 2 shillings was the amount most commonly awarded between 1848 and 1853.

Table 4.14 Occupations of mothers of illegitimate children in selected parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, 1851

	Glamorgan	Carmarthenshire
Mothers in paid employment:	14	26
domestic	8	7
labourer	1	9
dealer	2	4
textiles & clothing	1	6
other	2	-
Mothers without paid employment:	14	36
paupers	2	5
independent	-	1
Mothers who were heads of household	13	20
All mothers	28	62

Sources: 1851 census and parish registers.

Heads of households which included illegitimate children were most commonly farmers (mainly in Carmarthenshire parishes), labourers and artisans such as blacksmiths, carpenters and shoemakers. Many mothers living with their farming families, but not listed as having any occupation, would have contributed to the family enterprise, and this may account for the smaller proportion of mothers with specified employment in Carmarthenshire. Some of the farmers were substantial, with holdings of well over a hundred acres. The largest was Cilwen in Penboyr, with 375 acres, run by Martha Howells with her unmarried son and daughter, looking after two illegitimate grandchildren, while her husband languished in gaol.⁷⁸ Other household heads of some standing included a schoolmaster in Llandingad, grandfather to an illegitimate child, and a rate collector in Neath, whose household included an apparently unrelated illegitimate child being nursed there.⁷⁹

In his research into illegitimate children and their parents in three English counties from 1800 to 1840, Steven King concluded that 'substantial numbers of illegitimate births were concentrated in family groupings in which the majority of women and a substantial proportion of men were involved in at least 1 illegitimacy event', and also that there was 'some evidence of spatial concentration of bastard-bearing women ...and a distinct tendency for bastardy to be focused

⁷⁸ HO 107/2482, ED7f.

⁷⁹ HO 107/2470, ED 4 and HO 107/2463, ED 4h.

disproportionately among migrant families'.⁸⁰ It is difficult to determine whether the first of these two statements might apply to the families investigated here. Table 4.10 shows that a smaller proportion of mothers in the sample were involved in multiple events than in King's data, but the methodology used is not identical, and probably underestimates the numbers of multiple events.⁸¹ Some mothers identified in the census would have had additional children who had died, been brought up elsewhere, or had already left home. And in some of the parishes included in the linking exercise, notably Llanddeusant, there is evidence of family relationships between some mothers. Unfortunately the limited name pool in use in south Wales precludes a detailed investigation of familial links, though some investigation of migration patterns and spatial concentration is possible.

The geography of illegitimacy

In most of the parishes, the proportions of mothers of illegitimate children living in the parish in which they were born were similar to the proportions in the population of all unmarried women in the same age range. The exception was Llangynwyd, a parish which had seen a great deal of in-migration in the years leading up to 1851. Roughly a third of single women in the fertile age range had been born in Llangynwyd, a third were from the rest of Glamorgan, and a third from elsewhere. However, all nine mothers living with their illegitimate children were born in Glamorgan, mainly in parishes adjoining Llangynwyd. If anything, mothers living with their illegitimate children in Llangynwyd were more likely to have been born there or in nearby parishes than were other single women of a similar age.

⁸⁰ S. A. King, 'The bastardy prone sub-society again: bastards and their fathers and mothers in Lancashire, Wiltshire and Somerset, 1800-1840' in Levene *et al.* (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 84-5. King found that almost 40 per cent of bastards in three of the four parishes considered were part of a multiple illegitimacy experience (p. 75).

⁸¹ The matching exercise described here revealed several illegitimate children listed in the census but not in baptismal registers who were siblings to those found in baptismal registers. There may well have been more, living with other family members, or in the workhouse. King found that examination of several sources for illegitimacy in a parish increased the numbers of events substantially, and particularly the numbers of mothers with multiple bastard children (King, *Illegitimacy in Britain*, pp. 73-5).

Table 4.15 Streets in Neath, Glamorgan, with the highest concentration of households containing illegitimate children, 1851

	Households with illegitimate children	All households	Percentage of households with illegitimate children
The Green	5	115	4.3
Wind Street	8	92	8.7
All other addresses	18	901	2.0
All Neath addresses	31	1108	2.8

Sources: 1851 census.

Among the parishes considered here, Neath was the only one with a substantial urban area, where it was possible to investigate the spatial concentration of households with illegitimate children. No particularly high concentrations were evident, but as Table 4.15 shows, two streets, Wind Street and The Green, had higher concentrations than the rest of the town. The Green, despite its name, was a densely-populated street, isolated between the Neath Canal and the railway station.⁸² The area was mainly working-class, with artisans and labourers, including several households with paupers, and a few families of hawkers and travellers, mainly of Irish origin. Wind Street, one of the main shopping thoroughfares of the town, was home to a wider social range, from a few paupers and hawkers, through large numbers of artisans and shopkeepers, to a small number of higher-status households including a couple of solicitors and the local Rector. Wind Street clearly attracted mothers who were able to earn an independent living; six out of the eight families with illegitimate children living there included the mother, of whom five were in work, compared with only half the mothers of illegitimate children living elsewhere in Neath. In contrast, at The Green only one of the families with illegitimate children included the child/ren's mother. It would seem that there is only limited support here for King's hypothesis of spatial concentration and migrant status among mothers of illegitimate children.

⁸² The Vale of Neath Railway was authorised in 1846. The first section, from Neath to Aberdare, opened a few months after the 1851 census, in the September of that year, but much of the structure would have been in place at the time of the census.

Conclusions

As Henriques said, the implementation of the Bastardy Clauses in south Wales had 'upset ... a delicate machinery of social balance', helping to provoke a degree of civil unrest which prompted the government to give way to those who demanded that these clauses be changed.⁸³ Amendments to the New Poor Law in 1844 to allow women to seek redress from the father of their child resulted in the removal of one of the two fundamental principles of the bastardy laws, that the mother alone was responsible for her child. The attempt to deter bastardy by altering the sexual behaviour of young women, using economic disincentives, had failed. Traditional courtship customs, in south Wales and elsewhere, had proved stronger, at least in the short term, and public opinion would not tolerate the extent of suffering which might have been required to modify behaviour in the longer term. Marriage remained the most usual outcome of an extra-marital pregnancy. Those who could or would not marry faced a harsher system than before, but the changes were in some respects less radical than the laws' architects had hoped. Most illegitimate children in south Wales continued to live in the community, with their mothers, their grandparents or both. There were some differences between the two counties in the family circumstances of illegitimate children. Mothers in Carmarthenshire tended to be older, and to have fewer children, than those in Glamorgan. Carmarthenshire children were more likely to be living with grandparent or other kin, but their mothers were less likely to have been widowed before their illegitimate child's birth, or married after it, than those in Glamorgan. A consequence of the new laws was the creation of a new class of pauper (or at least its expansion), that of abandoned illegitimate children, both in the workhouse and outside. These children, particularly numerous in Carmarthenshire, were placed in a very different condition from those who had previously been put out to nurse while their mothers returned to service, since the mother's desire to avoid the workhouse would in most cases have led her to sever all contact with her child.

⁸³ Henriques, 'Bastardy and the New Poor Law', p. 127.

The concentration on heavy industry in south Wales offered little in the way of employment opportunities for women, so that the few mothers who were able to care for their children and earn a living without apparent family support were typically employed in domestic occupations. From 1844 some mothers – possibly about a third – obtained support for their child from the father. Others were prepared to suffer severe deprivation in order to avoid the workhouse, though a minority used it as a resource to get them through difficult times such as childbirth. Financial support for illegitimate children continued to be provided from a mix of local rates, father, mother and grandparents, though the balance had moved away from the first two sources, and towards the mother and her family. Though mothers were reluctant to accept relief in the workhouse, it had become a more significant component in south Wales than it had been under the old law. More generally, the balance of power had shifted away from mothers towards the poor law authorities. Possibly the greatest change was the fear and uncertainty which the new system produced in many mothers of illegitimate children, particularly those without family help, who had to choose between the rigours of the workhouse for themselves and their child, a precarious life for both in the community, or leaving their child in the workhouse. Whether the new law had met with any success in increasing the stigma attached to unmarried mothers in south Wales is one of the issues to be examined in Chapter 6. In the meantime, we return in Chapter 5 to demographic analysis, considering whether the parish register estimates of illegitimacy rates in Chapter 3 can be reconciled with the later statistics compiled from birth registration, and investigating the demographic, social and economic factors which influenced illegitimacy in south Wales in the mid nineteenth century.

Chapter 5 Trends in Illegitimacy in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

This chapter takes up the analysis of trends in illegitimacy begun in Chapter 3, which covered the period 1680-1840. It first considers the reliability of those estimates as compared with information published by the Registrar-General from the civil registration system, and presents illegitimacy ratios for the full study period (1680-1870) compared with the series for England produced by Laslett *et al.* The remainder of the chapter is focussed on illegitimacy in the mid-nineteenth century. A brief comparison of illegitimacy rates in south Wales with those in the rest of the country is followed by a detailed investigation of the relationship between illegitimacy in the study area and a range of demographic, social, economic and cultural factors. For the purposes of this analysis, information about population, age and sex from the 1851 census was used to calculate a more precise measure of illegitimacy, the index of illegitimate fertility. The chapter goes on to explore the possibility of developing a model of illegitimate fertility, using the most relevant social, economic and cultural factors, including language, poor relief and household occupation.

Data quality

The statistical information abstracted from the civil registration system from 1842 enables checks to be made on the reliability of illegitimacy ratios obtained from the sample of Anglican baptismal records discussed in the previous chapter. Two aspects are considered:

- Are the illegitimacy ratios calculated from parish register data up to the 1840s consistent with those from civil registration data from 1842?
- How representative in aggregate are the sample parishes of the county as a whole (referred to as the *sample county*), for the period 1847-70?

In the context of civil registration the usual definition of county is that used in the Registrar-General's Reports of the period, based on the allocation of poor

law unions to counties. In the case of Glamorgan there was not a great deal of difference between historic and registration county, but the Carmarthenshire registration county was substantially smaller than its historic equivalent (about 14 per cent lower by 1851 population). A better approximation to historic county can be obtained by aggregating all the RSDs which lie wholly or mainly within the boundaries of the historic county, described here as the *RSD county*. There are 22 RSDs in the Glamorgan RSD county and 26 in the Carmarthenshire RSD county, compared with 6 and 11 in the respective sample counties. In the analysis that follows, RSD county is used wherever possible.

Comparison between parish register and civil registration data

In Chapter 3 it was suggested that illegitimacy ratios calculated from baptismal records might become less reliable as the nineteenth century progressed. Table 3.1 implies that by the 1840s fewer than a half of all the infants born in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire were baptised in the established church. Of the remainder, increasing numbers were baptised in Nonconformist chapels through the early decades of the nineteenth century. As Nonconformist chapels tended to discipline members for illegitimacy or pre-marital conception, it seems likely that the pre-marital sexual behaviour of parents of children baptised in Nonconformist chapels was different from those who baptised their children in church.¹ Thus illegitimacy ratios estimated from church baptisms might not represent those of the whole population. A third group of children – those not baptised at all – may also have been increasing in size. The growth of religious nonconformity led many people to sever their links with the established church, but not necessarily to commit themselves to any particular nonconformist denomination, and as infant baptism was not held to be a sacrament as it was in the Anglican Church, some parents may have felt little pressing need to have their children baptised. A tendency for the numbers of unbaptised infants to increase might have been reinforced by the advent of civil registration in 1837, which reduced the documentary usefulness of a baptism certificate.

¹ Examination of Nonconformist registers for the Upper Tywi Valley showed very few illegitimacies. The likelihood is that most Nonconformist mothers of illegitimate children were excluded from their chapel and were unable to baptise their children, at least until they secured re-admittance.

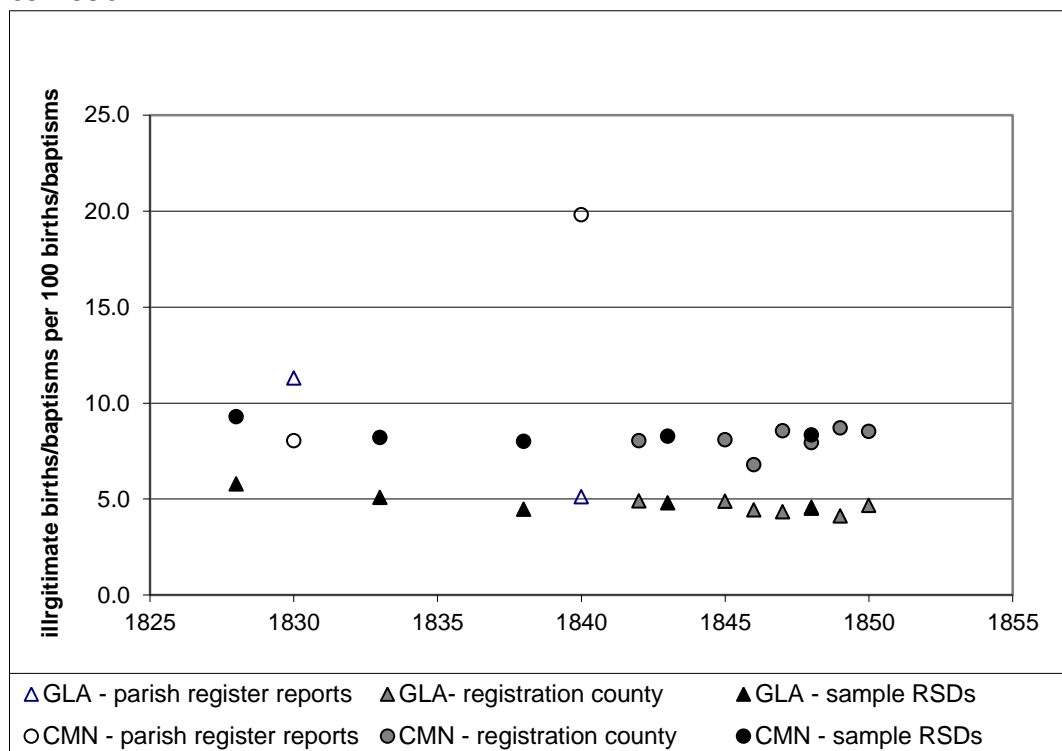
However, when illegitimacy ratios obtained from the sample parishes are compared with those published from 1842 by the Registrar-General, they give a consistent and plausible picture for the 1840s at the county level. Figure 5.1 shows that there is good correspondence over the period 1842 to 1850 between the sample estimates of county illegitimacy ratios and those from the civil registration system. Indeed the correspondence is so close that it gives some confidence that sample estimates for the earlier part of the nineteenth century are more reliable than the decline in church baptisms might suggest. We look later at how well this compares with figures for England from the work of the Cambridge Group.

A further source of information about illegitimacy, also shown in Figure 5.2, was collated by the Registrar-General's Office from parish registers for 1830 and 1840 and published as part of the 1831 and 1841 Census Reports.² These illegitimacy ratios have been adjusted to take account of estimates of 'unentered' births which were noted in the reports. The figures are not consistent either with sample or registration data and are probably unreliable; in particular the incidence of illegitimacy in Carmarthenshire in 1840 seems excessively high.³ A comparison of the Carmarthenshire data at registration district level with information derived directly from parish registers suggests that additional illegitimacies known to the providers of the data have been added (possibly workhouse births of illegitimate children not baptised in the Church of England).

² 1831 & 1841 Census Reports, Parish Register Abstracts.

³ Henriques believed the 1831 and 1841 Census Parish Register Reports to be unreliable, detailing discrepancies between them and the Registrar-General's figures for 1842. U. R. Q. Henriques, 'Bastardy and the New Poor Law', *Past and Present* 37 (1967), p. 122.

Figure 5.1 Illegitimacy ratios for Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire from sample data, census parish register reports and civil registration, 1825-30 to 1850



Sources:

Parish Register Reports: Illegitimacy ratios for the historic counties of Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan, from 1831 and 1841 Census Parish Register reports.

Registration county: Illegitimacy ratios for the registration counties of Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan, from the Register-General's reports.

Sample RSDs: Illegitimacy ratios from sample parish registers; 5-year averages plotted at the period mid-point

Consistency between sample and RSD counties

Figure 5.2 compares illegitimacy ratios based on civil registration data for sample and RSD counties by year, from 1847 to 1870. Although the ratios for sample counties are a little more erratic than those for registration counties, the two sets of series are fairly close. This is confirmed by Table 5.1, which shows that the mean differences, and the mean squared differences, between the two sets of estimates are small. These results give some reassurance that figures for the sample parishes provide good estimates of the illegitimacy ratio for the counties as a whole.

Figure 5.2 Comparison of illegitimacy ratios for sample county and RSD county, Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, 1847-70

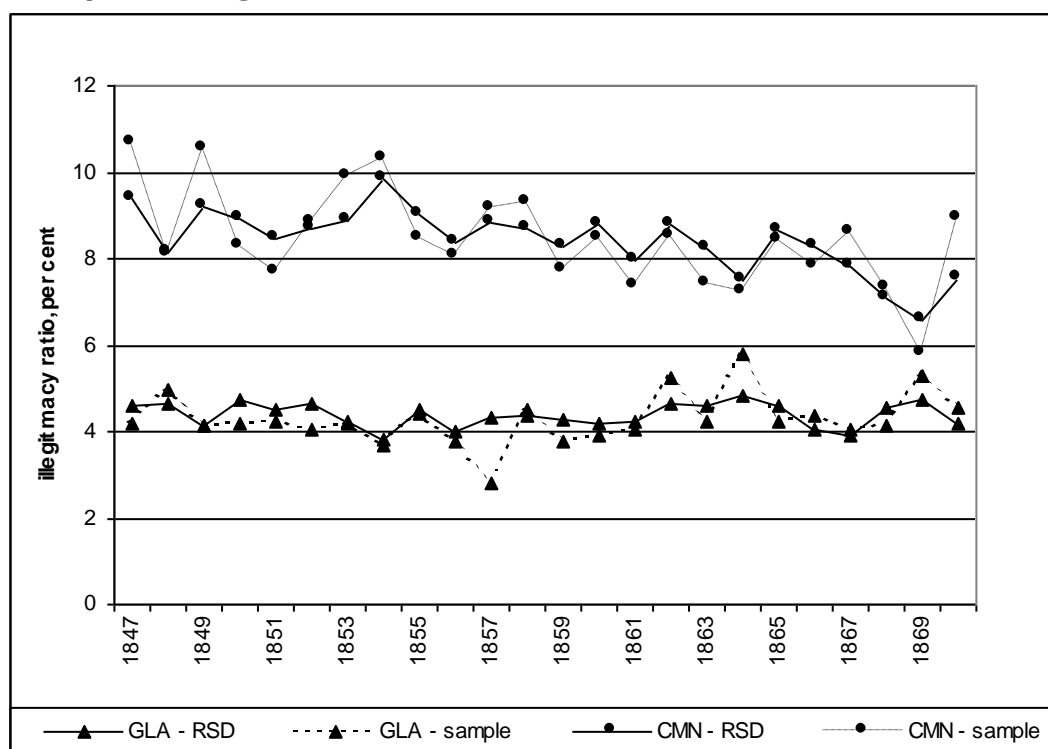


Table 5.1 Comparison of illegitimacy ratios for sample and RSD county, Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, average 1847-70

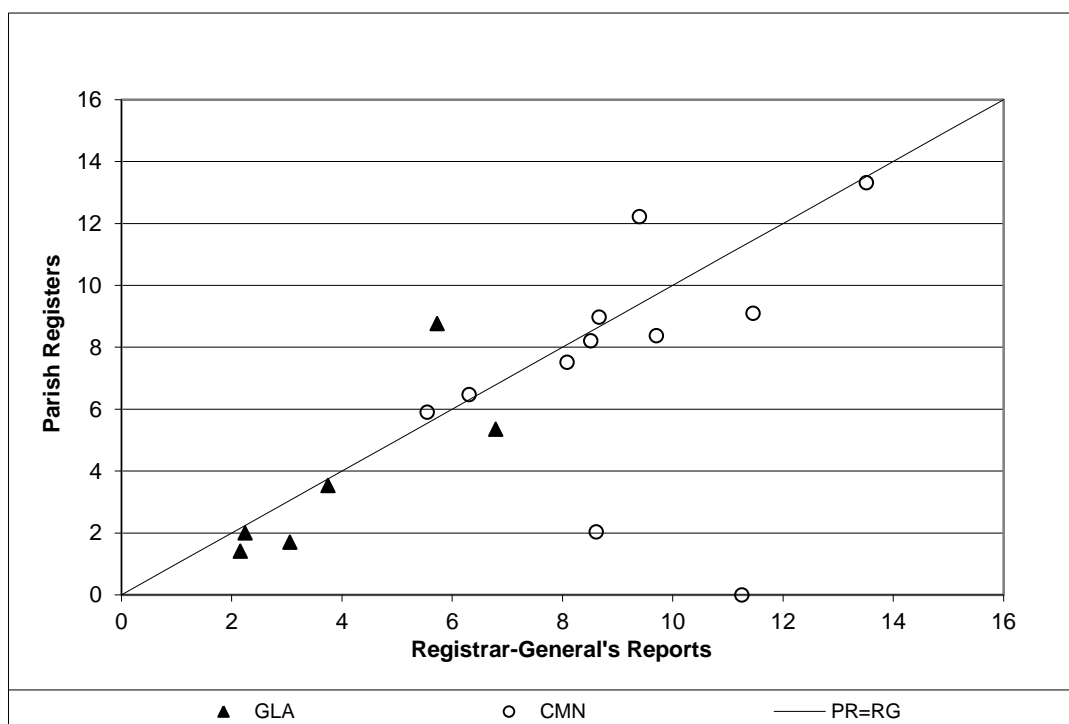
	Glamorgan	Carmarthenshire
Mean illegitimacy ratio, RSD county	4.39	8.41
Mean illegitimacy ratio, sample	4.28	8.45
Mean difference, RSD county less sample county	0.11	-0.04
Mean squared differences	0.26	0.48

Figure 5.2 also shows that between 1847 and 1870 the illegitimacy ratio in Carmarthenshire fell by around 2 percentage points, whereas in Glamorgan there was very little change.

Plotting illegitimacy ratios calculated from registration data with those from parish registers for the sample RSDs, for the period 1846-55, shows that for most RSDs the correspondence is reasonably close though, as Figure 5.3 shows, there is a tendency for the parish register ratios to be slightly lower than the corresponding RG ratios (most points lie below the line indicating equality between the two estimates). There are a couple of anomalies (Llanfair-ar-y-bryn and Llandingad),

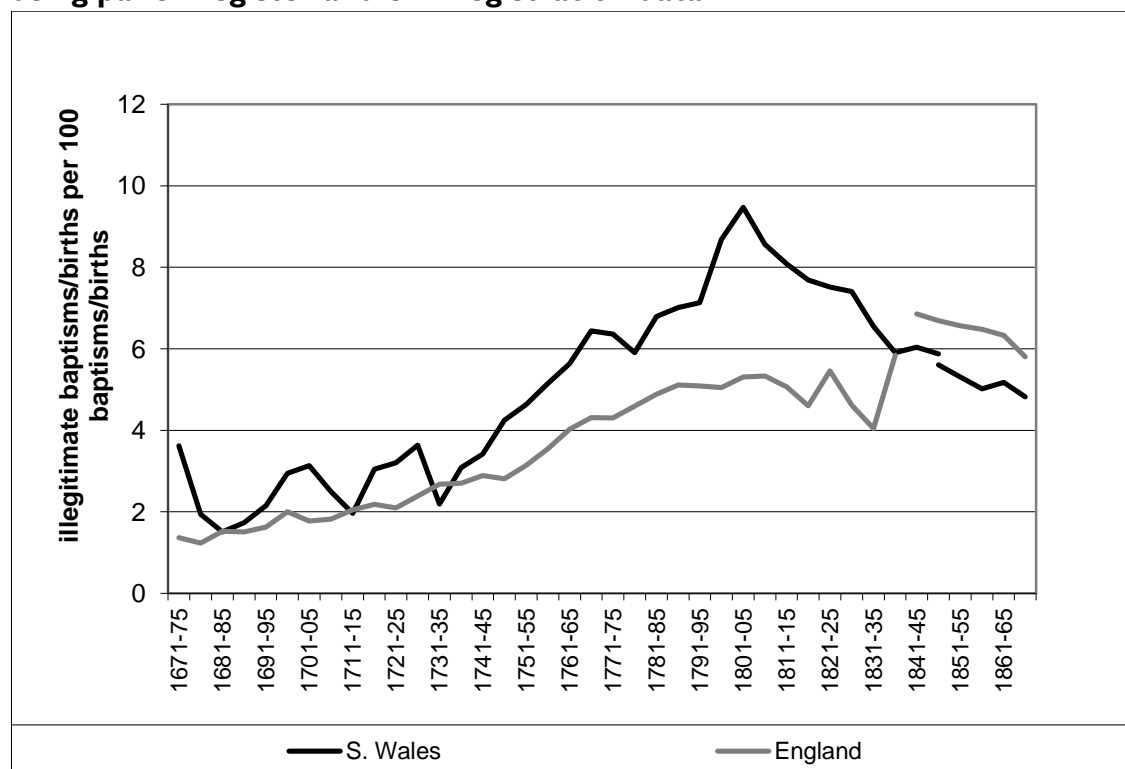
where far fewer illegitimacies were recorded in the parish register than would be expected from registration data. In these two RSDs (which were also single parishes) the ratio of Anglican baptisms to all births was below 20 per cent in 1846-50, a lower level than in any other RSD, with the exception of Cenarth. It is not surprising that the two parishes should behave in the same way, as they were both located in the town of Llandingad, and served by the same vicar. Llandovery was the site of the Union workhouse, but although a few baptisms of illegitimate children living there were noted in the parish register between 1842 and 1844, there were none between 1845 and 1869. One explanation for the lack of illegitimate baptisms might be the separate registration of workhouse births, in a book now lost. Alternatively, the transformation of Anglican churches into institutions perceived to be dominated by an English-speaking, socially elite, minority might have been more pronounced in a market town than in rural areas, discouraging lower-class Welsh-speaking mothers from baptising their children there, particularly if they were illegitimate.

Figure 5.3 Comparison of illegitimacy ratios for sample RSDs in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire calculated from registration and parish register data, 1846-55 average



Information from the civil registration period (1847-1870) confirms that the sample RSDs provide robust estimates of the incidence of illegitimacy for each of the two counties in this period, in spite of the decline in church baptisms. There is thus good reason to suppose that estimates of the illegitimacy ratio at county level for earlier periods are also soundly based. Figure 5.4 brings together information from both parish registers and the Registrar-General to show illegitimacy in England and south Wales across the whole study period. Both series suffer from a decline in the quality of the data towards the end of the parish register period, though the disjunction between the English parish register and civil registration series seems to be rather more serious than that for south Wales.⁴ Nevertheless, in spite of some reservations about data quality, it is evident from this graph that the decline in the illegitimacy ratio began much earlier in south Wales than in England, and that from the late 1840s the level had fallen below that in England.

Figure 5.4 Illegitimacy ratios for south Wales and England, 1671-1870, using parish register and civil registration data



⁴ The English sample was based on parishes rather than registration districts, so it was not possible to test how well the sample represented England as a whole, as was done for the south Wales sample in Table 5.1.

Comparison with illegitimacy in the rest of Wales

Up to this point the demographic analyses have been confined to south Wales and comparisons with England. Civil registration records allow illegitimacy rates to be calculated for all Welsh registration districts, enabling the level of illegitimacy in south Wales to be seen in context. Figure 5.5 maps illegitimacy rates per thousand single or widowed women aged 20 or over, averaged over the 9-year period 1847 to 1855.⁵ It is evident that there is a wide range of illegitimacy rates, with the highest found among the districts bordering England. Woods' mapping of illegitimate fertility among the registration districts of England and Wales in 1861 and 1891 shows a broadly similar pattern for Welsh registration districts in 1861, but rather lower rates overall in 1891, with a reduction in regional diversity.⁶

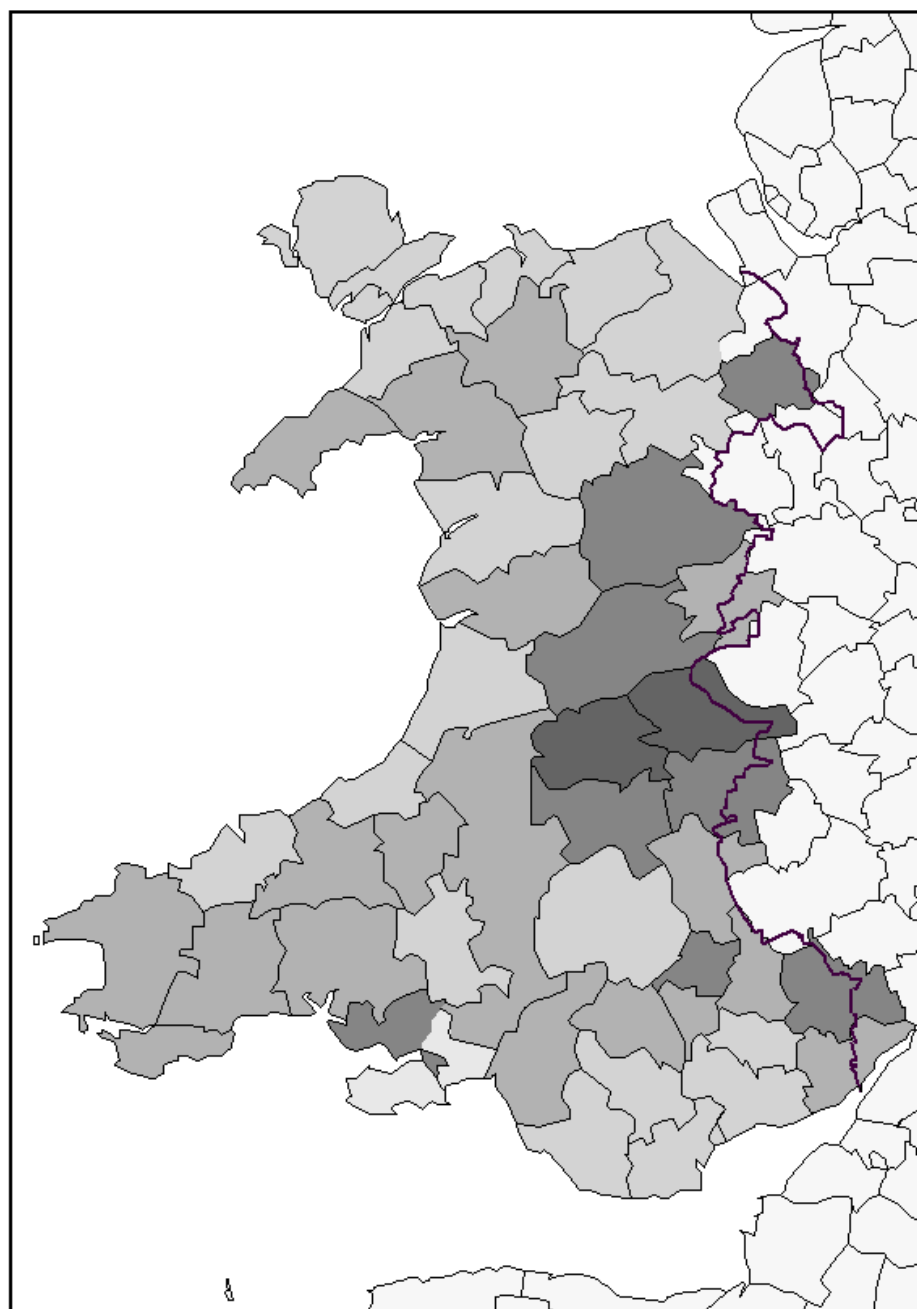
Within the study area, illegitimacy was slightly lower than in Wales as a whole, with Llanelli standing out as having the highest rate, though well below those recorded for some registration districts in Montgomeryshire and Radnorshire. Although illegitimacy rates within Wales tended to decline during the second half of the nineteenth century, reducing faster in districts where they had been higher, the relative position of districts did not change very much. In the period from 1847 to 1870, there is a great deal of rank consistency from year to year, with the lowest annual rates regularly found in the towns of south Wales, and the highest in Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire. Contrary to popular belief, rates in Anglesey were not particularly high.⁷ The very high illegitimacy rates in mid-Wales have

⁵ The measure used here takes account of the relative size of the group at risk, and is the best that can be achieved from tabulated data in the 1851 census

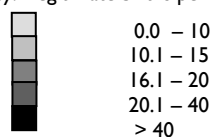
⁶ R. Woods, *The Demography of Victorian England and Wales* (Cambridge, 2000), Figure 4.12 (colour section between pages 96-7).

⁷ In evidence to the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales, the Rev. J. W. Trevor, Rector of Llanbeulan, Anglesey, wrote 'I believe the proportion of illegitimate children to the population in Anglesey (with only one exception, and that in Wales) exceeds that in any other county in the kingdom.' (*Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, PP 1847 xxvii, Part 3, Appendix H2, p. 335). The opening words of the classic Welsh novel, *Profedigaethau Enoc Huws* (The Trials of Enoc Huws), by Daniel Owen (Wrexham, 1891) refer to the same belief: '*Mab llwyn a pherth oedd Enoc Huws, ond nid yn Sir Fôn y ganwyd ef.* (Enoc Huws was a child of bush and brake, though he was not born in Anglesey)'

Figure 5.5 Average illegitimacy rates per thousand single or widowed women aged 20 or over, 1847-55, Welsh registration districts



Key: illegitimate births per '000 unmarried or widowed women aged 20 or over



Source: Registrar General

been noted elsewhere.⁸ Though it might be rash to extrapolate backwards, the consistency of the rank ordering of illegitimacy rates among Welsh registration districts over the period 1847-70 suggests that illegitimacy ratios in Glamorgan may also have been among the lowest in Wales in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Woods' analysis of illegitimate fertility in 1861 shows similar levels either side of the mid-Wales border, in Montgomeryshire, Radnorshire, Shropshire and Herefordshire. Further west, levels of illegitimate fertility in Wales were generally lower than in the borders, closer to those of Adair's south-west region than to his west (roughly the West Midlands).

It is not proposed to consider the incidence of illegitimacy in the rest of Wales in any more detail than that shown in Figure 5.5. The rest of the chapter will look at the factors associated with illegitimacy in south Wales, and consider the extent to which patterns of behaviour are associated with different types of community.

Demographic, social, economic and cultural factors related to illegitimacy in south Wales in the mid-nineteen century

Chapter 3 showed that within the study area there was systematic variation in the incidence of illegitimacy during the period from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century. For instance, illegitimacy ratios were higher in Carmarthenshire than in Glamorgan (Figure 3.2), and in inland districts (Figures 3.7 and 3.8) than in coastal areas. The next section looks in more detail at factors which may be related to illegitimacy in the mid-nineteenth century. The analysis described here is not restricted to sample RSDs but covers all RSDs in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire. As Laslett noted, much illegitimacy was an 'accident of courtship', involving single people of similar age and status. Possibly the majority of couples, faced with an extra-marital conception, had to make some sort of choice between marriage or an illegitimate birth, even if many individuals did not

⁸ For instance P. Laslett, 'Introduction', in Laslett, Oosterveen and Smith, *Bastardy and its Comparative History* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 63; Woods, *Demography*, p. 142.

seriously contemplate marriage. We look first therefore at the relationship between illegitimate fertility, marital fertility and nuptiality.

With the publication of detailed birth statistics by the Registrar General from 1847 and the recording of marital status in the 1851 census, it is possible to investigate key demographic indicators such as marital and illegitimate fertility and nuptiality through the construction of Coale indices.⁹ These indices use information about age, sex and marital status to produce standardised indices using age-related fertility rates derived from a reference population with exceptionally high fertility. Indices for 1851 are based on registration data averaged over the period 1847-55 and census data for 1851. However, as 1851 census tabulations do not provide sufficient detail at RSD level, the information was aggregated from census transcriptions and from enumerators' books.¹⁰ The same data can be used to calculate the 'singulate mean age of marriage', which is a useful indicator of true age at marriage.¹¹ These demographic indicators are shown in Table 5.2.

⁹ The construction of Coale Indices is described in Appendix A.

¹⁰ The 1851 census for Glamorgan has been transcribed by Glamorgan Family History Society, so that aggregating individual records to RSD level was relatively straightforward. In the case of Carmarthenshire, the information was compiled from enumerators' books.

¹¹ J. Hajnal, 'Age at marriage and proportions marrying', *Population Studies*, 1953, pp. 111-36.

Table 5.2 Indices of fertility and nuptiality, and average age at marriage, Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs, 1847-55 average

Registration sub-district	Index of marital fertility	Index of illegitimate fertility	Index of general fertility	Index of nuptiality	Singulate mean age of marriage
	I_g	I_h	I_f	I_m	SMAM
Glamorgan RSDs	0.686	0.037	0.387	0.539	25.20
Aberdare	0.769	0.042	0.453	0.565	24.61
Bridgend	0.581	0.028	0.293	0.479	25.77
Cadoxton	0.711	0.037	0.402	0.542	25.40
Caerphilly	0.613	0.023	0.335	0.529	25.01
Cardiff	0.636	0.037	0.348	0.519	25.21
Cowbridge	0.651	0.023	0.265	0.386	28.20
Gelligaer	0.751	0.055	0.445	0.560	24.70
Gower	0.510	0.009	0.223	0.428	27.59
Llandeilo Talybont	0.706	0.035	0.399	0.543	25.73
Llangyfelach	0.713	0.029	0.398	0.539	24.63
Llansamlet	0.732	0.023	0.436	0.583	24.23
Llantrisant	0.697	0.044	0.412	0.563	24.88
Loughor	0.704	0.065	0.381	0.494	25.64
Maesteg	0.804	0.061	0.442	0.512	25.55
Margam	0.733	0.031	0.434	0.575	23.80
Neath	0.698	0.045	0.380	0.514	25.03
St Nicholas	0.637	0.018	0.274	0.415	27.62
Swansea	0.641	0.020	0.307	0.462	25.56
Ystradfellte	0.688	0.049	0.381	0.520	23.48
Ystradgynlais	0.804	0.070	0.502	0.588	23.70
Lower Merthyr Tydfil	0.729	0.055	0.441	0.572	24.32
Upper Merthyr Tydfil	0.626	0.038	0.408	0.629	23.74
Carmarthenshire RSDs	0.774	0.052	0.349	0.412	27.22
Carmarthen	0.725	0.048	0.307	0.383	27.45
Cenarth	0.774	0.051	0.296	0.338	29.40
Cilycwm	0.769	0.057	0.368	0.438	25.23
Cynwyl Elfed	0.734	0.052	0.302	0.367	28.68
Cynwyl Caeo	0.806	0.064	0.361	0.400	29.03
Llanboidy	0.724	0.046	0.321	0.406	29.78
Llanddeusant	0.855	0.067	0.331	0.335	28.66
Llandybie	0.740	0.052	0.393	0.495	24.84
Llandeilo Fawr	0.705	0.038	0.276	0.357	28.04
Llandingad	0.643	0.044	0.253	0.349	28.10
Llanelly	0.755	0.046	0.405	0.506	25.32
Llanfair-ar-y-bryn	0.809	0.048	0.343	0.387	26.17
Llanfynydd	0.667	0.035	0.279	0.387	27.55
Llangadog	0.725	0.034	0.342	0.445	27.09
Llangathen	0.605	0.034	0.248	0.376	27.33
Llangyndeyrn	0.777	0.053	0.336	0.392	27.83
Llannon	0.776	0.060	0.376	0.441	25.10
Llansadwrn	0.773	0.048	0.348	0.414	26.50
Llanybyther	0.767	0.055	0.308	0.355	28.61
Myddfai	0.722	0.047	0.306	0.383	24.36

Table 5.2 (continued)

Registration sub-district	Index of marital fertility	Index of illegitimate fertility	Index of general fertility	Index of nuptiality	Singulate mean age of marriage
	I_g	I_h	I_f	I_m	SMAM
Pembrey	0.729	0.046	0.378	0.485	26.18
Pencarreg	0.556	0.055	0.261	0.412	25.89
St Clears	0.787	0.051	0.340	0.392	27.92
Talley	0.735	0.045	0.346	0.436	28.57
Amroth	0.728	0.041	0.324	0.411	26.84

Table 5.3 compares average indicators for Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire with estimates for England and Wales produced by Wilson and Woods.¹² Illegitimate fertility was higher in Carmarthenshire and lower in Glamorgan than in England and Wales as a whole. Legitimate fertility was also higher in Carmarthenshire, but the smaller proportion of women who married led to a lower general fertility than in Glamorgan or in England and Wales. The high rate of nuptiality in Glamorgan was responsible for a higher rate of general fertility than in England and Wales as a whole.

Table 5.3 Summary indices of fertility and nuptiality, Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs (1847-55), England and Wales (1846-55)

	Index of marital fertility	Index of illegitimate fertility	Index of general fertility	Index of nuptiality
	I_g	I_h	I_f	I_m
Glamorgan	0.686	0.037	0.387	0.539
Carmarthenshire	0.774	0.052	0.349	0.412
Both counties	0.708	0.042	0.378	0.504
England and Wales ¹	0.668	0.043	0.343	0.482

Note 1: Source: Wilson and Wood, *Population Studies* (1991), p.415

It is evident from Figure 5.6 and Table 5.4 that there is a strong positive correlation between legitimate fertility (I_g) and illegitimate fertility (I_h) in both Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, though for the other indicators there are clear differences between the two counties. Among Glamorgan RSDs, high levels of illegitimate fertility were associated with a high proportion of the population marrying, and a

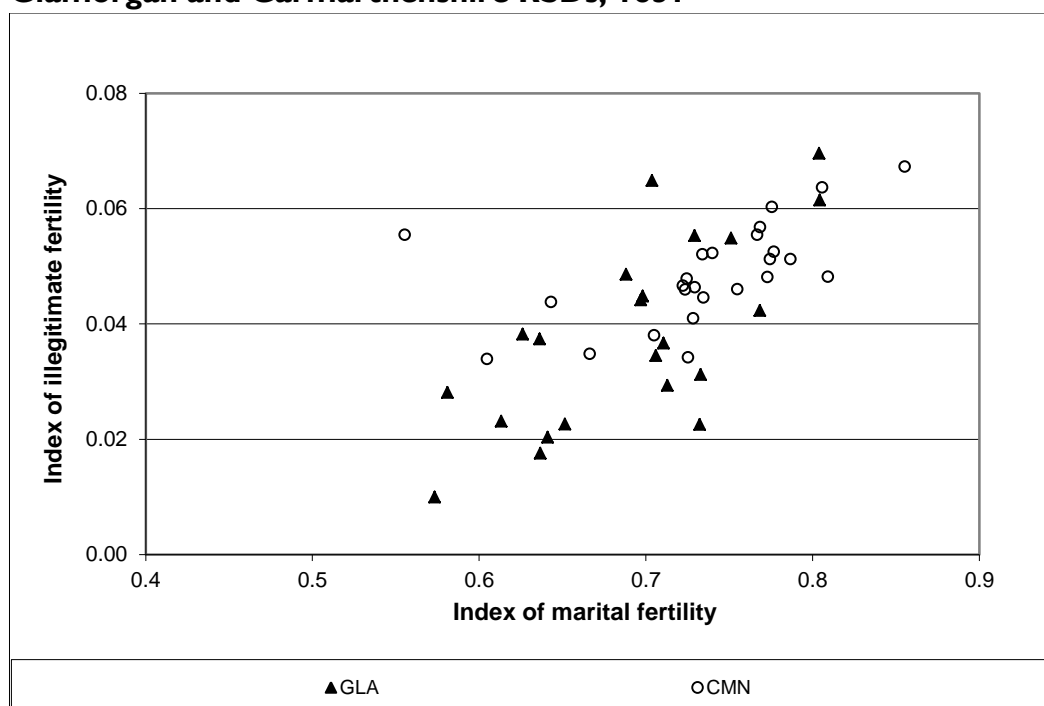
¹² C. Wilson and R. Woods, 'Fertility in England: a long-term perspective', *Population Studies* 45 (1991), pp. 399-415.

lower age at marriage, whereas in Carmarthenshire the relationships were very weak, and in the case of nuptiality, had a different sign.

Table 5.4 Correlation of illegitimate fertility with marital fertility, nuptiality and age at marriage, Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs, average, 1847-55¹³

	Glamorgan RSDs	Carmarthenshire RSDs	Both counties
Index of marital fertility I_g	0.722 **	0.541 **	0.683 **
Index of nuptiality I_m	0.469 *	-0.076	-0.094
Singulate mean age of marriage (SMAM)	-0.508 **	0.023	0.035

Figure 5.6 Relationship between illegitimate fertility and marital fertility, Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs, 1851



Laslett found that in England legitimate and illegitimate fertility moved in synchrony over a long period (from around 1550 to the early nineteenth century) though it broke down in the 1840s and 50s, when illegitimacy rose but general fertility fell.¹⁴ Woods, analysing cross-sectional data for English and Welsh districts, showed a weak relationship between legitimate and illegitimate fertility in 1861, but

¹³ Throughout the report a single asterisk indicates significance at the 1 per cent level and a double asterisk at the 0.1 per cent level.

¹⁴ Laslett, 'Introduction' in Laslett et al. (eds.), *Bastardy*, pp. 19-20.

a stronger one in 1911.¹⁵ Table 5.5 compares the regression equations derived by Woods for England and Wales with those estimated here for Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan RSDs in 1851.

Table 5.5 Regression of marital fertility on illegitimate fertility, south Wales RSDs, and English and Welsh districts

Source	Equation	R ²
South Wales RSDs, 1851	$I_g = 3.214I_h + 0.576$	0.438
English and Welsh districts, 1861 ¹	$I_g = 0.807I_h + 0.640$	0.096
English and Welsh districts, 1911 ¹	$I_g = 2.862I_h + 0.406$	0.224

Note 1: Source: Woods, *The Demography of Victorian England and Wales*, p.142.

Woods noted that the regional clustering of high and low illegitimacy observed in 1861 was much less marked by 1911. It seems likely that within those regional clusters in 1861 there were quite well-defined relationships between I_h and I_g , similar to that found for Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire in 1851, but that the parameters of the relationships varied markedly between clusters, giving a poorly defined relationship over England and Wales as a whole. The outlier in Figure 5.6 where relatively high illegitimate fertility is combined with unusually low marital fertility, is the Carmarthenshire RSD of Pencarreg, in the Teifi Valley, which in spite of having a marriage rate close to the Carmarthenshire average, and a relatively low average age of marriage, had an unusually low marital fertility rate, possibly the result of out-migration of families.

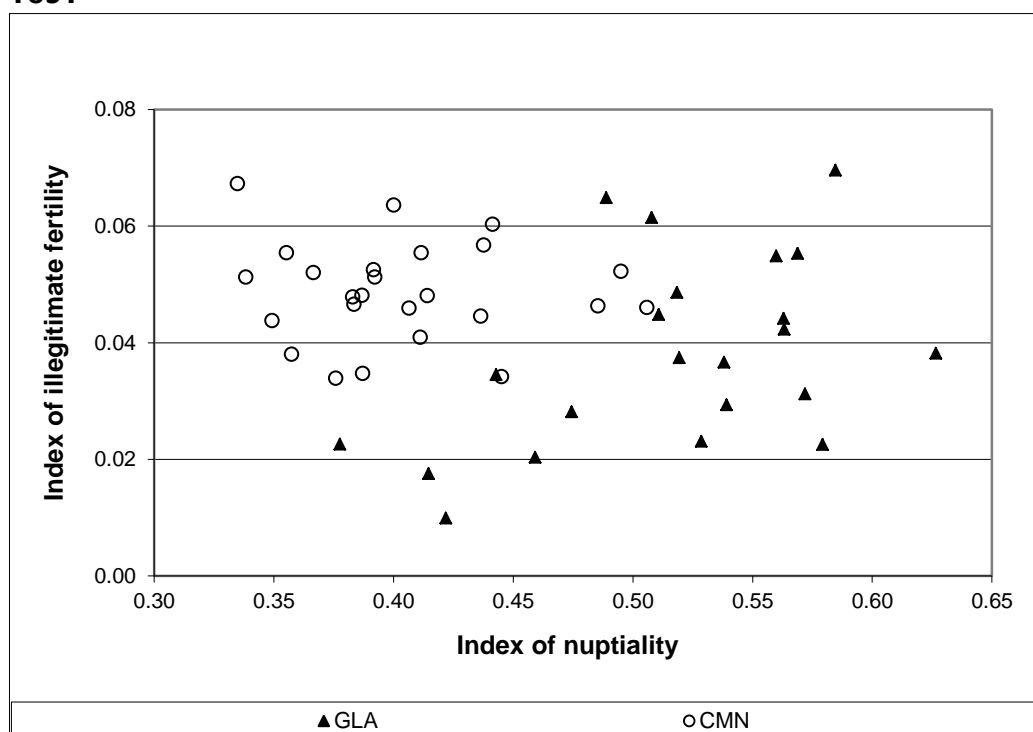
Woods explored the relationship between illegitimacy and nuptiality across a range of demographic regimes, according to whether they scored high or low on each scale. In Ireland (1871), where both illegitimacy and nuptiality were low, social constraints restrained illegitimacy even though the proportion who married was relatively low, and marriage tended to be late. By contrast in China (1930), which also had low levels of illegitimacy, nuptiality was very high, a situation typical of many non-European cultures and often associated with arranged early marriages. In some parts of Austro-Hungary (1880) high nuptiality was associated with high illegitimate fertility, but in other parts there were examples of low nuptiality and high illegitimate fertility, a combination not commonly found elsewhere in Europe.

¹⁵ Woods, *Demography*, p. 142.

Rates in English and Welsh districts (1861) tended to lie somewhere between those for Ireland and Austro-Hungary. In Scotland (1871), where rates of illegitimacy ranged from low to relatively high, there appeared to be a positive relationship with nuptiality. Woods concluded that among European countries in the nineteenth century 'there was no particular association between [illegitimate fertility and nuptiality] as measured by I_h and I_m , and certainly no inverse relationship'.¹⁶

For English and Welsh districts in 1861, Woods found a weak positive relationship between illegitimate fertility and nuptiality.¹⁷ As Table 5.4 above showed, positive association between the two variables in Glamorgan RSDs, contrasted with very little correlation, if anything negative, in Carmarthenshire RSDs. Figure 5.7 shows how the two distributions occupy largely discrete spaces in the X-Y plane, with illegitimacy higher and nuptiality lower in Carmarthenshire than in Glamorgan.

Figure 5.7 Relationship between illegitimate fertility and nuptiality in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs and English and Welsh districts, 1851



¹⁶ Woods, *Demography*, pp. 101-6

¹⁷ Woods, *Demography*, pp. 102-3

The very different relationship between illegitimacy and nuptiality in the two counties suggested the fitting of separate regression lines. The results are shown in Table 5.6, where they are compared with Woods' findings for England and Wales.

Table 5.6 Regression of illegitimate fertility on index of nuptiality in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs and English and Welsh districts

Source	Equation	R ²
Glamorgan RSDs, 1851	$I_h = 0.132I_m - 0.030$	0.248
Carmarthenshire RSDs, 1851	$I_h = -0.021I_m + 0.057$	0.014
English and Welsh districts, 1861 ¹	$I_h = 0.097I_m + 0.005$	0.088
English and Welsh districts, 1911 ¹	$I_h = 0.055I_m - 0.004$	0.119

Note 1 Source: Woods, *Demography* p.103.

The tendency for higher levels of illegitimacy in Glamorgan to be associated with higher levels of nuptiality is similar to that found by Woods for England and Wales as a whole, though the significance of the association is greater in Glamorgan, and the response stronger. In contrast, there is no evidence of a relationship between illegitimate fertility and nuptiality in Carmarthenshire. It is possible that patterns of migration are obscuring an underlying relationship between nuptiality and illegitimacy in Carmarthenshire, and reinforcing it in Glamorgan. We have already seen in Chapter 3 that migration tended to increase the index of illegitimate fertility, because the female population at risk as measured from the census did not include women who returned to their parish of origin for the birth or baptism of their child but left later to seek work. Where the outcome of the pregnancy was marriage rather than an illegitimate birth the need for a regular wage and family housing might prompt a move to the industrial districts. Thus nuptiality in industrial districts would be enhanced and in rural districts reduced, by greater permanent out-migration of married than of single women. Within Glamorgan RSDs, St Nicholas, Bridgend and Gower had low rates of illegitimacy and low rates of nuptiality. These were districts of mixed agriculture which were unlikely to attract much net in-migration. In contrast some RSDs with higher than average levels of illegitimacy, such as Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare, also had levels of nuptiality enhanced by in-migration. Substantial numbers of married women living in the industrial areas of Glamorgan at the time of the 1851 census were born elsewhere. Some 69 per cent of married women recorded in Upper Merthyr Tydfil in the age

range 15-49 came from outside Glamorgan, with Carmarthenshire the most numerous county of origin, accounting for 23 percentage points. Though some women would have migrated in childhood, evidence from the variation in children's birthplaces in the 1851 enumerators' books shows that many others moved into the area at or after marriage. As a result the gradient of the regression line linking illegitimacy and nuptiality in Glamorgan was greater than it would have been in the absence of in-migration. If it were possible to calculate the nuptiality and illegitimate fertility of a cohort of women born in each of the RSDs, rather than of those residing there at census time, we might find less of a difference between the two counties in the relationships between illegitimacy and nuptiality.

Figure 5.8 illustrates the effects of migration on the distribution of age and marital status for men and women aged 15-54, for selected RSDs in 1851. In-migration had brought large numbers of unmarried men to Upper Merthyr Tydfil, but few single women. By contrast, Llanddeusant, an upland agricultural district with a relatively stable population and high levels of illegitimate fertility, saw net out-migration by single people of both sexes, with men leaving at a slightly younger age than women. Those who remained married late. St. Nicholas, an area of mixed agriculture with larger farms and a greater proportion of agricultural labourers than Llanddeusant, saw similar rates of out-migration, though unlike Llanddeusant there was a slight surplus of men over women among the remaining population in each age group between 15 and 54. As in Llanddeusant, those who stayed in St Nicholas tended to marry late, but by contrast illegitimate fertility was low. The pattern in Merthyr Tydfil of 'higher fertility and earlier and more extensive marriage' is very similar to what Haines described for coal-mining areas during the nineteenth century, a pattern which he considered applied also to occupations such as iron puddling. He hypothesised that the factors encouraging high levels of fertility in mining and similar populations included 'males reaching peak earning capacity at a relatively early age ... frequent lack of employment opportunities for women, higher infant mortality, high adult male debility and morbidity, and a taste and cost structure more rural than urban in the early stages of development' – all characteristic of the industrialising districts of south Wales.¹⁸

¹⁸ M. R. Haines, 'Fertility, nuptiality and occupation: a study of coal mining populations and regions in

Figure 5.8 Age and marital status distributions, men and women aged 15-49, selected RSDs, 1851

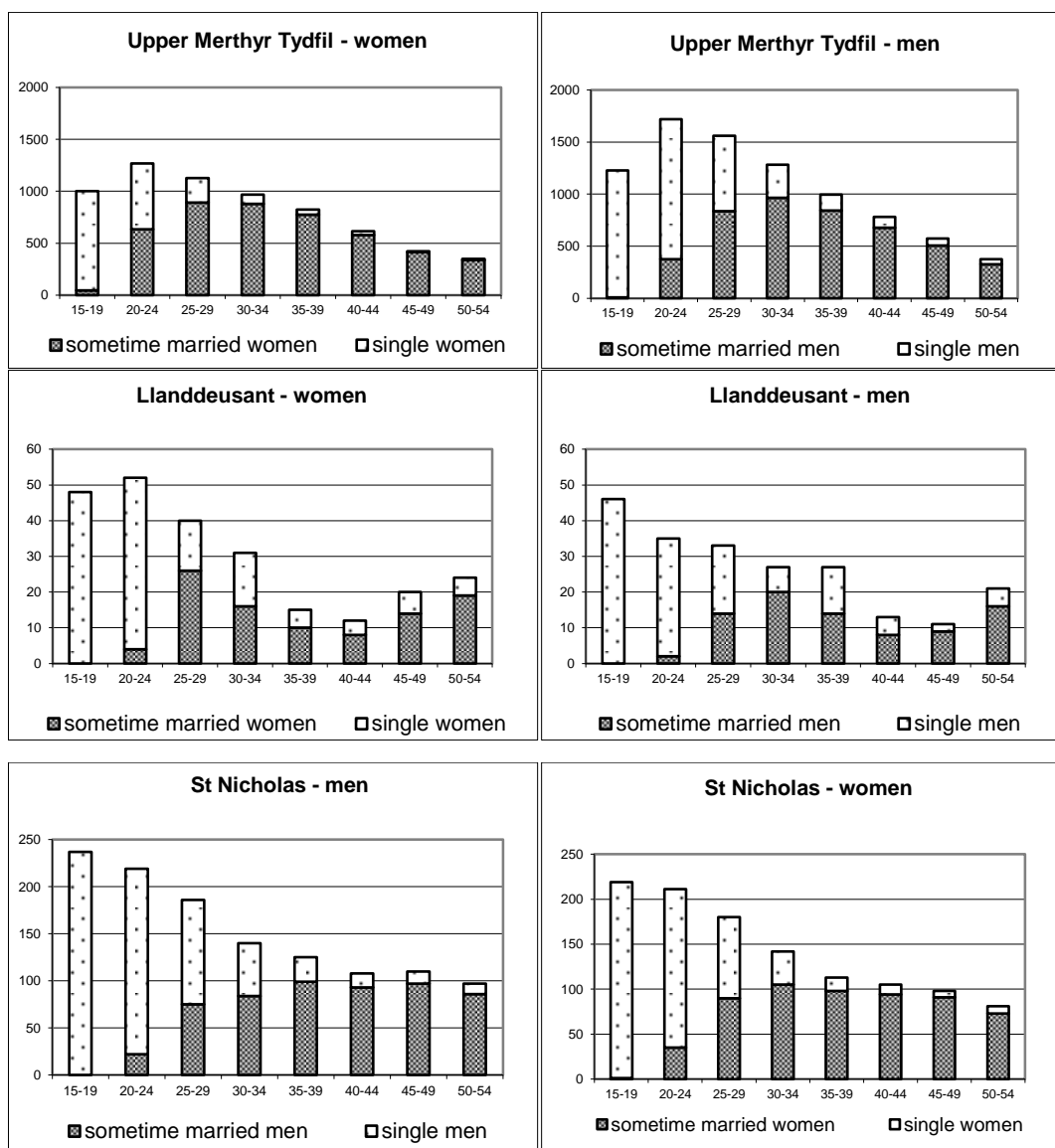


Table 5.7 Indices of fertility and nuptiality and age at marriage, Upper Merthyr Tydfil, Llanddeusant and St Nicholas, 1851

	I_h	I_g	I_m	SMAM: women	SMAM: men
Upper Merthyr Tydfil	0.038	0.626	0.629	23.74	26.62
Llanddeusant	0.067	0.855	0.335	28.66	29.61
St Nicholas	0.018	0.637	0.415	27.62	29.42

Regression analysis was used to explore further the relationship between migration and nuptiality. It is difficult to measure migration directly, but population growth

England and Wales in the mid-nineteenth century', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (1977), pp. 267 & 278-9.

and the sex ratio can be used as indicators, since both are positively correlated with in-migration. Details are given in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8 Determinants of nuptiality in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs, 1851 (stepwise multiple regression)

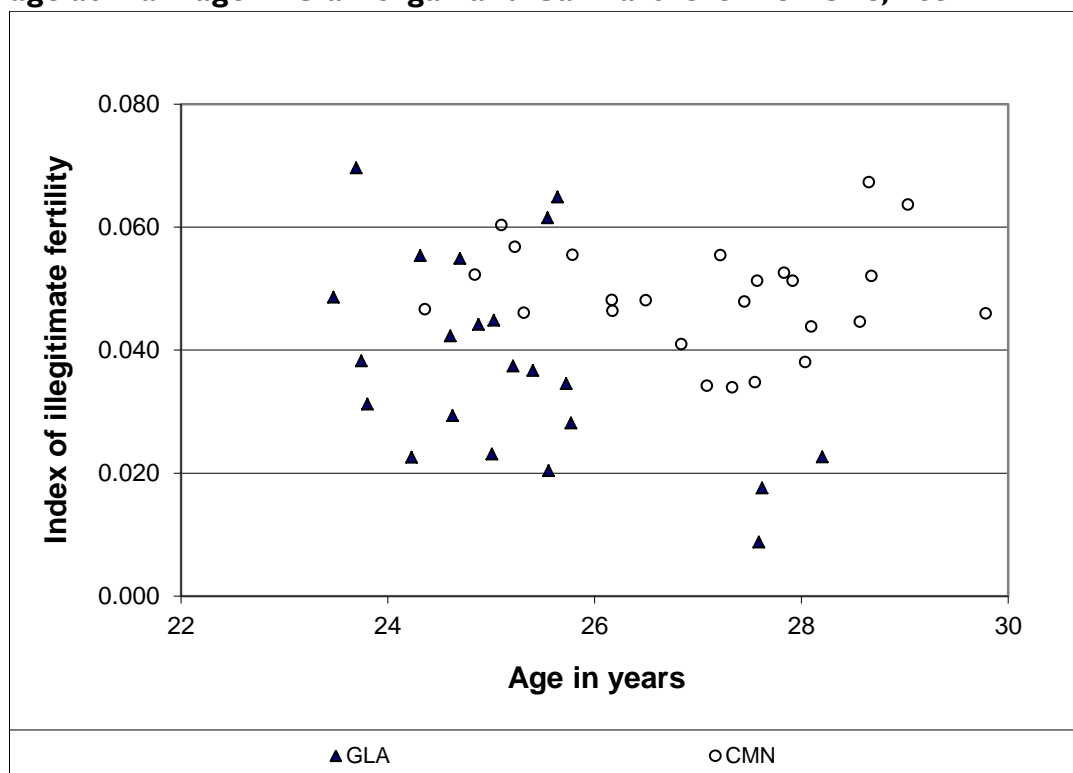
R square	0.813				
Standard error	0.034				
Analysis of variance					
	DF	Sum of squares	Mean square		
Regression	3	0.2128	0.0709		
Residual	42	0.0489	0.0012		
F=	60.9				
Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	Beta	T	Significance
Population growth, 1811-1851	0.0266	0.0063	0.404	4.210	0.000
Proportion of women who were servants	-0.0073	0.0019	-0.323	-3.877	0.000
Sex ratio, ages 20-34	0.0013	0.0003	0.340	3.893	0.000
constant	0.3669	0.0382		9.608	0.000

The link between nuptiality and migration is clearly confirmed. Nuptiality is shown to have been higher in those districts with a faster-growing population, fewer women working as servants, and a higher ratio of men to women in the age groups most commonly associated with courtship and marriage. Though nuptiality was generally lower in Carmarthenshire, within the county higher rates were again to be found in the more industrialised RSDs, such as Llanelly and Llandybie. The implication is that many of the men who married in these areas found their partners elsewhere.

Not unexpectedly, higher levels of nuptiality went along with a lower mean age at marriage. Figure 5.9 shows that the significant negative correlation found between illegitimate fertility and age at marriage in Glamorgan (Table 5.4) was heavily influenced by three RSDs, Gower, St Nicholas and Cowbridge, each mainly areas of mixed farming, which were at the extreme end of the range, with high average ages at marriage and low illegitimate fertility rates. There is little overlap in average age at marriage between the remaining Glamorgan RSDs and those in Carmarthenshire. Some of the Carmarthenshire RSDs with lower average ages

were industrial, like Llandybie, but others, like the Upper Tywi parish of Myddfai, were almost entirely rural.

Figure 5.9 Relationship between illegitimate fertility and mean female age at marriage in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs, 1851



The analysis so far has established that there is a complex relationship between illegitimacy, nuptiality and age at marriage, which is only weakly explained by regression analysis, and shows distinct differences between the two counties. We now need to look at a wider range of indicators for an explanation of variation in illegitimate fertility.

Social, economic and cultural factors related to illegitimacy

The next section examines the relationship between illegitimacy and a variety of societal indicators. Table 5.9 shows correlation coefficients between illegitimate fertility and selected demographic characteristics (sex ratio, population density and rate of population change); employment; wealth and poverty; religious adherence; and language. Most of the indicators chosen were readily available from official sources, but a few presented challenges. Information about employment was

taken from the 1831 census, which gives a few broad categories of employment at the level of parish. The 1851 and subsequent censuses report detailed categories of employment but lack sufficient geographical detail for the current study. In the rapidly industrialising parts of Glamorgan the pattern of employment by mid-century may have been rather different from that in 1831, though the changes in Carmarthenshire are likely to have been less marked. Information about the wealth of a parish is also not timely, being taken from the (1873) Imperial Gazette, albeit based on material from the mid to later 1860s. Finally, the information about language use was provided by W. T. R. Pryce and was derived from Church of England visitation returns for 1848.¹⁹ Further details of how the indicators were constructed can be found in Appendix C.

¹⁹ Personal communication. A description of how the data were compiled is given in W. T. R. Pryce, 'Welsh and English in Wales, 1750-1971: A spatial analysis based on the linguistic affiliation of parochial communities', *The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, November 1978, pp. 1-33. The scale used here is as follows: 1 'English only'; 2 'Mainly English'; 3 'Bi-lingual'; 4 'Mainly Welsh'; and 5 'Welsh only'.

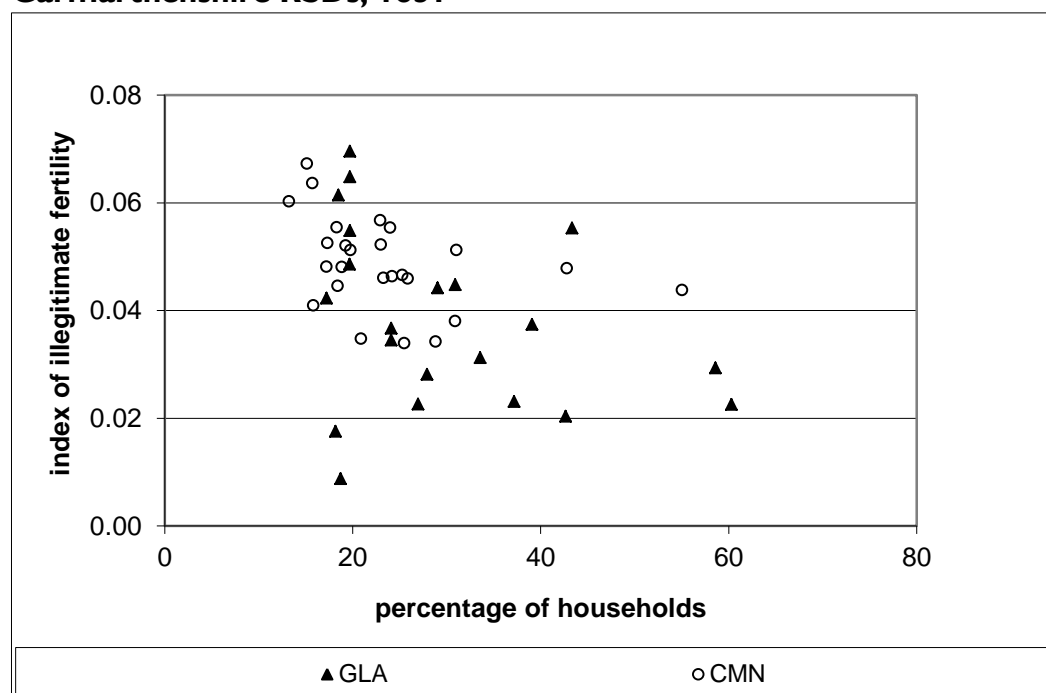
Table 5.9 Correlation between illegitimate fertility and selected indicators in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs, 1851

	Glamorgan	Carmarthenshire	Both counties
<i>Demographic</i>			
Sex ratio 15-44	0.361	0.199	-0.075
Sex ratio 20-34	0.390	0.034	-0.076
Population density	-0.123	-0.183	-0.246
log population density	-0.030	-0.334	-0.284
Rate of change in population 1811-1851	0.252	-0.060	-0.085
<i>Employment</i>			
Agricultural households as % of all households	0.044	0.246	0.294 *
Manufacturing and trade households as % of all households	-0.362	-0.371	-0.430 **
Agricultural occupiers as % of all households	0.338	0.449 *	0.485 **
Agricultural occupiers employing men as % of all households	0.410	0.193	0.429 **
Agricultural labourers as % of men > 20	-0.108	-0.132	0.078
Other labourers as % of men > 20	0.185	-0.073	-0.146
Men employed in manufacture as % of men > 20	-0.020	0.233	-0.096
Men employed in retail trade or handicrafts as % of men > 20	-0.288	-0.411 *	-0.288
Capitalists, bankers and professionals as % of men > 20	-0.139	-0.321	-0.255
Male servants as % of men > 20	-0.319	-0.209	-0.372 *
Female servants as % of all women	-0.177	0.060	0.147
<i>Wealth & poverty</i>			
Property value per head	0.070	0.061	0.059
Value of living per head	-0.408	-0.218	-0.472 *
Poor rate per head	-0.187	-0.302	-0.097
Poor relief per head	-0.452 *	-0.382	-0.440 **
<i>Culture</i>			
Welsh speaking	0.567 **	0.525 **	0.630 **
<i>Religion</i>			
All attendances per '000 population	0.325	-0.414 *	-0.104
Church of England attendance per '000 population	-0.609 **	0.358	-0.343 *
Calvinistic Methodist attendance per '000 population	-0.005	0.042	-0.036
Independent attendance per '000 population	0.476 *	-0.232	0.132
Religious diversity	-0.367	-0.067	-0.265

None of the demographic variables showed any correlation with illegitimacy, and there is a mixed picture for the employment variables. For the two counties taken together, there was significant positive correlation between the level of illegitimate fertility and the proportion of households engaged in agriculture, and significant negative correlation with the proportion of households engaged in

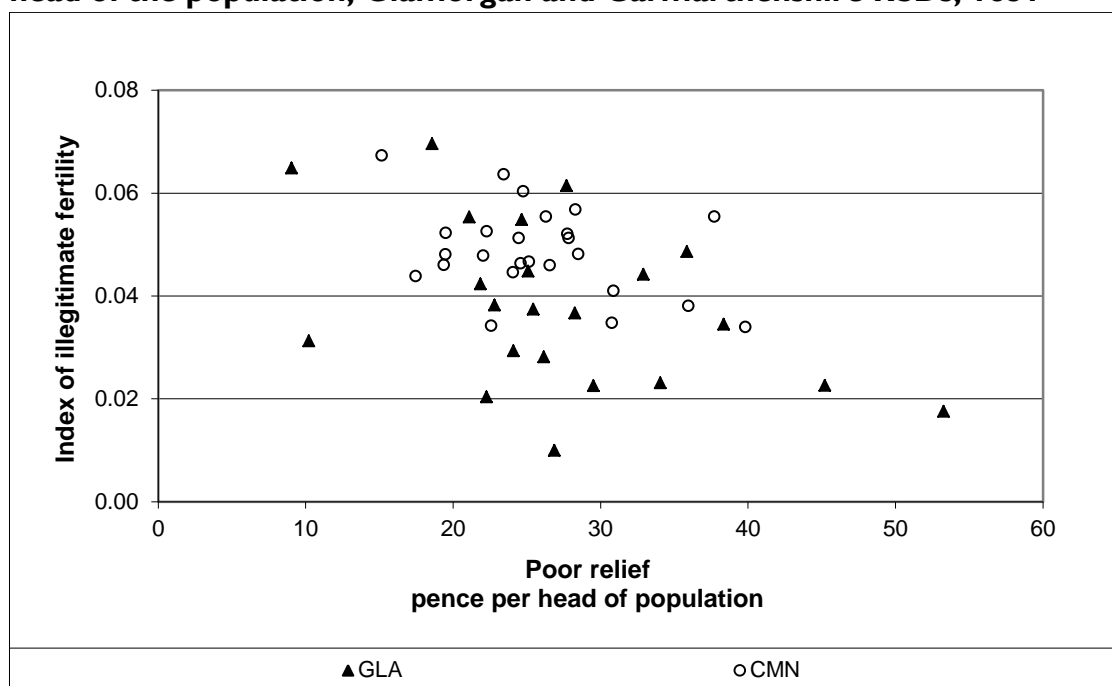
manufacturing or trade. The employment variables showed no significant correlation with I_h in Glamorgan, though in Carmarthenshire there was significant positive correlation with the proportion of households who were employers engaged in agriculture. In Carmarthenshire, the proportion of men over 20 years employed in retail trade or handicrafts also showed significant negative correlation with I_h . There is of course considerable cross-correlation within the employment indicators, for example a negative correlation between agriculturalists and those employed in manufacturing or as general labourers. The inverse relationship between illegitimate fertility and the percentage of households engaged in manufacture or trade is illustrated in Figure 5.10. The Glamorgan outliers (Gower and St. Nicholas), with both low illegitimate fertility and low proportions of households in manufacturing or trade, have tended to dampen the significance of the relationship in that county.

Figure 5.10 Relationship between illegitimate fertility and proportion of households engaged in manufacturing or trade, Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs, 1851



Among the variables relating to wealth and poverty, there was a strong inverse correlation with the average amount of poor relief per head, as Figure 5.11 illustrates.

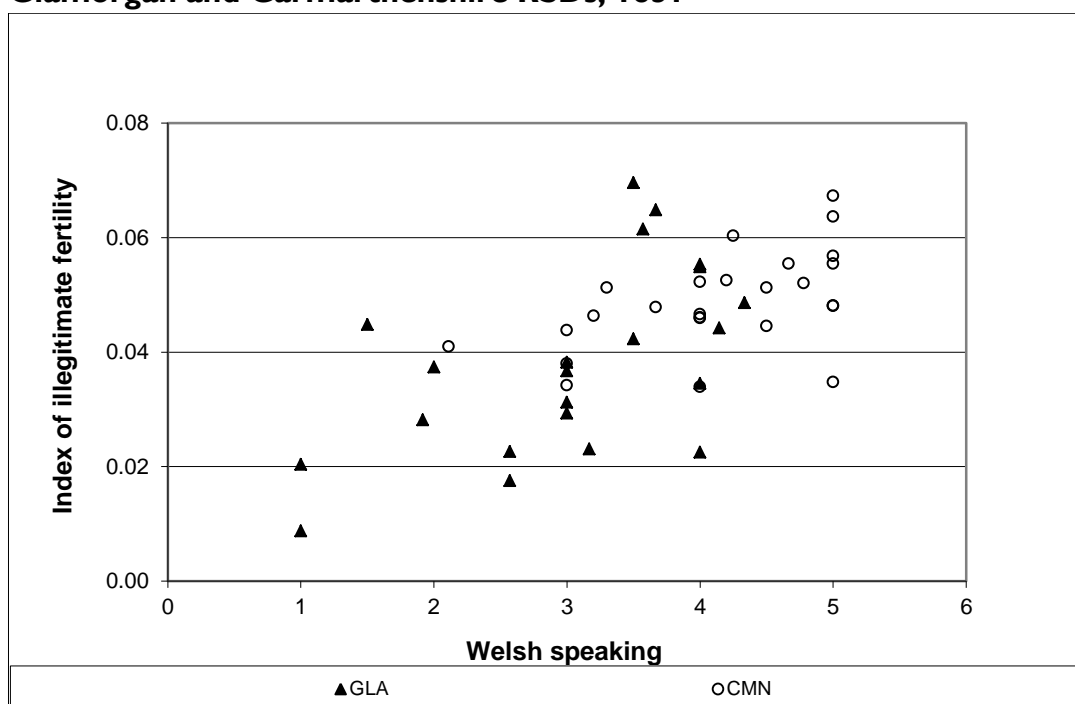
Figure 5.11 Relationship between illegitimate fertility and poor relief per head of the population, Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs, 1851



Poor relief was highest in St. Nicholas and Cowbridge, which had low rates of illegitimate fertility, and lowest in industrial districts, such as Loughor and Margam.

Figure 5.12 demonstrates the positive correlation, particularly strong in Glamorgan, between I_h and the level of Welsh speaking, scored for each parish on a scale from 1 (mainly English) to 5 (mainly Welsh). Although both counties had numerous districts where both languages were spoken, the 'mainly English-speaking' districts were only to be found in Glamorgan, with the 'mainly Welsh-speaking' districts only in Carmarthenshire. The most anglicised districts in the mid-nineteenth century were Swansea and Gower, which had amongst the lowest rates of illegitimate fertility.

Figure 5.12 Relationship between illegitimate fertility and language use, Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs, 1851



The association between high levels of illegitimacy and use of the Welsh language recalls the findings of the 1847 *Report on the State of Education in Wales*, discussed earlier in this chapter. Two points need to be made. Firstly, it is important to remember that association is not the same as causation; the analysis simply implies that districts within the study area which had higher than average levels of illegitimacy were also more likely to be Welsh-speaking than those with lower than average levels of illegitimacy. Secondly, the association applies only within the area of study. The factors which influenced illegitimacy elsewhere in Wales were not necessarily associated with use of the Welsh language; it is evident from Figure 5.5 that some of the highest levels of illegitimacy occurred in areas of mid-Wales where, according to Pryce, the English language had predominated since the mid-eighteenth century.²⁰ Further research is required to establish whether any of the factors identified here as being associated with illegitimacy have a wider application elsewhere in Wales.

²⁰ Pryce, 'Welsh and English in Wales, 1750-1971', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, November 1978, p.11.

The correlations shown in Table 5.7 suggest that it might be possible to fit a multiple regression equation using some combination of the variables which were most highly correlated with illegitimate fertility²¹, that is:

Index of married fertility

Manufacturing and trade households as a percentage of all households

Agricultural occupiers as a percentage of all households

Men employed as servants as a percentage of men aged over 20

Poor relief (pence per head of the population)

Welsh speaking²²

Church of England attendances per thousand of the population.

As there was some cross-correlation between the independent variables, stepwise regression was used to select the set which provided the best fit. The procedure selected married fertility, Welsh speaking, poor relief per head and the proportion of households engaged in manufacturing and trade. Though this was a reasonable fit to the data, with R square of 0.742, married fertility was itself correlated with the other variables in the equation, giving rise to multi-collinearity among the independent variables and resulting in unstable coefficient estimates. Married fertility was thus dropped from the set of independent variables, removing some of the multi-collinearity, with some loss of explanatory power. The results are shown in Table 5.10.

²¹ A few writers, for instance Haines and Schellekens, have used regression analysis to investigate some of the factors which influenced illegitimate fertility, though it has not been widely used. See Haines, 'Fertility, nuptiality, and occupation', and J. Schellekens, 'Illegitimate fertility decline in England, 1851-1911', *Journal of Family History* (1995) pp. 365-377.

²² It might be objected that the variable representing 'Welsh speaking' is not a scalar quantity and therefore not suitable for use in regression analysis. The original data coded by Pryce were ordinal, and for this study have been aggregated from parish to RSD level using parish populations as weights. The variable may thus be regarded as an approximation to an underlying measure of the proportions of the population speaking Welsh.

Table 5.10 Determinants of mean illegitimate fertility in south Wales RSDs, 1851 (stepwise multiple regression)

R square	0.617				
Standard error	0.011				
Analysis of variance					
	DF	Sum of squares	Mean square		
Regression	3	0.0051	0.0017		
Residual	40	0.0032	0.0001		
F=	21.51				
Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	Beta	T	Significance
Welsh speaking	0.0067	0.0014	0.513	4.850	0.000
Parish relief	-0.0007	0.0002	-0.401	-4.068	0.000
Households occupied in manufacturing & trade	-0.0003	0.0001	-0.283	-2.668	0.011
constant	0.0869	0.0060		14.531	0.000

Thus illegitimate fertility was higher where the rate of Welsh speaking was higher, and lower where parish relief and the proportion of households engaged in manufacturing and trade were higher. The relative size of the Beta coefficients suggests that Welsh speaking was more strongly associated with levels of illegitimate fertility in the mid-nineteenth century than the other two factors.

Analysis of illegitimacy ratios in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire for earlier periods have shown that those for the latter county were consistently higher, with an excess of around 2 percentage points in the period from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries, rising to around 4 percentage points from 1847-1870. The residuals (that is, the difference between the observed values and the values predicted by the regression equation) were examined to see whether there was any remaining 'county' effect. Although the difference between average residuals for the two counties had the expected sign, it was not significantly different from zero, so that it may be concluded that the factors included in the regression equation have accounted for county level differences in illegitimate fertility in the period 1847-55.

A further possibility was that the level of illegitimacy was higher in those sub-districts where the union workhouse had been located, as a consequence of women from other RSDs within the poor law union entering the workhouse to give birth. Investigation showed that the average residual for RSDs with workhouses was a little higher than that for those without workhouses, but the difference between the two was not significantly different from zero.

The correlation analysis in Table 5.9 suggested several employment variables which might have been candidates to explain differences in the levels of illegitimate fertility between RSDs which were mainly agricultural and those which were engaged in industry, crafts or retail trades. The choice of 'Households engaged in Manufacturing or Trade' as the most appropriate indicator in the regression equation, inversely related to illegitimacy, reflects the fact that towns like Swansea, which were centres of trade, craftsmen and services, tended to have low levels of illegitimacy.

The implication of a significant negative coefficient for the term in the equation representing poor relief is unclear. The level of poor relief per head of the population within a parish does not seem to have been closely related to the poverty or otherwise of its inhabitants. Rateable value per capita might have provided a better measure of poverty, but was not found to be significant in the regression equation. Poor relief would seem rather to be a complex function of the demand for relief from those with a claim on the parish, together with the generosity or otherwise of that parish. The lower levels of relief in many industrial RSDs might have been partly determined by the meanness of the local industrialists who sat on the Boards of Guardians, but were also kept low by the substantial numbers of workers whose settlement was elsewhere.²³ High levels of relief tended to be found in RSDs such as St Nicholas and Cowbridge, where most of the population would have had a local settlement, and where there was a tradition of generosity in respect of individual payments, to judge from the level of support for illegitimate children during the period of the old poor law. It would seem therefore

²³ The resistance of the ironmasters to increases in their contributions towards the rates is documented in R. K. J. Grant, *On the Parish* (Cardiff, 1988), pp. 58-9.

that the level of illegitimacy was not directly related to per capita poor relief, but that other factors, resistant to measurement, influenced both.

The regression equation shown in Table 5.10 does not identify the causes of illegitimacy; rather it selects the factors most strongly associated with it, either positively or negatively. Within the study area, localities with higher rates of illegitimacy were more likely to be wholly or mainly Welsh speaking, to have low per capita rates of poor relief, and relatively small numbers of households engaged in manufacturing or trade. In these mainly agricultural communities traditional customs such as *caru yn y gwely* were strong.²⁴ Communities with lower illegitimacy rates were wholly or mainly English speaking, included centres of industries or commerce, and often paid relatively large sums of money in poor relief. The advent of the New Poor Law does not seem to have changed this.

Groupings of sub-districts on the basis of illegitimacy rate and socio-economic factors

The foregoing analysis suggests that the 47 Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs might be divided into four types of locality, based on their illegitimacy rates and the factors identified in the regression equation. These localities, two mainly rural and two a mix of urban, industrial and rural areas, seem also to have had different profiles of courtship and marriage. The two rural types were similar in their population densities and rates of growth, and were both depleted by primarily male out-migration, resulting in a surplus of women of marriageable age. However there were long-standing differences between the two areas in terms of illegitimacy rates, dating from at least the mid-eighteenth century, which were still in place a century later. There are some parallels between the groups distinguished here and the range of English communities discussed by Wood in the context of nuptiality, which included pastoral and arable rural districts and a steel-making town. There was however no equivalent in south Wales of the textile town where the low rate of nuptiality suggests that good opportunities for women to work delayed and even deterred marriage.²⁵

²⁴ *Caru yn y gwely* - courting in bed, sometimes referred to as bundling – is discussed in Chapter 2.

²⁵ Woods, *Demography*, pp. 98-9.

Table 5.11 Comparison of demographic and social characteristics of four types of localities, south Wales RSDs, 1851

	Rural areas		Mixed areas	
	Welsh-speaking	Anglicised	Industrial-ised	Commercial
Index of illegitimate fertility	0.048	0.020	0.043	0.034
Index of marital fertility	0.733	0.588	0.711	0.657
Index of nuptiality	0.434	0.410	0.545	0.414
SMAM (women)	26.8	27.3	24.6	26.9
Welsh speaking	4.1	2.0	3.4	2.5
Poor relief (pence per head of population)	27	37	21	24
Percentage of households engaged in manufacturing and trade	23	23	36	41
Percentage of men aged 20 + working as non-agricultural labourers	11	7	47	18
Population density (persons per acre)	166	187	496	813
Population growth rate 1801-1861, per cent per annum	1.11	0.94	3.01	2.18
Sex ratio, ages 20-34	96	93	125	100
Number of RSDs	26	4	12	5

The first type was made up of the rural areas where the Welsh language predominated, labelled for convenience 'Welsh-speaking rural areas'. In these areas much of the population lived in farms and cottages scattered across the countryside, rather than in nucleated settlements. This type had the highest rate of illegitimate fertility in the study area. Here, traditional Welsh courtship practices such as *caru yn y gwely* persisted, resulting in frequent prenuptial pregnancies. There was a degree of tolerance of illegitimacy, with care of the illegitimate child often taking place in the extended family. Among these communities, the bastardy clauses of the New Poor Law contributed to the grievances which provoked the Rebecca Riots, discussed earlier in this chapter. Average amounts paid in poor relief per household were low, reflecting the relatively low incomes of ratepayers, and low standards of living in these districts.

In the coastal areas of the Vale of Glamorgan and the Gower, 'Anglicised rural areas', different courtship practices appear to have prevailed. No mention of

caru yn y gwely has been found in these localities; indeed, in the 1847 Report, the morality and behaviour of the people of the Vale of Glamorgan were generally described in positive terms, such as 'well-conducted'.²⁶ Illegitimacy rates in the mid-nineteenth century were exceptionally low, and had been for some time; Figure 3.7 showed that the divergence between illegitimacy ratios in coastal parishes and elsewhere began in the mid-eighteenth century. It seems possible that these lower illegitimacy rates were linked to the distinctive settlement patterns of the area, developed from the Norman manorial system and from nucleated villages based around churches, which possibly encouraged higher levels of social control than elsewhere in the study region.²⁷ Age at marriage was higher, and marital fertility lower, than elsewhere, possibly also an indication of greater social control. But illegitimacy ratios were not uniformly low in the Vale; for instance in St. Nicholas RSD they averaged well over 10 per cent in the two decades from 1791 to 1810.²⁸ The average amount paid in poor relief under the old poor law was substantially higher than in the other localities in the study; at least partly because rates of relief were higher than elsewhere in the study area.

The other two types of locality, both of which included a mixture of urban, industrial and rural communities, were categorised according to whether they had a greater proportion of industry or commerce ('Industrial' and 'Commercial'). The former were distinguished by the high proportion of the male workforce employed as labourers (excluding agricultural labourers). Both types had higher rates of population growth than the rural areas, with recent in-migration an important component of that growth. Those which were mainly industrial had relatively high rates of both marital and illegitimate fertility. High rates of in-migration had created new communities with a shortage of single women of marriageable age, densely-populated places where rural customs were no longer appropriate. Here were found the highest rates of nuptiality and the lowest average ages at marriage, both consequences of the availability of comparatively well-paid employment for men, but little opportunity for women to find work. Though both languages were in use,

²⁶ 1847 Report. The village of St Athan was an exception; here bastardy cases were said to be prevalent.

²⁷ For a description of this area see H. Carter 'The Vale of Glamorgan and Gower', in E. G. Bowen (ed.), *Wales: a Physical, Historical and Regional Geography* (London, 1965)

²⁸ See Appendix D, Figure D6.

Welsh tended to predominate. Spending on poor relief was lowest in these localities, possibly in part because many recent migrants had not gained a settlement there, and because wages were relatively high.

The last group had a mix of activities but were not predominantly rural or industrial. Each included a town which was a commercial centre for the locality, providing markets, craftsmen and professional services. Employment was available for women as well as men in the urban centres, so that the sex ratio was broadly in balance at the main ages for courtship and marriage. Again, both languages were in common use, but with more English spoken than in the industrial localities. Illegitimate fertility was relatively low here, though not as low as in the coastal rural areas. As long-established urban centres, perhaps these localities exercised greater social control over illegitimacy than was possible in the industrial localities, which tended to have relatively under-developed local government.

In practice, although it is not difficult to categorise most of the more urbanised RSDs into these two latter types, there is not as clear a distinction between them as was the case for the rural RSDs. Most had a mixture of rural, industrial and commercial activities, with the differences being ones of degree rather than kind. Nevertheless there were clear differences in the demographic characteristics of the two types of district, with much higher nuptiality and fertility, and lower age at marriage, in the industrial districts. There were also a few RSDs which did not fit easily into the broad categories. Swansea had very low fertility, both legitimate and illegitimate, comparable with that of the Anglicised rural areas, but in other respects had a quite different profile. Ystradgynlais, with over 60 per cent of households involved in agriculture in 1831, and with relatively high illegitimate fertility, nevertheless had one of the lowest average ages at marriage.

Conclusions

Chapter 3 looked at changes in illegitimacy over the period 1670-1840, identifying different illegitimacy regimes in coastal and inland areas. The examination in this chapter of spatial variation in illegitimate fertility rates in the mid-nineteenth

century has refined this basic division. The model which best explains variation in the rate of illegitimate fertility in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs at this period shows that average rates of illegitimacy were higher in districts where use of the Welsh language was greater, where the level of parish relief per household was lower, and the proportion of households engaged in manufacture or trade was lower. These factors do not so much 'explain' the reasons for different rates of illegitimacy, as describe the kinds of areas in which different patterns of fertility and nuptiality are observed. The analysis suggests that economic and cultural differences among Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire RSDs gave rise to different patterns of courtship and marriage behaviour. The RSDs may be categorised into four groups, with different levels of illegitimacy, and different geographic, economic and cultural attributes.

The localities identified in Chapter 3 as having the highest and lowest levels of illegitimacy in the earlier period, inland rural areas and coastal rural areas, continued in these positions at mid-century, though contributing less to overall illegitimacy in the two counties because of the relative decline in their populations. The two new types of locality which had developed identifiably different patterns of illegitimacy and related demographic variables by the 1850s, and which grew in size throughout the rest of the century, were the industrial districts and existing (but expanding) commercial centres. The relationship between changes in illegitimacy rates and industrial change has been the subject of a large number of studies, many of which have concentrated on the impact of female employment opportunities, with conflicting views as to whether it increased or decreased nuptiality or age at marriage.²⁹ In south Wales, growth was almost entirely confined to male employment, particularly after the 1842 Mines and Collieries Act prohibited women from working underground. The present research, which investigates a region where male employment dominated, covers not just industrial districts but also their immediate hinterland and the more remote areas which supplied the greater part of their migrant labour. It thus provides a wider view of the impact of

²⁹ For instance Woods (*Demography*, p.93) took the view that 'wage labour among women had an adverse effect on nuptiality'. Hudson and King interpreted fall in marriage age as change in behaviour among extremes rather than a widespread reduction in ages (P. Hudson and S. A. King, 'Two textile townships, c. 1660-1820: a comparative demographic analysis', *The Economic History Review* (2000), p. 720).

industrialisation and migration on nuptiality and illegitimacy throughout the whole region.

Chapter 6 **Social control, moral correction and reform of sexual behaviour**

Throughout the period of this study, sexual relations outside marriage, and consequent illegitimacies, were viewed with disapproval by society at large, though the nature of this disapproval changed over time. At the outset, sexual relations outside marriage were liable to be punished in both religious and secular courts; by the end, though still frowned upon by many sections of the community, they were essentially a matter of personal choice. This chapter looks at the ways in which society attempted to control and influence sexual behaviour, through ecclesiastical and secular laws, within Nonconformist chapels, and through discussion in pamphlets and denominational magazines. Local newspaper reports of affiliation cases are used to trace changing trends in attitudes towards illegitimacy. The main sources used in this chapter are the records of the ecclesiastical courts, Nonconformist records of members' punishments, and printed sources such as magazines and newspapers.

Role of the ecclesiastical courts

Following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the church courts, which had been abolished during the Commonwealth, were again the major agent of moral control and correction. The courts exercised control over the behaviour of individuals through corrective prosecutions, known as 'office causes'. These encompassed, as Outhwaite described, 'not only spiritual concerns but also communal discord, marital arrangements and sexual behaviour'.¹ Office causes came to court in three ways: from regular visitations, in which clergy and churchwardens were required to report on the behaviour of their parishioners; promoted by individual accusation (*ex officio promoto*); or by enquiry of the Judge (*ex officio mero*).² Crimes of a sexual nature were typically described as fornication,

¹ R. B. Outhwaite, *The Rise and Fall of the English Ecclesiastical Courts, 1500-1860*, (Cambridge, 2006), p. 6.

² Anne Tarver, 'The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Lichfield and Coventry and its work, 1680-1830', Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick (1998), p. 115; Outhwaite, *Rise and Fall*, p. 9.

incontinence, carnal copulation, adultery, bastardy or incest (which usually involved a widower cohabiting with his deceased wife's sister. The offender was said to have been 'seduced by an evill and diabolical spirit', imagined perhaps in the manner of the one shown in a mural on the wall of Llandcarfan Church, in one of the sample parishes, illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 Image of 'Lust'



Taken from a mural of the Seven Deadly Sins, Llandcarfan Church, Vale of Glamorgan, dating from the late fifteenth century. Almost certainly covered in limewash before the period considered here, though most people continued to hold ideas about evil spirits encouraging sin.

Reproduced by kind permission of Roger Rosewell

Source: <http://www.rogerrosewell.com/#!/photography/photostackergallery0=6>

Couples could be prosecuted for cohabiting without being lawfully married, or for not cohabiting though they were married. Cases were also brought in respect of clandestine marriages, that is, marriages conducted by a clergyman but which had not observed some aspects of the ecclesiastical code, such as time, place

or the publication of banns or the issuing of a licence.³ The clergyman officiating, the couple themselves and anyone else present were liable to prosecution. The objective in correction causes was not simply to reform the individual, but also to protect the wider community from God's providence, which, as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, was thought to be visited on communities which tolerated immorality. Causes could be settled or withdrawn at any stage, without the outcome being noted. The defendant, if found guilty, might receive a warning (monition) or be required make one or more acts of penance, usually involving a public confession before the congregation at Sunday service, dressed in only a white sheet and bearing a white wand in the hand. Refusal to comply with the courts' processes led to excommunication from the church (lesser excommunication); persistent defiance would result in excommunication from the whole community, a severe punishment at a time when the vast majority were church-goers, but one liable to lose its force if over-used. However, the efficacy of excommunication tended to be undermined by occasional general pardons, of which there were four between 1672 and 1708.⁴

Instance cases were brought by one individual against another, in matters over which the church had jurisdiction. Actions concerning marriage, such as divorce from bed and board (in effect a judicial separation), restitution of conjugal rights, and jactitation of marriage (a complaint by one individual that another had wrongly claimed that the two were married to one another), which can provide insight into courtship and marriage, are considered in Chapter 7. Cases of defamation involving statements about sexual behaviour, using words such as 'bastard', 'cuckold', 'whore' and their many synonyms, may provide insights about attitudes to such behaviour.

When the church courts resumed business in 1660 there was no shortage of work; as Outhwaite remarked, 'for nearly twenty years English men and women went unpoliced by the ecclesiastical courts, and for over a decade they had to find

³ R. Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment*, (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 7-8.

⁴ Outhwaite, *Rise and Fall* p. 10-14.

other ways of resolving their tithe, testamentary, matrimonial and slander conflicts'.⁵ However the volume of business was generally much lower than before 1640, and was frequently dominated by probate and non-payment of tithes. Initially, breaches of the religious code predominated among office causes, but changes in legislation, such as the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672 and again in 1687, and the Toleration Act of 1689, brought an end to most actions against nonconformity. Sexual misdemeanours once again became the most usual type of office causes, though prosecutions were at a much lower level than in the early seventeenth century, and continued to decline, so that from the mid-eighteenth century these causes had started to disappear from many courts, and by 1830 had become rare.⁶

As we saw earlier, Outhwaite ascribed the decline in actions against sexual immorality to economic changes, and to a decline in the effectiveness of excommunication. Dabhoiwala put more emphasis on changing ideas about religion and individual conscience, suggesting that religious toleration led inevitably to sexual toleration, in spite of the insistence of contemporary moralists that the two were entirely different.⁷ Increasingly individual conscience became the guide to behaviour, with punishment regarded as ineffective as a means of bringing about penitence; 'the business [of law] was only crime, not sin'.⁸ These two approaches to the decline in the power of the church courts to restrain sexual offences are not necessarily in conflict; people living in rapidly changing areas were more likely to be receptive to new ideas about morality than those in settled rural areas.

The ecclesiastical courts in Wales

Moral correction at the ecclesiastical courts in Wales has not received much attention, in contrast with the English courts; for instance the subject hardly warrants a mention in the seven articles written by W.T. Morgan about the consistory courts of St Davids.⁹ Though most English dioceses had a hierarchy of

⁵ Outhwaite, *Rise and Fall*, p. 79 & 103.

⁶ Outhwaite, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 81-4, Tarver, 'The Consistory Court', p. 123, pp. 128-9.

⁷ F. Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution*, (London, 2012), pp. 80-84.

⁸ Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex*, pp. 87-91.

⁹ W. T. Morgan 'The Consistory Courts in the Diocese of St David's', *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales*, (1957). Further articles by this author relate to specific subjects such as the prosecution of Nonconformists. See also B. D. Parry *Thou art a whore!: women and defamation at the consistory court of Llandaff, 1750-1759*, MA dissertation, Aberystwyth (2000).

ecclesiastical courts, with the archdeacon's court at the lower level, and appeal to the consistory (bishop's) court, the two dioceses which covered the area of this study, Llandaff and St David's, had only consistory courts, with appeal to the Court of Arches in London. St David's covered an exceptionally large area, from the Pembrokeshire coast to the English border at Breconshire and Radnorshire, and the consistory court sat at each of the four archdeaconries in St David's, Cardigan, Carmarthen and Brecon.¹⁰ Figure 6.2 shows the consistory court in St. Peter's

Figure 6.2 The Consistory Court, St Peter's Church, Carmarthen

Image removed for copyright reasons

Source: David Pocklington

<http://www.lawandreligionuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Carmarthen-Const-Ct1.jpg>

church, Carmarthen. The archdeaconry of Carmarthen included most of the Carmarthenshire parishes, together with Glamorgan parishes west of the river Tawe. The remainder of Glamorgan together with Monmouthshire was included in the diocese of Llandaff. In the discussion that follows, 'Carmarthen' refers to the archdeaconry of Carmarthen, and 'Llandaff' to the Glamorgan parishes of the diocese of Llandaff.¹¹

¹⁰ Morgan 'The Consistory Courts in the Diocese of St David's', p. 6.

¹¹ A small number of Carmarthenshire parishes in the north-west of the county, together with some

The survival of records for the archdeaconry of Carmarthen and the diocese of Llandaff is not particularly good, mirroring patchy survival in England. There are three surviving groups of documents relevant to the study of moral correction. Act books list the causes on each occasion that they were considered by the courts, together with details of progress or action to be taken. A series of act books covers business in the archdeaconry of Carmarthen from the Restoration in 1660, with some gaps; post-restoration act books for Llandaff have survived from 1722.¹² Cause papers for Carmarthen begin in 1681, and for Llandaff in 1711, with few cases in either jurisdiction after the 1750s. Records of bishops' visitations, including answers to the questionnaires which accompanied regular visitations, and churchwardens' presentments, cover the period 1679-1792 in Carmarthen, and 1703-52 in Llandaff. In Table 6.1, causes described in the original sources as fornication, incontinence, adultery, cohabitation and concubinage have been grouped together and are described in subsequent analyses as 'sexual offences'.¹³ The crime of incest, typically a relationship between a widower and his sister-in-law (or, less often, a widow and her brother-in-law), has not been included, since the offence was primarily the relationship itself, not its extra-marital nature (and some of the couples had married).

Table 6.1 Numbers of sexual offences recorded by the dioceses of St David's and Llandaff within the counties of Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan, 1660-1800.

	Archdeaconry of Carmarthen	Llandaff (Glamorgan parishes)
1660-69	284	..
1681-1700	43	..
1701-20	69	1
1721-40	21	55
1741-60	56	63
1761-1800	7	14
Total	480	133

Source: NLW, Consistory court documents of the dioceses of St David's and Llandaff.

Pembrokeshire parishes, fell within the archdeaconry of Cardigan; in the nineteenth century these same parishes made up the registration sub-district of Cenarth.

¹² An earlier surviving act book for the archdeaconry of Carmarthen, covering the period 1590-3, is not considered here.

¹³ Outhwaite suggests that 'the terms 'adultery' and 'fornication' were sometimes used interchangeably and imprecisely' (Outhwaite, *Rise and Fall*, p. 60).

It is evident that the level of prosecutions in the archdeaconry of Carmarthen in the period immediately after the Restoration far exceeds that in any later period, and that there were very few prosecutions after 1760.¹⁴ Little can be inferred about trends in the intervening years, not just because of the uneven survival of records, but also as a result of the tendency during 1680-1700 for clerks not to record details of the type of some office prosecutions. In addition the figures for the archdeaconry of Carmarthen in the period 1748-53 are inflated by an unexplained surge in prosecutions for fornication and bastardy in one parish (Llanegwad). The relatively high volume of business recorded in Carmarthen during 1660-69 raises the question of how far this was a direct consequence of the Restoration, either through a back-log of work from the Commonwealth period, or because of prosecutions motivated by personal disputes rather than moral correction. It is thus worth considering this period separately.

The archdeaconry of Carmarthen was quick to resume business after the Restoration. Act Book 2, which covers the period 1660-68, records that court sittings began on 20 November 1660, although they were sporadic until August 1661, after the restoration of powers to punish offenders in July of that year. Initially, most actions related to wills or administration of estates, but later large numbers were undertaken to ensure conformity to church practices, such as church attendance, infant baptism, payment of church rates and tithes and respect for the Sabbath. While these actions were aimed partly at dissenters, many offenders were probably motivated by a natural reluctance to pay taxes and a preference for rest or recreation on Sundays, rather than by principled dissent. The surge in business seen in the Carmarthen court was repeated in some other dioceses, for instance Cheshire and Lichfield, but Wiltshire, Herefordshire and Oxfordshire among others saw a fall in activity.¹⁵

¹⁴ Although Table 6.1 ends at 1800, there were a few later prosecutions in the diocese of Llandaff for bastardy in the first decade of the nineteenth century; the last prosecution for adultery (not in the context of a suit for divorce) was in 1824, in the Glamorgan parish of Wick.

¹⁵ Tarver, 'The Consistory Court' p. 68; Probert, *The Changing Legal Regulation of Cohabitation: From Fornicators to Family, 1600-2010*, (Cambridge 2012), p. 31-2.

Most entries during this period simply list the name of the person or persons charged, with no information about how the cause was initiated, though some have a marginal note giving details of the outcome. There were a fair number of cases of clandestine marriages and ‘concubinage’, but few other cases relating either to marriage or illicit sexual behaviour, as Table 6.2 shows.

Table 6.2 Cases listed in Act Book 2, archdeaconry of Carmarthen, 1660-1668

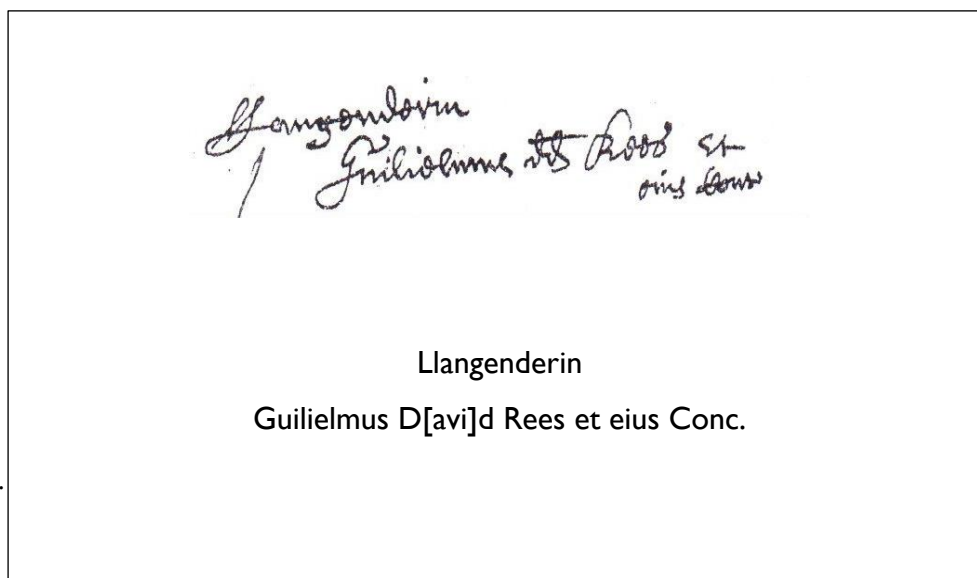
Cause	Number
Concubinage	261
Living an incontinent life	18
Adultery	2
Maintaining a bastard	2
Keeping a bawdy house	1
Clandestine marriage – laity	228
Clandestine marriage - clergy	26
Other marital causes	9
Total	547

Source: NLW, SD/CCCM/2.

It is possible that prosecutions for clandestine marriage or concubinage were directed at valid marriages contracted during the interregnum, even though an Act of 1661 stated that these were to be recognised, as long as participants had complied with the regulations in place at the time that the marriage was contracted. Prosecutions for clandestine marriage might also have concerned ceremonies conducted by clergymen ejected from their livings during this period. The use of the term ‘concubine’ is illustrated in Figure 6.3. The meaning is unclear: was it intended solely in its modern meaning of mistress or lower-status wife, or used more widely as a synonym for terms such as ‘fornication’, ‘incontinency’ or ‘adultery’? In view of the very small number of prosecutions for incontinence or bastardy in this period, the latter seems more likely.¹⁶

¹⁶ ‘Concubine’ is used in the same sense in a visitation of 1684 (SD/CPD/21 (27)), and is found in some parish registers to label mothers of illegitimate children, for instance in the Cydweli baptism register from the Restoration to the end of the seventeenth century. Probert also pointed to ‘the ambiguity of terms such as ... ‘concubine’” (*The Changing Legal Regulation of Cohabitation*, p. 24).

Figure 6.3 Example of an entry in the Carmarthen Act Book relating to concubinage



Source: NLW, SD/CCCm/2

Reproduced by kind permission of the Bishop of St Davids; supplied by Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/ National Library of Wales

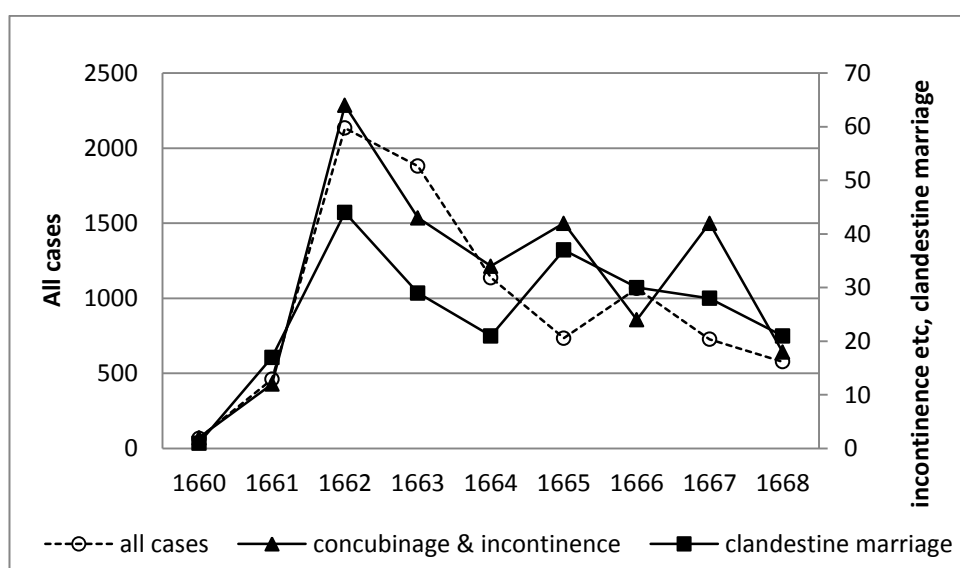
The majority of cases of concubinage – 62 per cent – named the male partner but not his concubine; a further eight per cent gave only her first name. Little further information is provided about the individuals involved; of the minority with listed occupations all were artisans, except for one clergyman. Where the outcome was noted, the impression given is that it was the man's evidence which was reported, though there is no reason to suppose that the woman was exempt from any punishment handed out by the court. This gendered approach to sexual misbehaviour is made explicit in a later visitation; in 1728, following up on an earlier presentment for bastardy, the churchwardens of Llanegwad wrote 'We did not know that it was necessary to return the woman's name'.¹⁷ Gender differentiation among prosecutions for immorality was observed by Tarver in Lichfield consistory court in the period 1700-19, though it took a different form. Here defendants were named individually rather than as couples, with men overwhelmingly outnumbering women. Tarver commented that those few women who were prosecuted appeared to have 'lives [which] were colourful in the extreme.'¹⁸

¹⁷ NLW, SD/CPD/26, 1728 (840).

¹⁸ A. Tarver, 'The Consistory Court', p. 129.

Where outcomes were given, most were dismissals. Catherine Jenkin of St. Ishmael was charged in 1663 with living an incontinent life, but denied her crime and the cause was dismissed. Similarly, most of the cases against men charged with having a concubine were dismissed. Where further information was recorded, the majority of the men charged admitted to having had carnal knowledge of the woman concerned, but said that the relationship had ended several years earlier, implicitly during the Commonwealth. However in 1662 John ap John Rees of St. Clears was admonished following his acknowledgement that he had had a concubine, and a few couples were obliged to do penance for their crimes. It is possible that some causes which had occurred several years earlier were based on a personal grudge rather than a concern for the moral health of the parish.

Figure 6.4 Actions listed in Carmarthen Act Book 2 by type



Source: NLW, SD/CCCm/2.

Note: Recording began on 20 November 1660 and ended on 19 December 1668.

Figure 6.4 presents the numbers of actions listed in Act Book 2 by year. The series for 'all cases' (left-hand scale) is not on exactly the same basis as those for concubinage and similar actions and for clandestine marriages (right-hand scale), as the former includes duplicated listings of the same case. Though this will have inflated the true number of cases, it is unlikely to have significantly affected the trend through time. The three series follow a similar path, with a peak in business during 1662, and decline thereafter. This pattern suggests that the build-up of cases from the Commonwealth period to which Outhwaite referred applied to sexual and

marital nonconformity as well as to other cases. In 1668, the last year covered by Act Book 2, the level of sexual offences was a third of that in the peak year, 1662.

Actions against sexual and marital nonconformity during the 1660s were spread across most of the larger parishes of Carmarthenshire and West Glamorgan, suggesting that they were not the result of a few local campaigns, but instead reflected widespread community concerns. In order to get some idea of the scale of prosecutions, rough estimates were made of the population of the parishes covered by the archdeacons of Carmarthen, by assuming that parishes within the archdeaconry had the same proportion of Rickman's estimates of county populations in 1700 as they had in 1801. The results, shown in Table 6.3, suggest that the rate per thousand of the population of prosecutions for concubinage and similar sexual misdemeanors in Carmarthenshire parishes was more than four times that for West Glamorgan, reinforcing the findings in earlier chapters that there was evidence of underlying differences in sexual behaviour in the two areas which had deep cultural roots.

Table 6.3 Numbers and incidence of sexual misdemeanours and clandestine marriages in the archdeaconry of Carmarthen, 1661-8

	Carmarthenshire parishes	West Glamorgan parishes
<i>Number of events, 1661-68</i>		
concubinage, incontinence	259	25
clandestine marriages	161	67
<i>Annual average</i>		
concubinage, incontinence	32	3
clandestine marriages	20	8
Estimated population, 1700	23,129	10,397
<i>Incidence per 1000 population</i>		
concubinage, incontinence	1.40	0.30
clandestine marriages	0.87	0.81

Sources: SD/CCCm/2, Registrar-General's reports.

Another way of looking at the data in Table 6.3 is to compare it with the possible number of illegitimate children born in the two areas. The data set in Chapter 3, with a relatively small sample of parishes and little information for the seventeenth century, is an inadequate basis from which to estimate figures for illegitimate baptisms in the 1660s. However, the Parish Register Abstract which

accompanied the 1831 Census gave numbers of baptisms by Hundred for the period from 1700. On the one hand, some parishes are missing from the returns, and not all children were baptised; on the other, there had been some population growth between 1660 and 1700. As these factors cancel each other out to some extent, the figures published for 1700 are probably a good enough guide to the scale of baptisms in the 1660s. Applying the illegitimacy ratios estimated for sample parishes in the later seventeenth century to the baptism figures for 1700 gives a very rough figure for the average annual numbers of illegitimate children born in the late seventeenth century of around 30 a year in Carmarthenshire parishes and about 3 in West Glamorgan, surprisingly close to the annual average of prosecutions shown in Table 6.3. This is not to suggest that all parents of illegitimate children were presented in the consistory court, merely that a significant proportion of sexual crimes seems to have been prosecuted in this period, including pre-nuptial pregnancy, bastardy and other examples of extra-marital sexuality.

Earlier the question was raised of whether the high level of correction causes in the years immediately following the Restoration simply reflected local concern for the moral health of communities, or indicated a readiness on the part of some individuals to use the church courts for personal ends during a period of considerable uncertainty, when individual fortunes were affected by political changes. In a different context, Sharon Howard has shown that the level of Quarter Sessions' indictments in the Denbighshire courts during 1661-5 were higher than in subsequent periods.¹⁹ In the absence of any knowledge of the identities of those concerned, either accusers or accused, what follows can only be speculation. The fact that some of the crimes complained of were no longer current, and that many actions were dismissed, could be evidence of both a desire on the part of some members of the community to pursue old scores, and on the part of the church to resist such actions in order to maintain communal harmony. Although Jenkins considered that at the Restoration, 'churchmen looked forward to the opportunity to pay off old scores', Morgan dismissed the view that all those presented *pro articulis* were dissenters, arguing that the religious code provided many other

¹⁹ S. Howard, *Law and Disorder in Early Modern Wales: Crime and Authority in the Denbighshire Courts, c.1660-1730* (Cardiff, 2008), p. 45.

opportunities to constrain the activities of those who would not conform.²⁰ It seems probable that some individuals in the archdeaconry of Carmarthen had attempted to use the church courts to gain an advantage over a rival by attacking his reputation through the prosecution of a sexual crime; but although some actions may have been spurious there may nevertheless have been real concern across the archdeaconry during this period to combat sexual crime.

By the early eighteenth century the level of sexual crime prosecuted in the archdeaconry of Carmarthen was well below that of the 1660s, with an annual average of between three and four cases, compared with 18 in 1668, the lowest yearly figure during the 1660s. However the profile of the decline is unclear since there are gaps in records during the later seventeenth century, and the type of offence was not given for many office causes in that period. Nevertheless more detail in the act books and particularly the cause papers provide the possibility of a better understanding of their circumstances. Table 6.4 provides information about who promoted the action, the charges made, and the gender of the person or persons accused, for the period 1680-1800. In the archdeaconry of Carmarthen, the majority of causes were office prosecutions or were promoted by the churchwardens; with only five per cent (10 cases), promoted by individuals. Most Llandaff records did not specify the source of the prosecution; those that did (20 per cent or 28 cases) gave the name of the individual or individuals promoting the cause. Ten were described as 'voluntary promoter'; the remainder included an overseer, a clergyman and a proctor. In ten cases the promoter and the person charged shared a surname, suggesting a possible family connection. Though chance may be responsible for a few cases, it may be discounted in the cause of incontinence brought by Edward Carne of Cowbridge against John Carne, formerly of the same place, for begetting a bastard child on Jennet Carne. The bastardy causes brought against Morgan Thomas and Ann Harry of St Hilary were promoted by Mary Harry, widow, (against Morgan) and William Thomas (against Ann). Moreover the proportion (10 matches out of 28 cases) is higher than might be

²⁰ W T Morgan, 'The prosecution of nonconformists in the consistory courts of St David's, 1661-88', *Journal of the Historical society of the Church in Wales*, (1962), p. 32; G. H. Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales* (Cambridge, 1997), p.158.

expected by chance. It thus seems very likely that family tensions played a part in bringing about a number of these prosecutions.²¹

Table 6.4 Sexual offences in the dioceses of St David's and Llandaff within the counties of Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan, 1674-1800, by source of prosecution, offences specified, and gender of the person accused.

	Archdeaconry of Carmarthen		Diocese of Llandaff - Glamorgan parishes	
	number	per cent	number	per cent
Total	196	100	133	100
<i>Source of prosecution</i>				
office	70	36	-	-
wardens	84	43	-	-
individuals	10	5	28	21
unspecified	32	16	105	79
<i>Offences</i>				
bastardy	56	29	105	79
prenuptial fornication	-	-	5	4
other fornication, incontinence, adultery	136	69	15	11
cohabitation, pretended marriage	4	2	8	6
<i>Gender of offenders</i>				
men only	107	55	24	18
women only	35	18	22	17
both	54	28	87	65

Sources: Consistory Court records for St David's and Llandaff

The offences were more likely to include bastardy in Llandaff than in Carmarthen. Descriptions of offences are to some extent arbitrary, in that a charge of fornication does not necessarily rule out bastardy, though as the existence of a child provided some proof it would usually be included in the charge. Charges of ante-nuptial fornication (in the case of a subsequent marriage between the partners) and cohabitation were rare. There were differences also between the relative proportions of men and women named in the charges, with a higher proportion of men than women named in Carmarthenshire (particularly before 1740), but close to equal proportions in Glamorgan.

²¹ NLW: LL/CC/G/55 (1714), NLW: LL/CC/G/1310 (1769). Tarver considered that it was the more complex causes that reached the consistory court, and that these often arose as a result of problems within the household. Tarver, 'The Consistory Court', pp. 117-8.

In both jurisdictions prosecutions were spread over a large number of parishes. Where parishes had more than five cases, these tended to occur over short periods; for instance, the nine prosecutions in Eglwys Ilan, a parish just north of Cardiff, all took place during 1738-41.²² The most striking example of this 'bunching' was the Carmarthenshire parish of Llanegwad, where 18 of the 21 cases occurred during the period 1748-53. The activities of a group of 15 men and 17 women, some involved in more than one relationship during this time, led to a sudden rise in illegitimate births, which seems to have provoked the churchwardens to make an unprecedented number of presentations at several consecutive annual visitations.²³ The group included a pair of sisters, and possibly several groups of brothers. It was no doubt with some relief that the churchwardens could report to the 1759 visitation that they knew of 'none that are guilty of Fornication Incest or Adultery excepting one Mary Thomas who hath lately been brought to bed of a base child and one Margaret Thomas who hath been guilty also of the like offence as they have heard and been informed'. Of the 21 people presented by the Llanegwad churchwardens between 1748 and 1753, eight appeared at the consistory court in May 1750, of whom two, John Lewis Anthony and Joyce Thomas Jeremy, were charged again in 1751 with not having undergone any canonical punishment for their offences. Neither was then prepared to comply with the court's orders, and in October 1752 letters of excommunication were issued. Finally, in 1762, Joyce had a change of heart and underwent absolution.²⁴

There are several features about the proceedings in Llanegwad which can be observed elsewhere. The numbers presented by churchwardens were much larger than those eventually appearing in court. Tarver has suggested that the majority of morality causes were dealt with at courts held during archdeacons' visitations, and went unrecorded.²⁵ However, as noted earlier, there were no archdeacons' courts in the two south Wales' dioceses, though the possibility remains that an informal procedure may have been used to settle some less serious morality causes. Some

²² NLW, LL/CC/16 & 19.

²³ NLW, SD/CPD/30.

²⁴ NLW, SD/CCCm/C(G)/520, SD/CCCm(G)/362, SD/CCCm(G)/370, SD/CCCm(G)/370.

²⁵ Tarver, 'The Consistory Court', p. 122.

people summoned to appear before the consistory courts were unwilling to attend, ignoring successive citations to appear, and a few were prepared to ignore canonical justice and live, like Joyce Thomas Jeremy, in an excommunicated state. A list dated 1743 of Llandaff cases which had resulted in excommunication gave the names of 20 people charged with bastardy or cohabitation in cases initiated over the period 1733-42. The 20 individuals, nine of whom were excommunicated for not answering the court's citation to appear in court, and five for refusing to do penance, represented just over a fifth of all those charged with sexual offences in that period.²⁶ This suggests that up to the mid-eighteenth century at least, a substantial proportion of people were still prepared to accept church discipline, albeit reluctantly.

Several historians have suggested that some defamation cases may have arisen as an attempt to head off a prosecution for immorality.²⁷ One such case is that of the aptly-named Elizabeth Love. In June 1734 Thomas Love of Penmark, from a respectable family long-established in the Vale of Glamorgan, brought an action of defamation against Ann Watkin on behalf of his daughter Elizabeth, then a minor. He alleged that Ann had spread rumours that Elizabeth had been seen in bed with Stephen Frederick Remy, a manservant at Fonmon Castle, in order to scandalise and defame Elizabeth, 'who before the rising of the scandal had the character and reputation of a well behaved young woman in her neighbourhood'. Ann Watkin's defence was that 'before she had uttered the words complained of, the couple in the presence of several credible witnesses mutually contracted & promised themselves in marriage to each other, & it was reported ... in the neighbourhood ... that the said Stephen Mr Jones' manservant was lawfully married to the said Elizabeth Love'. At around the same time a cause of incontinence was brought against Elizabeth, that 'within the previous two years she had frequented the company of Stephen Frederick Remy in secret and private places ... at unseasonable hours in a very suspicious and scandalous manner' and that in July 1733 she was seen and apprehended 'in naked bed' in the house of Theophilus

²⁶ NLW: LL/CC/G/944.

²⁷ Outhwaite, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 44-5, quoting M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (1987) and L. Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (1996).

Walter and 'then and there had carnal knowledge of the body of the said Stephen Frederick Remy'.²⁸ There are no records of the outcomes of these causes, though the act book records that both were still in progress in 1735.

Although Elizabeth Love was the only one of the couple to be charged with incontinence, we saw from Table 6.4 that women were generally less likely than men to be charged with sexual offences. This might suggest that those women who were singled out for prosecution had committed the more heinous crimes. There were certainly some women who might fall into this category. One example is Elizabeth Thomas, a widow from Neath, who was described by several witnesses as having led a lewd and disorderly life. She had allowed Thomas Owen to live in her house 'under pretence of courtship', as her mother said, for some three years, but when she gave birth to an illegitimate child was unsure whether he or one David Morgan was the father.²⁹ And Anne Lewis of Llandeilo Abercywyn was presented as 'a lewd woman, being the mother of three bastard children'.³⁰ It would seem that having several illegitimate children, or refusing to name the father of an illegitimate child, led to a higher risk of mothers being prosecuted. But in several other causes where women alone were charged, no aggravating circumstances are mentioned, so that Tarver's observation that the women charged at Lichfield led 'colourful lives' is not altogether justified from the evidence available in the dioceses of south Wales.

Nevertheless the patterns of activity described above strongly suggest that parishes did not routinely present parents of illegitimate children, let alone couples merely suspected of fornication. From time to time a sudden surge in illegitimacies, or perhaps a new churchwarden or incumbent with ideas of reform, might have caused parishes to become concerned at the sexual behaviour of their young people, and to make an example of a few. Possibly some offenders were presented by family members who thought exposure in the church courts might lead to a reform in behaviour. It is evident that the number of people prepared to ignore the court was increasing, particularly from the middle of the eighteenth century. And

²⁸ NLW: LL/CC/G/729 (a-c), LL/CC/G/754, LL/CC/12.

²⁹ NLW: SD/CC/G/843 (1737-39). Elizabeth was excommunicated not for refusing to do penance, but for being unable to pay the court's costs.

³⁰ NLW: SD/CPD/30 1758 (2753).

from the same period the responses to successive visitation articles tended to become more vague, suggesting that churchwardens were increasingly reluctant to single out individuals. The churchwardens of Llanfair-ar-y-bryn reported in 1755 that 'some persons in our chapelry lie under a common fame and suspicion of Incontinency, Intemperance and of rash and prophane swearing', but did not name them, explaining that 'we find none are so zealously affected & disposed that can have sufficient evidence to convict them, in order to effect and promote their future reformation'. In 1759 the Cydweli wardens were not certain that their parish had any such persons, and at Llangan in the same year the response was that 'Fame is often false'.³¹ There is no evidence among these statements of fears that the well-being of the parish might be threatened by the crimes of a few. In the following decades replies to the visitation queries were expressed in generalities which ranged from 'none' to 'too many', but presentations of individuals for sexual offences in south Wales were rare. The timing of the decline in the use of the church courts to prosecute sexual offences may have varied from place to place, with the last recorded cases occurring surprisingly late in some parishes, but it would seem likely that in south Wales in the second half of the eighteenth century few single couples having a sexual relationship within the context of courtship would have regarded the church courts as a significant threat.

In England the vacuum left by the decline of the church courts was initially filled to some extent by the growth of societies for the reform of manners, which began to be formed around 1690 and flourished for about 40 years. These societies thrived in towns and in areas with a history of dissent, using existing secular laws and local magistrates to punish offenders. But rather than seeking the reform of individual sexual behaviour, they tended to focus on public vice, such as prostitution.³² The movement was active in West Wales; in 1708 Sir John Phillips of Picton Castle, 'a leading figure in all the religious and philanthropic movements of the day', was instrumental in setting up societies in Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire. Six magistrates in the town of Carmarthen made their intention

³¹ SD/CPD/23, 1755 (346), 1759 (412) and 1759 (442). No doubt the churchwardens of Llanfairarybryn were aware of the contrast between the attitude towards moral reform among their own parishioners, and that of the numerous dissenters in the area,

³² Tarver, 'The Consistory Court', p. 128, Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex*, pp. 55-6; A. Hunt, *Governing morals: a Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 39.

to enforce the laws against immorality and profaneness known to the public, ordering a notice to that effect to be hung at the church door at Whitsun, Easter and Christmas. According to George Bull, bishop of St David's, this 'had a wonderful influence on the lives and manners of the people', and he and other moralists encouraged magistrates elsewhere to adopt the idea.³³ However as Bull died in early 1710, his judgement of the success of the scheme may have been premature. Edward Tenison, then Archdeacon of Carmarthen, reported in a visitation of his archdeaconry undertaken in the summer of 1710 that the reading in church of the Proclamation against vice and profaneness and the Act against cursing & swearing was neglected everywhere except Laugharne.³⁴ A later initiative, the 'Royal Proclamation for the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue' (1787), led to the establishment of a 'Proclamation Society' in Carmarthen, and, in the early nineteenth century, branches of its later variant, the 'Society for the Suppression of Vice' in Swansea and Cardiff.³⁵

With the church courts in decline, the only effective legal sanctions against incontinence and bastardy were those which concerned parents of illegitimate children likely to become a burden on the parish. From 1610, an Act of Parliament ruled that 'every lewd woman which shall have any bastard which may be chargeable to the parish, the justices of the peace shall commit such woman to the house of correction, to be punished and set to work, during the term of one whole year'.³⁶ In 1732-3 changes in the law compelled a woman pregnant with an illegitimate child to declare her pregnancy and name the father, and made the putative father responsible for the maintenance of his child. A failure on the part of either parent to comply would result in imprisonment.³⁷ It is unclear how often these

³³ G. H. Jenkins, *Literature, Religion and Society in Wales 1660-1730* (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 108-110.

³⁴ G. M. Griffiths, 'A visitation of the Archdeaconry of Carmarthen, 1710', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 1974, pp. 279-311, and 1976, pp. 311-326. As mentioned elsewhere, archdiaconal visitations were not the practice in the diocese of St David's; this visitation seems to have been carried out in Tenison's role as deputy to the vicar-general of the archbishop of Canterbury, during the vacancy of the see of St David's.

³⁵ R. Davies *Hope and Heartbreak: a Social History of Wales and the Welsh, 1776-1871* (Cardiff, 2005), p. 284. The Swansea Society for the Suppression of Vice, which included among its members Thomas Bowdler, prosecuted sales of pornography and sex toys; however the Carmarthen Proclamation Society seemed to have been more concerned with discouraging the plundering of shipwrecks around the west Wales coast than with pursuing sexual immorality.

³⁶ 7 James, cap.4 (1610).

³⁷ 6 Geo.II, cap.31 (1732-3).

punishments were put into effect. There are few instances of resolutions to commit a woman to the house of correction among the vestry books examined in Chapter 3, or recorded among the Glamorgan petty sessions papers.³⁸ Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire each had one house of correction, at Cowbridge and Carmarthen respectively, and both were relatively small, with insufficient capacity to take either county's annual output of mothers of illegitimate children, even if the scope were confined to those with a second or subsequent child.³⁹ The minor role played by the house of correction in punishing mothers of illegitimate children is confirmed by the answers from Welsh parishes to a question about such punishment in the 1832 Commission of Enquiry into the Poor Laws, which indicated that imprisonment, even for a second offence, was rare.

However there were within south Wales communities subject to a moral discipline more severe than that of the courts, whether the secular variety or the post-Restoration church courts. The next section looks at the Nonconformist approach to moral correction, and goes on to consider how the growing power of Nonconformity was used to campaign more widely against extramarital sexual behaviour in the nineteenth century.

Nonconformity and moral correction

While the control exercised by the Church of England over sexual behaviour was declining, communities across Wales were submitting themselves to the more rigid disciplinary code of the dissenting churches. From small beginnings, Baptist and Independent congregations grew throughout the eighteenth century. From 1735 they were joined by Welsh Methodism which, though nominally a movement within the Anglican Church, shared much of their theology. Their methods, 'an irresistible combination of open-air sermons, individual introspection

³⁸ Nutt found that courts in early nineteenth century Essex prioritised affiliating the father of an illegitimate child over punishing his/her mother. (T. Nutt, 'The paradox and problems of illegitimate paternity in old poor law Essex' in A. Levene, T. Nutt and S. Williams (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain, 1700-1920* (Basingstoke 2005), p. 121.)

³⁹ Howard noted that houses of correction arrived late in Wales (S. Howard, *Law and Disorder*, p. 260. Cowbridge house of correction was rebuilt in 1806 to house 30 prisoners; Carmarthen (which was housed within the county gaol), had 12 cells, though the numbers of occupants could be increased by 'doubling up' in cells.

and fervent hymn-singing', gained them large numbers of converts, particularly women, and brought an evangelising vigour to Nonconformity as a whole.⁴⁰ In 1720, Nonconformists made up only 5 per cent of the population of Wales, many of them in rural communities, but by the end of the century most of the population of south Wales lived within reach of a Nonconformist chapel or meeting house, and by 1851 three-quarters of church attendances were in Nonconformist places of worship.⁴¹ Each of the main movements – Baptist, Independent and Welsh Calvinistic Methodists – was Calvinistic in theology.⁴² They held deeply patriarchal views, in which the paterfamilias was expected to become 'the priest and Christian magistrate within the family'.⁴³ Within church communities, disciplining of members was an important tenet of Calvinism, intended to promote individual repentance, and to keep the church uncorrupted. Calvin had described discipline as moving through stages of private admonition, rebukes before witnesses, and finally excommunication. He argued that church censures did not 'consign those who are excommunicated to perpetual ruin and damnation,' but were designed to induce repentance, reconciliation and restoration to communion.⁴⁴ Dissenting churches found it necessary to maintain records of offences, by noting them in a separate register, or by including them in membership registers which also recorded admissions, transfers, suspensions and deaths, in a system which has parallels with that used in the Church of Scotland.⁴⁵

The disciplinary records of Welsh Nonconformity do not survive in great quantity, and do not always show details of offences, or record them only for limited periods. Details of the records used here are given in Table 6.5, with a map of the locations of the churches shown in Figure 6.4. The earliest surviving disciplinary records in the area of this study are those of the Baptist churches

⁴⁰ G. H. Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales*, p. 164.

⁴¹ Clive D. Field, 'Counting religion in England and Wales: the long eighteenth century, c.1680–c.1840', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, pp.702-6. Information for south Wales was calculated from I. G. Jones and D. Williams (eds.), *The Religious Census of 1851: a Calendar of the Returns Relating to Wales, vol. 1: South Wales* (Cardiff, 1976).

⁴² The majority of Welsh Quakers had followed William Penn to America. Over the early eighteenth century, most Presbyterians in Wales came to be identified with the Independents.

⁴³ Jenkins, *Literature, Religion and Society*, p. 40.

⁴⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.12. 'Discipline of the church: its principal use in censures and excommunication', (Philadelphia, 1816, translated by John Allen) pp. 410-418.

⁴⁵ R. Mitchison and L. Leneman, *Girls in Trouble: Sexuality and Social Control in Rural Scotland, 1660-1780* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 2-3.

established in the far west, on the borders of Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Cardiganshire. The most comprehensive is the exclusions Register for Cilfowyr, which lists names of those expelled between 1705 and 1904. All the churches discussed here were in rural areas, except for Ebenezer, a large Independent chapel in an industrial area in the rapidly-growing town of Swansea. Records were generally kept by the minister, who was often responsible for several churches, keeping records in a single church book or register of exclusions, as in the examples shown in Table 6.5. The categories of offence include many familiar from the ecclesiastical courts, such as breaking the Sabbath, incontinence, adultery, ante-nuptial fornication and incest. Many other offences reflected the high standards of behaviour demanded of chapel members. Eryn White's description of the Calvinistic Methodists, for whom 'Life ... was a deadly serious business. Anything that smacked of self-indulgence, that was not motivated by a regard to God's will in the matter, was regarded as sinful' applied equally to the other denominations.⁴⁶ The list of offences, including lying, carelessness, attending a 'bidding', a fair or the races, disregarding censure, breaking the covenant or 'disorderly living', illustrate the serious and self-reflective life expected of members.⁴⁷ One register (Hebron) gives not only details of offences, but also the views of the minister, Simon Evans, on the character of offenders.⁴⁸ According to Geraint Jenkins, Welsh dissent considered that the sins most prevalent in society in the early eighteenth century were 'Sabbath-breaking, drunkenness and vain swearing', though later in the century sexual offences came to be a substantial proportion of the offences which led to exclusion.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ E. M. White, 'The world, the flesh and the devil and the early Methodist societies of south-west Wales', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1997), p. 48.

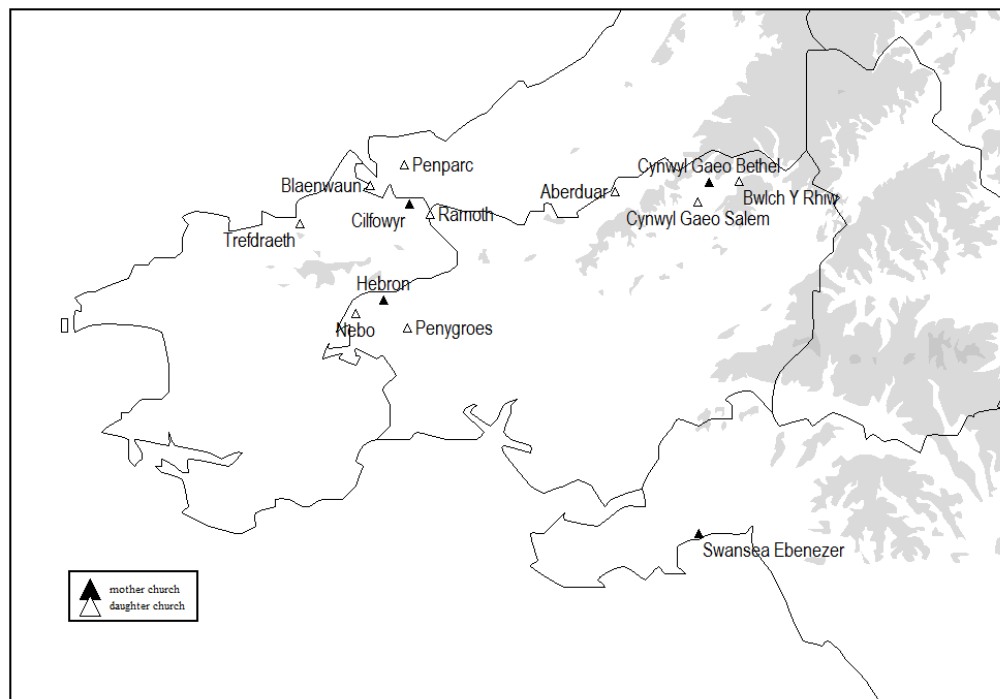
⁴⁷ A 'bidding' was an event organised by a betrothed or recently-married couple at which money and gifts were given to the couple. These events, which are discussed in Chapter 7, were discouraged partly on account of the beer-drinking and festivities which took place, and also because they might encourage 'improvident' marriages.

⁴⁸ It seems unlikely that Evans intended the register to be kept with other chapel records. It was compiled after the event in another hand, on the reverse of a printed parliamentary voters' register for the parish of Merthyr Tydfil, 1872 (NLW MS 11691E).

⁴⁹ Jenkins, *Literature, Religion and Society*, pp. 85-6.

Table 6.5 Nonconformist exclusion records, south Wales

Church	Denomination	Period covered	Period with details of offences
Cilfowyr Including Blaunwaun, Trefdraeth, Penparc and Ramoth	Baptist	1705-1797, 1817-54	1705-1797, 1845-51
Cynwyl Gaeo, Bethel Including Salem, Aberduar and Bwlch-y-rhiw	Baptist	1751-1857	1751-89, 1805-45
Hebron including Nebo and Penygroes	Independent	1844-1905	1844-84
Ebenezer (Swansea)	Independent	1803-76	1837-45

Figure 6.5 Location of chapels with records of exclusions, 1705-1884

The majority of the disciplinary records of the Nonconformist churches were compiled in Welsh, though Ebenezer kept its records in English. Sexual offences were generally described using terms from the vernacular or from the Welsh Bible, some of which, for example *putain* (whore) and *putiendra* (prostitution) contrast in their directness with the latinate, legalistic English of the consistory courts. On the other hand, the degree of intimacy implied by the term *anlladrwydd*

(wantonness) is unclear; nor is it evident whether 'disorderly conduct' (*rhodiad anaddas*) was a catch-all category, or had some particular meaning. The offence is rarely described as *annilyrwydd* (bastardy), though in many cases disciplinary action would have been prompted by the visible evidence of a pregnancy.

Table 6.6 gives details of all exclusions by gender, together with those for sexual offences alone. It can be seen that the majority of offences leading to exclusion at Hebron were sexual in nature, whereas they made up only a minor part at Cilfowyr. However, once unspecified offences are excluded, sexual offences at Cilfowyr accounted for around half of the total from 1751 to 1854. Women formed the majority of those excluded, except at Cilfowyr in the first half of the eighteenth century, and a still larger proportion of those excluded for sexual offences. However men were more likely to be censured for those lesser offences at Hebron which at that chapel generally led only to suspension, such as drunkenness, fighting and quarrelling. It would seem that women found it harder to conform to the standard of behaviour expected by the (male) chapel elders, and were sometimes accused of offences such as neglecting the cause, lack of enthusiasm, or lying to conceal some offence. Though the larger numbers of women excluded for sexual offences might be taken as evidence of gender bias on the part of ministers and church elders, other reasons might have contributed to the imbalance. It seems unlikely that, where two church members were discovered to have had sexual relations outside marriage, only the woman was punished. However in most churches, membership generally included larger numbers of single young women than men of a similar age and status. At Cilfowyr, for instance, though similar numbers of men and women underwent adult baptism during the first half of the eighteenth century, in the remainder of the century female baptisms comfortably outnumbered those of men, and, according to White, women outnumbered men in the early years of the Methodist societies.⁵⁰ Thus some of these women, should they have wished to marry, would inevitably have had to seek partners from outside their denomination, and in the event of an extramarital pregnancy the man would not have been subject to church punishment.⁵¹ Women

⁵⁰ White, 'The world, the flesh and the devil', p. 50.

⁵¹ All three main Nonconformist denominations expected their members to seek a marriage partner within the same denomination. Though both sexes were discouraged from marrying outside the

Table 6.6 Exclusions and suspensions at Nonconformist churches in south Wales, 1705-1884

	All offences			All offences with descriptions			Sexual offences		
	men	women	total	men	women	total	men	women	total
Cilfowyr, exclusions									
1705-50	40	26	66	40	26	66	2	3	5
1751-97	60	68	128	47	48	95	20	29	49
1817-54	78	112	190	19	25	44	7	20	27
total	178	206	384	106	99	205	29	52	81
<i>women as a % of total</i>									
1705-50		39.4			39.4			60.0	
1751-97		53.1			50.5			59.2	
1817-54		58.9			56.8			74.1	
total		53.6			48.3			64.2	
Cynwyl Gaeo, exclusions¹									
1756-1800	21	38	59	20	34	54	4	13	17
1801-45	65	106	171	65	106	171	34	56	90
total	86	144	230	85	140	225	38	69	107
<i>women as a % of total</i>									
1756-1800		64.4			63.0			76.5	
1801-45		62.0			62.0			62.2	
Ebenezer, exclusions									
1837-45	76	104	180	53	42	95	1	6	7
<i>women as a % of total</i>									
		57.8			44.2			85.7	
Hebron suspensions and exclusions									
1850-84									
suspensions	80	20	104	80	20	104	4	1	5
exclusions	44	58	102	44	58	102	26	54	80
<i>women as a % of total</i>									
suspensions		19.2			19.2			20.0	
exclusions		56.9			56.9			67.5	

Sources: NLW Minor deposit 1110B; NLW MS 10785C; NLW MS 11691E; Minor deposit 131B and Dyfed FHS Journal 4.5.

Note 1: Charges of 'wantonness' against women make up the majority of sexual offences at Cynwyl Gaeo. If these are excluded, women account for half the offences in the earlier period and 57% in the later period.

in service away from their home villages, obliged to return when their pregnancies were discovered, would also contribute to the excess of women over men in the disciplinary lists. On the other hand men whose sexual partners were not members of the same church would have found it easier to conceal their offence, though not

denomination, the issue was more significant for a woman, since it was liable to produce a conflict between her duty to obey her husband and the need to follow her religious obligations. The category of offence described in the Cilfowyr register as 'marrying contrary to the will of God' probably referred to marrying outside the church.

always successfully, as some were excluded for having a child sworn to them. Nevertheless the overall impression is of some evidence of gender discrimination, reinforced by the Hebron punishment lists, where four out of the five people whose offence of fornication or bastardy led to the lesser punishment of suspension were men, compared with 26 out of the 80 punished by exclusion.

Only Cilfowyr has a long enough series of exclusions to give any indication of trends, though even here there are significant gaps in the recording of the type of offence, from 1817-44 and after 1851. An increase in sexual offences over the eighteenth century is clearly evident, though this must be seen against the numbers of adult baptisms, which suggest a steadily rising membership up to 1760, after which annual levels of baptisms doubled. However sexual offences increased rather more rapidly, rising from under 10 per cent of all categorised offences up to 1750 to around half in the period 1751-1797 and nearly two-thirds during 1841-51. The figures are too incomplete to come to any judgement about whether the rise in sexual offences was more or less than might be expected from the rising membership and increasing rates of illegitimacy in the area.⁵² It is also noticeable that in the decades with the most offences (1771-89 and 1841-50) the proportion of female offenders rose, to around three-quarters of the total.

The entries at Cilfowyr distinguished between *godineb* (adultery), *putiendra* and *gyda wyr (menyw) cyn priodi* (ante-nuptial fornication), though as in the records of the consistory courts it is not clear whether the term for adultery necessarily implied that one of the couple was married. Cases of ante-nuptial fornication first began to be distinguished in the 1750s, amounting to 18 percent of all sexual offences in the second half of the century and 35 per cent from 1841 to 1860. The increase in the second half of the eighteenth century no doubt reflects the trend towards pre-nuptial sexual activity in this period, which also gave rise to increasing illegitimacy, but the continuing increase in the first half of the nineteenth century against a fall in recorded illegitimacy rates suggests a hardening in attitudes on the

⁵² The membership of Cilfowyr was drawn from a wide area on the Pembrokeshire/ Carmarthenshire/ Cardiganshire border, partly covered by the parishes which made up the Cenarth RSD, where illegitimacy grew (if somewhat erratically) during the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century.

part of chapel elders, who might have readier to take action once the pregnancy became evident, rather wait until the birth.

Exclusion was not intended to be permanent; every effort was made to persuade the offender to mend his or her ways and return to the church. The Hebron disciplinary lists give dates of both exclusions and restorations. Of the 33 people excluded for sexual offences in the period 1851-8, 22 had been restored by 1861. Twelve of these were couples, censured jointly. A slightly higher proportion of women were restored than men, though there was little difference in the duration of time for which they were excluded. Four couples and three individuals had married before they were excluded, and a further two couples and three individuals married between exclusion and restoration. The implication is that discipline was provoked by evidence of pregnancy rather than by direct knowledge of an illicit relationship, and that the vast majority of cases, if not all, were accidents of courtship. The likelihood that it was visible evidence of pregnancy which led to exclusion suggests that church elders found it difficult to supervise the courtship behaviour of young couples, and that in spite of the ideal of the godly family, parents and employers were not always prepared to enforce discipline themselves. It is noticeable that none of the sexual offences were described as illegitimacy, and it may well be that the majority of couples disciplined at Hebron had married before the birth.⁵³

One member at Hebron offended twice. Brigid Evans, aged 40 and a member for 20 years, was excluded in November 1855 for 'prostitution' (*putiendra*). On her restoration in July of the next year, Simon Evans commented 'still unmarried'; following a further exclusion in November 1857 for the same offence, and restoration in 1861 after her marriage he described her as 'of doubtful character'. He displayed a degree of cynicism about the repentance of some of the restored members, particularly the women, saying of Mary David 'I was not

⁵³ It is evident that Nonconformist discipline set its members aside from society at large, where, as Gillis noted, 'there was little shame attached to premarital pregnancy' (J. R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (Oxford, 1985), p.180).

particularly satisfied by her – tendency towards hypocrisy and dishonesty’, and of Elizabeth Davies ‘Desires to live religiously but I doubt her’.⁵⁴

Nonconformist discipline applied only to members, not to the larger group of people who regularly attended services, known as ‘hearers’. Clive Field, in estimating numbers of Nonconformists in the long eighteenth century, suggests that the multiplier between members and hearers was between 3 and 4.⁵⁵ Thus even when church attendance in Wales was overwhelmingly Nonconformist, as demonstrated by the 1851 Religious census, chapel discipline applied only to a minority of Welsh people. Moreover not everyone was impressed by the nonconformists’ apparently strict code. The Calvinistic Methodists aroused particularly fierce criticism; in the words of John Evans they were ‘the Nurseries of Fornication, Adultery, and all kinds of Lewdness’, an assertion which probably owed much to the youth of the members in the early years of the societies, and the preponderance of young women.⁵⁶ Lewis Morris, the eighteenth-century poet and scholar, and another critic of the Methodists, mocked their leaders as ‘seducers who encouraged carnal lusts by luring young wenches to nocturnal meetings, and the wenches as ‘Lambs of the Lord ... willing to play. ... I give you leave to play, my Lovely Lambs ... But whatever you do Doe in the Dark, that our enemies may not triumph over us’.⁵⁷ A century later, similar allegations about the influence of Nonconformist activities on the sexual behaviour of young people were made in the evidence to the 1847 Reports on the State of Education in Wales. Typical was the contribution of David Owen of Llandovery, editor of *Yr Haul*, described by the Commissioners as ‘a person beyond most others, practically acquainted with the Welsh peasantry’, who claimed that ‘at Revivals, when such meetings occur, a great stimulus and opportunity for immorality is given; the parties attending them are under strong excitement, and often do not separate till a late hour. ... Something of

⁵⁴ P. Ll. Morris, ‘Morality and the Nonconformists: A local study of Hebron, Carmarthenshire’, *Dyfed Family History Society Journal*, Dec 1992, pp. 188-193.

⁵⁵ Field, ‘Counting Religion’, pp. 702-6.

⁵⁶ J. Evans, *Some Account of the Welsh Charity Schools and the Rise and Progress of Methodism in Wales*, (London, 1752) p. 79 (quoted in White, ‘The world, the flesh and the devil’, p. 49). Evans was a Carmarthenshire Anglican cleric noted for his diatribes against Methodists.

⁵⁷ G. H. Jenkins, ‘Lewis Morris: The fat man of Cardiganshire’, *Journal of the Ceredigion Historical Society* (2002), p. 7, quoting from NLW MS 67A, p. 60.

the same results accompany the common prayer-meetings'.⁵⁸ Though Lewis Morris was an intellectual who despised Methodists for what he saw as their hypocrisy and cant, many of their other critics were motivated more by the petty politics of denominational rivalry, and their allegations of youthful immorality were often exaggerated, or merely hearsay, intended to undermine them. Nevertheless, Methodists themselves were well aware of the dangers; William Williams Pantycelyn (one of the founders of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism) described his members as 'A company of vigorous, manly youths, a crowd of vivacious, energetic girls, people who for the most part are easy prey for Satan to work on their carnal affections and to entice them to the pleasures of flesh and blood'.⁵⁹

So far in this chapter we have examined formal and organised attempts at the correction of extra-marital sexual behaviour, through the disciplinary processes of church and chapel. Alongside these went more informal methods through which the community expressed its disapproval, for instance through gossip and shaming rituals such as the *ceffyl pren* ('rough music'). During the nineteenth century the rise of local newspapers and religious journals not only provided an outlet for moralists to denounce sexual misdemeanours, but also a forum for public shame through the reporting of cases coming before courts, particularly in respect of affiliation. The next section examines attitudes towards sexual behaviour expressed or implied in printed sources in the nineteenth century.

Attitudes towards sexual behaviour in print

Newspaper publishing came late to Wales: the first to appear was the *Cambrian* (1804), mainly in English and based in Swansea, with the first religious journal the Baptist Welsh-language *Seren Gomer* (1814), which aimed to serve the whole of Wales. However the earliest relevant publication found for the study area came not from this source, but unusually was an English-language pamphlet published at Carmarthen following an execution for murder in 1817. Rees Thomas Rees of Llangadog, forbidden to marry his pregnant girlfriend Elizabeth Jones by her

⁵⁸ Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales, London PP (1847) xxvii, I, p. 237 (henceforth 1847 Reports). *Yr Haul* supported the Church of England. Owen had become, in turn, a Baptist and an Independent, but by 1847 had returned to the established church.

⁵⁹ White, 'The world, the flesh and the devil', p. 50.

father, provided her with an abortifacient which unfortunately killed her. The case was widely reported in the local and London press, and 10,000 people were said to have attended the hanging.⁶⁰ The anonymous author of the pamphlet blamed the practice of 'midnight courtship' for the tragedy, and advised parents that:

It would be easy for heads of families, by practising their power, to put a stop to it. An hour or two, before bed time, would be sufficient for young people to converse with each other; and then let the master of the house see that they separate, and the door be locked.⁶¹

The rational and practical tone of this advice to parents contrasts with the several Welsh language ballads published on the same topic, which tended to focus on sin and damnation.⁶² A clue to the identity of the author comes from his concern for the reputation of the man's family; he may have been Rees's family doctor Joseph Yeomans, who attempted to treat Elizabeth after she had taken the abortifacient which later killed her. Yeomans may not have been sufficiently fluent to write in Welsh, but the likely consequence was that he failed to reach his intended audience.

Rees's trial and execution may have also provided the inspiration for an article published in the following year in the religious periodical, *Seren Gomer*, entitled '*Caru wedi pryd cysgu*' (courting after bedtime).⁶³ The author, who took the pen-name 'Llewelyn', seems to have had Rees in mind when he referred to 'those who were likely to be of great service in the church of God ... who ended their career on the tree of suffering' (Rees was a lay preacher). He claimed that 'wantonness and foul adultery' (*anlladrwydd a'r godineb aflan*) was thriving, and called on 'ministers of every denomination to unite in the task of removing this disgrace from Wales' (*dylai crefyddwyr o bob enw gyduno yn y gorchwyl o sumyd y gwarth hwn o Gymro*). He condemned those who 'argue confidently for the innocence of courting through the night - two or three nights a week – and this for years, in bed!' (*rhai yn dadleu yn öon dros ddiniweidrywydd caru trwy'r nos – dwy neu dair nos yn yr wythnos – a hyny dros y flyneddau, yn y gwely!*). The claim made by 'Llewelyn', that Welsh courting

⁶⁰ *Times*, 23 April 1817; *Cambrian*, 26 April 1817.

⁶¹ Carmarthen Public Library, *A Brief And Authentic Narrative Of That Unfortunate Young Man Rees Thos. Rees, Of Llangadock In the county of Carmarthen Who Was Executed In Carmarthen On Saturday the 19th of April 1817*. Anon. Published by Evan Jones, Carmarthen (undated).

⁶² Five ballads on the topic are in the collection of the National Library of Wales.

⁶³ 'Llewelyn', '*Caru wedi pryd cysgu*', *Seren Gomer*, 21 May 1818, pp. 136-9.

customs were not just a matter of personal morality, but brought shame to the wider community, ‘a disgrace to any civilised nation under heaven’ (*yn warth i un genedl wareiddiedig dan y nef*) was echoed in later denominational literature; thus in 1834 *Y Dysgedydd* (a journal of the Welsh Independents) asked:

Yn mha le, yn mha wlad y mae llanciau a merched yn cyfarfod â'u gilydd yn y taflodau gwair, yn yr ysguboriau, i gael myned i le digon dirgel, a digon pell o glyw dynion, i gyflawni eu haflendid, i genedlu bastarddiaid, i dynu gwarth ar eu penau eu hunain, ar eu perthynasau, ar yr ardal y maent yn byw, ... ac ar genedl y perthynant iddi.⁶⁴

In which place, in which country, do lads and lasses meet together in the hay lofts, in the barns, and go to secret places, far away, out of men's hearing, to fulfil their illicit love, to conceive bastards, to bring disgrace upon themselves, upon their relatives, upon the area in which they live, ... and upon the nation to which they belong.

‘Llewelyn’ implied that courting at night was confined to rural society; in his view, a girl known to keep company with a man after bed-time in his home town (Swansea) would lose her character immediately, and could expect excommunication from chapel. He also claimed that the areas where night-time courtship was common were those where preaching had become more popular. He proposed a number of actions to discourage the custom, calling for ministers to preach against courting at night and in bed, for virtuous young people to lead by example, and for the formation of a society to prepare a booklet to be distributed throughout the areas where bundling was popular.⁶⁵ In 1840, Rev. William Jones of Anglesey brought the subject to a potentially wider audience through his prize *Essay on the Character of the Welsh as a Nation*, written in English and submitted to the Liverpool Eisteddfod. In his view, ‘...instances in which parties preparing for marriage forestall the privileges of that sacred state are shamefully numerous.’ He stated explicitly what other writers had implied, namely that one reason for night courtship was to avoid the banter that couples would receive if their relationship were publicly known; another was that couples found it easier to counter parental

⁶⁴ *Y Dysgedydd*, 1834, p. 211.

⁶⁵ *Seren Gomer*, 1818, p. 136. A comparison of the numbers of sexual offences at Ebenezer Chapel, Swansea in Table 6.6, with those for the rural chapels shown there would seem to support Llewellyn's assertion that night-time courting, and the subsequent pregnancies, were much less common in the former.

opposition to a match if the girl was pregnant. Jones' prescription, like that of the anonymous pamphleteer of Rees Thomas Rees, was that parents and employers should make 'more prudent regulations in every house... to bar night visitors, and ensure that couples are able to court ...at proper hours, and in proper places'.⁶⁶ However there is little evidence that these messages were taken up with any great enthusiasm. Although there were a number of local campaigns, for example at Dolgellau in 1840, where the young people were asked to sign a pledge not to court in bed, and at Henllan, Llandysul, in 1850, where a competition was launched for a series of essays on 'The Evil of Unchastity', Catrin Stevens suggests that as initiatives from their elders, these had little influence on the activities of courting couples.⁶⁷ Even where heads of households were strongly opposed to night courting, they had difficulty in preventing it, particularly where servants were concerned, as several of the clergy giving evidence to the 1847 Commission reported.⁶⁸ As an article in the *Illustrated Police News* shows (Figure 6.6), employers could encounter problems in the courts when they attempted to take action against intruders in search of amorous adventures.⁶⁹

In 1870, Mr Charles Jeffreys, of Gwynfryn, near Aberystwyth, was sued by Evan Williams and Evan Jenkins, farm servants, for injuries received in a violent assault by Jeffreys when he found the two of them on his premises, courting a couple of his servants in bed. The two young men sued Jeffreys for damages in the county court; the judge, while noting 'the disgraceful custom of the country' and the 'gross misconduct of the plaintiff(s) in trespassing', nevertheless advised the jury that the 'serious nature of the assaults entitled the plaintiffs to damages, which they awarded at £15 each'.⁷⁰ In spite of the opposition to traditional Welsh courting customs during the second half of the nineteenth century, courting through the night remained popular in rural areas and did not disappear completely until well

⁶⁶ W. Jones. *Essay on the Character of the Welsh as a Nation in the Present Age* (Caernarfon, 1841), p. 130-1. The dangers of using pregnancy to overcome parental opposition are well illustrated by the example of Rees Thomas Rees and Elizabeth Jones discussed earlier.

⁶⁷ C. Stevens, *Welsh Courting Customs* (Llandysul, 1993), p.104-5; also Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, p. 121.

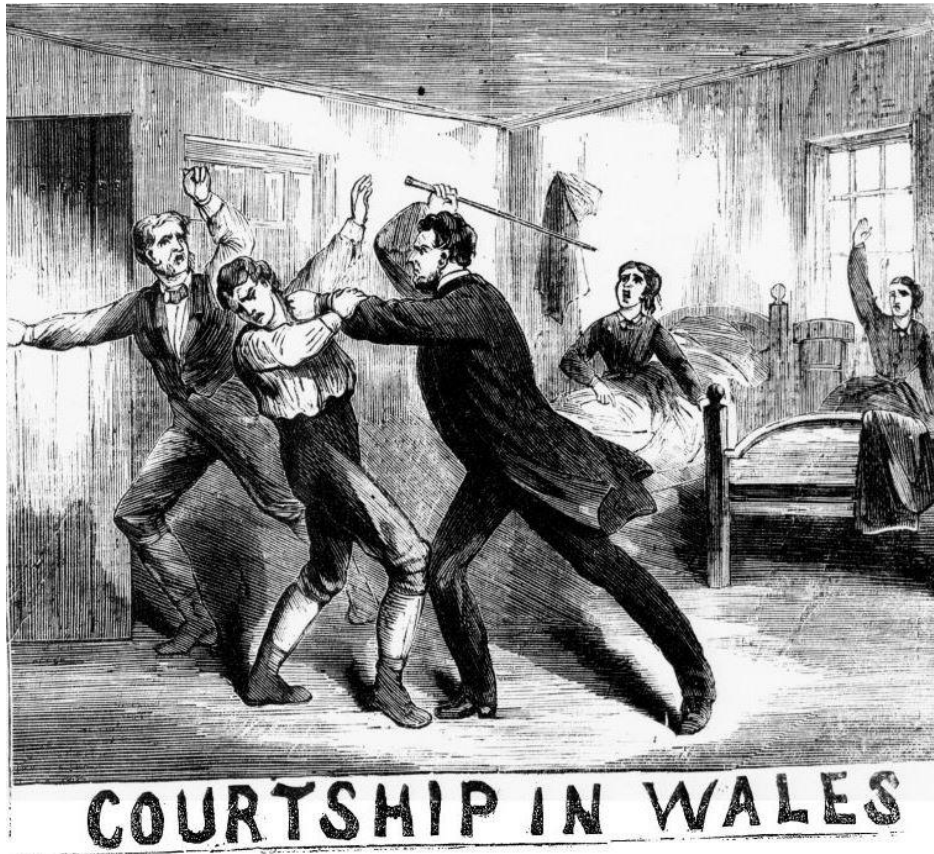
⁶⁸ 1847 Reports, for example vol. 1, Appendix p. 254 and vol. 3 p. 534

⁶⁹ The British Library, *Illustrated Police News*, 16 June 1870, p.1. A more factual account of the case can be found in the *Cambrian News* of a similar date.

⁷⁰ See Chapter 2 for references to twentieth-century courtship in rural Wales.

into the twentieth. The campaign against the evils of alcoholic drink proved to be a much more popular issue for harnessing the energies of Welsh moral reformers.

Figure 6.6 'Courtship in Wales', *Illustrated Police News*, 16 June 1870.



Sourced from the British Library

Though explicit campaigns against Welsh courting customs do not seem to have been taken up widely, nevertheless there seems to have been a change in popular attitudes towards mothers of illegitimate children in Wales in the second half of the nineteenth century. To some extent this change simply reflected developments taking place elsewhere in nineteenth-century Britain, particularly the suppression of the sexuality of 'respectable' woman, but was given greater impetus in Wales by Nonconformist reaction to the 1847 Reports.⁷¹ According to Jane Aaron, the leaders of Welsh Nonconformity sought to 'establish beyond all possibility of doubt the purity of their womanfolk. Woman's sexual behaviour was to be heavily policed ... for the rest of the century, and well into the twentieth.'⁷² The ethos of the New Poor Law, in placing the responsibility for an illegitimate child

⁷¹ Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, p. 238

⁷² J. Aaron, 'Gender and Colonisation' in J. Aaron, T. Race, S. Betts and M. Vincentelli, (eds.) *Our Sisters' Land*, (Cardiff, 1994), p. 187.

on its mother, though overwhelming rejected in south Wales in the decade or so after the law was changed, eventually came to influence popular ideas, through the concept of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. The old poor law had operated within a largely rural society, on the scale of the parish, with its dense networks binding parishioners together, and ensuring some sympathy and support for unmarried mothers. By the middle of the nineteenth century structural changes had created new urban, industrial, towns across south Wales peopled largely by migration, with social structures based to a great extent on the solidarity of the workplace, and the fellowship of the chapel. Mothers of illegitimate children were excluded from the first by gender, and from the second by their situation.

Evidence of changing attitudes can be found in newspaper reports of affiliation cases, and these reports in turn were responsible for reinforcing the changes. Though initially most reports were confined to an outline of the case, the requirement for a plaintiff to provide details of the relationship to support her case, and the frequent representation of a defendant by a solicitor whose chief strategy was to undermine her reputation, led in time to the routine reporting of anything likely to amuse, titillate or shock the reader. The *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, *Glamorgan, Monmouth, and Brecon Gazette*, for example, printed a minimum of information about affiliation cases in the 1840s but by the end of the 1850s was routinely carrying longer articles.⁷³ These reports often portrayed stereotypes, such as 'deserving' women – those led astray by a suitor – and the undeserving, including women thought to be intent on tricking a man into marriage, or those 'fallen' women with more than one illegitimate child, often considered to be on the edge of prostitution.⁷⁴ The tenor of the reports tends to distance the reader from both the plaintiff and defendant, and to evoke a feeling of moral and social superiority. Davies, commenting on the frequency with which the plaintiff claimed

⁷³ Newspapers occasionally saved their readers' blushes; 'the full evidence cannot be published' said the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian* of a case reported on 24 December 1869, but a reader complained to the editor about the reporting of another affiliation case 'where the details are brought so prominently forward that parents could scarcely allow it to remain on the table, fearing that it would catch the eyes of their children' (20 June 1868).

⁷⁴ There was nothing new about mothers of illegitimate children being obliged to present 'a good character', as Samantha Williams describes in '“A good character for virtue, sobriety, and honesty”: unmarried mothers' petitions to the London Foundling Hospital and the rhetoric of need in the early nineteenth century', in Levene *et al.* (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 87. But it does not seem to have been a feature of the old poor law system of affiliation.

that she was seduced after a promise of marriage, suggested that 'it was as if the promise pulled back a curtain in the girl's mind and led to thoughts of marriage. ... In the man's mind, after the promise was uttered, there was probably just one all-consuming thought'.⁷⁵ Although this stereotype may accurately describe some cases, it fails to put them within the context of the courtship conventions of the period, in which, as the chaplain to the Bishop of Bangor said, 'fornication ... is ... the regular conventional process towards marriage'.⁷⁶ It is evident from some reports that among the spectators in court were many who had attended principally for entertainment.⁷⁷ For many plaintiffs and defendants however, the exposure of their private lives in open court, repeated in the local newspaper, might have been just as shaming as earlier rituals of public penance in church, or contemporary experiences of expulsion from a Nonconformist congregation.

Conclusions

During the eighteenth century the established church abandoned its courts as a means of controlling extra-marital sexual relations, while at the same time small communities across Wales joined religious movements which demanded much greater discipline from their members. By the mid nineteenth century these minorities had grown so large that they had come to represent the dominant moral force in Welsh life, though they never had a complete majority of the people. At the same time, the role of women whose extra-marital relations came into the public arena through legal action changed from merely an accessory in the consistory court of the 1660s to the main focus of nineteenth century social control, whether through the bastardy clauses of the New Poor Law, or the informal standards set in the press.

In this review of the ways in which society policed sexual transgression, from the Restoration to the mid nineteenth century, the implicit question is whether policing of any kind affected the incidence of extramarital sexual relations.

⁷⁵ R. Davies, *Hope and Heartbreak*, p. 284.

⁷⁶ 1847 Reports, Vol. III, p. 335.

⁷⁷ M. G. R. Morris, *Romilly's visits to Wales, 1829-1854* (Llandysul 1998) p. 89. Romilly describes the Carmarthen court packed with over 200 people listening to the details of 'an absurd trial about sitting up and breach of promise'.

It is true that the extraordinary rise in illegitimacy ratios in south Wales during the eighteenth century went alongside a decline in prosecution for sexual offences by the ecclesiastical courts, but it is unclear whether there was a direct relationship between these two trends. And if there was a relationship, which was cause and which effect? Did a declining interest on the part of the courts and churchwardens encourage courting couples to more or earlier sexual experiences, or did a greater tendency on the part of couples to ignore the ecclesiastical courts tend to discourage the courts from bringing further actions? In Chapter 3 it was suggested that the decline in illegitimacy ratios in south Wales at the beginning of the nineteenth century might owe something to the influence of the growing numbers of Nonconformists on the behaviour of courting couples, for instance in discouraging sexual relations before marriage, or encouraging marriage when a pregnancy occurred. Evidently many Nonconformist couples were reluctant to abandon traditional courtship practices, but might well have been persuaded by church discipline to marry once a pregnancy occurred. It may be inferred that the impact of growing Nonconformity was not so much on the traditional mode of courtship, but upon its outcome.

Chapter 7 **Courtship, Marriage and Community**

In the preceding chapters we looked at illegitimacy in the context of the specific data sources used in each chapter, referring in passing to the relation between illegitimacy and prevailing customs of courtship and marriage. Chapter 3 showed that there were very different rates of illegitimacy in different districts, and Chapter 5 refined the distinction between these districts and demonstrated that the differences extended to nuptiality and age at marriage, as well as to types of community and cultural differences. The present chapter investigates courtship and marriage practices, using material from a wide range of other sources, including diaries, consistory court papers, folklore collections and social research.

In Chapter 5 we arrived at a division of the region into four types of community. The focus in this chapter is on the evidence of courtship and marriage relating to Welsh-speaking rural communities, where body of evidence is greatest and the contrast with customs prevailing in England is strongest. The discussion considers those aspects of courtship and marriage which relate most closely to illegitimacy, including the conduct and control of courtship, the evidence for informal marriage and cohabitation, and the transition to marriage. Though the subject of how courtship and marriage developed in the newly industrialising communities, which were distinctively Welsh in character, is both interesting and relevant, it requires a depth of study which puts it beyond the scope of the current work.

The chapter looks first at how courtships were conducted during the eighteenth century, using material found in consistory court records. Courtship in the nineteenth century is examined through the prism of three diaries, covering the 1820s to the 1860s. We then review marriage, including irregular and informal unions and clandestine marriages, and finally discuss differences between courtship and marriage customs in England and Wales.

Courtship

Descriptions of courtship customs in Wales can be found in accounts written by English travellers from the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, parish histories written in the nineteenth century, and material collected by antiquarians and folklorists, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Few if any of these give direct accounts of individual experiences. No personal narratives of the courtship of ordinary people have been found, in diaries, letters, or autobiographies, before the early nineteenth century, in contrast with the collection explored by Griffin, who used over 350 narratives dating from between 1760 and 1900.¹ However some evidence relating to the eighteenth century can be seen in examples of contested marriages heard in the consistory courts in the period 1719-56. Details of these cases, and three examples of diaries recorded in the nineteenth century, are to be found in Appendix E.

We look first at the implications for courtship and marriage in the cases which came before the consistory courts in south Wales. The uncertainty about what constituted a valid marriage before the passing of Hardwicke's Marriage Act gave rise to several kinds of action in the church courts, some designed to determine whether a pre-contract existed, or whether a couple were validly married, others to bring together married couples who were not cohabiting, or to punish those who had contracted clandestine marriages.² All of these kinds of action may provide evidence about how courtship was conducted, and how marriage was viewed by the community. There were 37 such cases relating to Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan in the consistory courts at Llandaff and at the archdeaconry of Carmarthen between 1681 and 1753. Some, such as those which sought to punish unmarried cohabiting couples, or anyone involved in a clandestine marriage, were corrective prosecutions; others were instigated by individuals.

¹ E. Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (London 2013).

² R. Probert, in *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: a Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2009) and *The Changing Legal Regulation of Cohabitation: From Fornicators to Family, 1600-2010* (Cambridge, 2012), has challenged widespread assumptions about informal marriage and cohabitation.

While actions in the church courts could give rise to substantial costs, and thus were unlikely to be undertaken by the poorest members of the community, the inclusion of several yeomen and a tucker indicates that the range of people who undertook such actions went beyond the gentry.

The evidence from these consistory court cases suggests that, in common with their counterparts in England, unmarried women in south Wales had a good deal of freedom to go where they pleased, with whomsoever they pleased, though for the many young women who were in service, there were limits to this freedom.³ Elizabeth Lewis of Llangadog went to a dance on Easter Monday 1744 with Morgan Beynon, who was then courting her, and accompanied him to the house of John Thomas William, victualler, although she was aware that her uncle, with whom she lived, did not approve of the relationship. Beynon later claimed that they had been married that night by a local curate, in William's house, though Elizabeth disputed this, saying that she had been tricked into giving her consent. At the time of the supposed marriage Beynon was in service and thus not in a position to provide a home for Elizabeth; when the home was ready she refused to join him and he brought a case for restitution of conjugal rights. In a similar case from 1750, where John Rees sought to enforce his conjugal rights against Mary William, his servant Frances Badger related how John and Mary often dined alone at John's house in Llangennech and stayed together late. It also seems that courting couples were quite open in their intimacies when among friends. Robert Lewis gave evidence that he had seen John and Mary in bed together at Mary's father's house, and Samuel David, a shopkeeper, said that he had often seen them in bed together at his own house. Similarly Elizabeth Love, from a respectable Penmark family, seems to have had considerable freedom to meet Stephen Frederick Remy, though in her case her conduct gave rise to an action for incontinency.⁴ It might be thought that women from gentry families would be subject to closer control, but this was not the case for Anne Rice, the daughter of Mr Woodford Rice of Abergwili, who was frequently at the Carmarthen lodgings of her suitor Edward Vaughan Mansel in and around 1749, according to Mansel's landlord Lewis Phillips, even though both

³ See for instance J. R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (Oxford, 1985), p. 112

⁴ See Chapter 6 for details of this case.

were minors at the time. In 1756, Anne alleged that the couple had been married clandestinely, and brought a case of restitution of conjugal rights, while Edward, by then a baronet, sued for jactitation of marriage.

Witnesses who gave evidence to confirm the existence of a courtship relationship based this mainly on the nature of the couple's behaviour towards each other. Robert Lewis said of John Rees and Mary William that 'he never saw two persons so fond', and several couples were described as being seen in 'naked bed' together. In contrast with the importance of gift-giving in the formation of marriage in Tudor England, gifts were mentioned only once as an indicator of courtship. In a Glamorgan case of defamation brought by Susannah Meyrick of Pendoylan against her former suitor Thomas Howell after their relationship had broken down, his friend David John recounted how in winter 1718/9 Thomas had sent him to Susanna with a gift of a bag of walnuts, and she in return had sent 'a large fair apple'.

In view of the freedom which young people had to make their own choices of partner, and to conduct their courtship free from supervision, it is perhaps surprising that the levels of illegitimacy were relatively low in the first half of the eighteenth century. Griffin suggested that community disapproval was a powerful deterrent during this period, 'encouraging young men and women to channel their sexual desires in ways that ensured a conception did not take place'. Men were particularly concerned to avoid damage to their reputation, which might have serious consequences for both their marriage prospects and business activities. For women the consequences were yet more serious, and many preferred to have the support of a reluctant husband than none at all.⁵

The diary and autobiographical evidence for courtship in south Wales is somewhat late into the period under consideration, but for the nineteenth century some insight into the progress of a courtship can be found in the diary of David Davies, a book-binder of Treboeth, a village on the margins of the coal-mining and copper-smelting area east of Swansea, who courted Hannah Rees, the daughter of a

⁵ E. Griffin, 'Sex, illegitimacy and social change in industrialising Britain' *Social History* (2013), pp. 149-151.

tenant farmer, over the years 1821-23.⁶ Davies was an enthusiastic member of his local Independent chapel, and occasional preacher; in later life he became a Baptist minister. His account of his courtship, as we will see, parallels several descriptions of courtship customs at the end of the century. The early diary entries describe social events in the tavern, after chapel meetings, and at Llangyfelach fair. On several occasions while David was in company with Hannah, competitors for her favours would attempt to draw her away. The interaction between the sexes which he describes is similar to that found in the Carmarthenshire parishes of Penboyr and Llangeler at the end of the nineteenth century, described as 'fetching and drawing':

Once the girl had sat down with some chosen youth, someone else would 'send to fetch' her and 'draw' her in an attractive way to him. Then she would be 'fetched' back again or someone else might draw her, and thus on the girl would go from one lover to a new one, receiving cakes from each one to place in her handkerchief, until it was time to go home.⁷

This use of intermediaries to fetch a girl is also evident in the diaries. In view of the amount of alcohol drunk on these occasions, it is not surprising that competition for a popular girl sometimes degenerated into a brawl. 'Pelagius', a correspondent of *Seren Gomer*, was one of the many moralists who took a condemnatory view of such events:

Pulling, poking and dragging each other across chairs, tables and beds; spilling beer, falling over. And pushing each other like wild animals without reason in them ... the girls stay in this ungodly environment until the end to defend their lovers ... and to keep watch in case another steals them from them ... there is little faithfulness in Welsh courtship.⁸

In the popular view, a certain amount of rough horseplay between young people of the opposite sex was normal, even expected; as Jill Barber commented in the context of nineteenth-century Cardiganshire, 'men saw conquest and resistance as part of normal sexual relations'.⁹ Similar customs were recorded by David

⁶ University of Swansea, Richard Burton Archives, LAC/114/4-5.

⁷ C. Stevens, *Welsh Courting Customs* (Llandysul, 1993) p. 39-40, translated from D. E. Jones, *Hanes Plwyf Llangeler a Phenboyr* (A history of the parishes of Llangeler and Penboyr) (Llandysul, 1899). Similar practices are recorded for Llandysul, also in the Teifi valley, and in the Vale of Glamorgan.

⁸ R. Davies, *Hope and Heartbreak: A Social History of Wales and the Welsh, 1776-1871* (Cardiff, 2005), p. 276, translated from the original in *Seren Gomer* (1832), p. 322.

⁹ J. Barber, ' "Stolen Goods": the sexual harassment of female servants in west Wales during the nineteenth century', *Rural History* (1993), p. 130. Similar observations were made by Reay in the

Jenkins for south Cardiganshire in the late nineteenth century, describing an 'institutionalised play' in which women used a friend as an intermediary to ask a potential partner whether he was willing to pair up with her. Here a woman on first appearing in public with her suitor was liable to be subjected to enticing away by local youths, but this 'ceased after she had remained faithful to him on a few occasions'.¹⁰ The observation by David Davies that Hannah remained open to enticing, however innocent, during the early days of their courtship, caused friction between them which led to temporary ruptures in the relationship.

A further source of tension between David and Hannah is evident in David's accounts of his occasional attempts to increase the physical intimacy of their relationship. The diary records not disappointment, nor resentment, at her rejection of him, but admiration of her chastity; on one occasion he wrote 'went more rude this night in her company than ever but now I can say that my well beloved and dear Hannah is a modest and as good a girl as any in the world for her rebuking me for being so bad plainly shows her goodness in all respects.'¹¹ There is a double standard at work here; David regarded his forwardness as natural and unblameworthy (in spite of his religious beliefs), but seemingly would have been disappointed in Hannah had she acquiesced at that stage in the relationship. Later, after a marriage had been agreed, it would seem that David's religious scruples did not prevent intercourse, which probably occurred while spending the night together at Hannah's house. When the marriage was delayed and it became clear to the chapel elders that Hannah's pregnancy pre-dated her marriage, the couple were expelled, no weight being given to David's view, based on Biblical precedent, that

context of nineteenth-century Kent (B. Reay, *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800-1930* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 203-4. Davies considered that male violence within courtship was still customary at the end of the nineteenth century (A. Davies, 'Youth, violence, and courtship in late-Victorian Birmingham: The case of James Harper and Emily Pimm', *History of the Family* (2006) p. 119).

¹⁰ D. Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community in South-West Wales at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 1971), p. 128. The villages of South Cardiganshire, where his research was carried out, are not far from the Carmarthenshire parishes to which Stevens referred.

¹¹ University of Swansea, Richard Burton Archives, LAC/114/4. It is unclear whether Davies' argument owed anything to contemporary attempts in Parliament to reform the marriage laws, instigated by the Unitarians (Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, pp. 332-3. Davies was not a Unitarian, but his family home was in the Cardiganshire Unitarian 'black spot'.

vows had been exchanged and no 'ffeurad diffaith anfad (wicked wastrel priest)' was necessary to make a valid marriage.¹²

Although David was known to Hannah's family before he began to court her, through communal events such as helping with the harvest on her father's farm, and as part of the same congregation, his role as her suitor seems not to have been acknowledged by her parents until marriage was in prospect, though the relationship was evidently common knowledge. On one occasion an accidental meeting between David and his future father-in-law in the latter's barn found both reserved and formal. However once a marriage had been agreed, David socialised quite freely with her parents: 'went [with Hannah] to Llangyfelach to meet my mother in law – treated her a little and made an excellent fair'.¹³ The pretence between a young woman and her family that she had no regular suitor seems to have been common in Welsh courtships of this period, perhaps to avoid families having to make their views about a match known prematurely.¹⁴ There is no evidence that Hannah's family exerted any control over her social activities, except when she was needed at home, though they might have acted differently had they objected to David. There was no parent nearby for David to answer to, but his employer, with whom he lived, and who was also his minister, made plain his disapproval of David's late hours courting and drinking, though these were evidently faults to be corrected rather than dismissible offences.¹⁵ The evidence from David's diary is that he and his friends, male and female, experienced little control over whom they chose as partners in courtship.

The similarity between courtship customs in the early nineteenth century community of Treboeth and those described in David Jenkins' study of the agricultural community in south Cardiganshire at the turn of the twentieth century

¹² Brynley F. Roberts, 'Davies y Binder', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1985), p. 215.

¹³ NLW MS 22106A, 1 March, 1823.

¹⁴ This custom prevailed in rural Wales well into the twentieth century; even in the 1930s courtship was 'a secret to be concealed from both parents and neighbours as long as possible' (A. Rees, *Life in a Welsh Countryside: A Social Study of Llanfihangel yng Ngwynfa* (Cardiff, 1996), p. 85).

¹⁵ David Davies's employer reprimanded him on several occasions for his late return from an evening's courting, and, after David had become a preacher, had him censured by the chapel for courting on a Sunday. David's reaction to reprimands was generally to avoid being caught in future, though he does seem to have restrained his Sunday courtship.

indicates how little customary practices had changed among the rural community of Cardiganshire.¹⁶ Even in rural Glamorgan, customs were slow to change. In a breach of promise case the solicitor appearing for the defendant, a Caerphilly farmer, claimed that the plaintiff must have known that he had no intention of marriage, since

‘The plaintiff had the defendant—not in her father's house as her accepted suitor, but in highways and byeways, in public-houses, malt-houses; and the circumstances of the alleged courtship were not such as would justify the plaintiff in coming there to seek redress in the character of a deeply injured person.’¹⁷

The court gave no weight to the argument that a farmer would be expected to employ more refined methods of courtship had he intended marriage, and found for the plaintiff. Nevertheless, by the end of the nineteenth century parents and employers seem to have exercised a greater degree of control over young women's movements, so that they were rarely permitted to be absent from home except on a specific mission, and the opportunities for young people to meet were largely restricted to formal occasions, such as chapel activities, ‘biddings’ or the occasional fair.¹⁸

The courtship of David Davies and Hannah Rees followed a traditional pattern which in its essential features was to persist among communities in south Wales until the second half of the twentieth century, though the cinema and dance hall came to replace chapel-based activities. But of course not all sexual relationships occurred within the framework of courtship. Many sexual encounters were opportunistic, with varying degrees of consent between the parties involved. The practice of *caru yn y gwely* was not restricted to established courting couples but was also a means to bring together young people (in particular servants) who had very little leisure time but nevertheless wanted the opportunity to have relationships with the opposite sex. In the example quoted in Chapter 6, where two men obtained damages for assault from a householder, sustained when he

¹⁶ Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community*, pp. 118-139. See Chapter 2 for further information.

¹⁷ *Cardiff & Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth, and Brecon Gazette*, 24 Jul 1852.

¹⁸ Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community*, p. 125. Frost and Gillis argue for a similar re-assertion of parental control in England (see G. Frost, *Promises Broken: Courtship, Class, and Gender in Victorian England*, p. 139, J. R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, pp.256-8. A ‘bidding’ (discussed later in the chapter) also called a ‘bride-ale’ or Scotch Wedding’ in England, was an event organised by a betrothed or recently-married couple to which family and friends brought money and gifts.

discovered them in the bedroom of the housemaid and parlour maid, the couples had known each other a month and a fortnight respectively. According to Stevens, 'some hopeful lovers roamed from one farm to another, trying to curry a friend to "have a bit of fun" ' with another young woman of the house, as this letter from James Evans to Mary Williams indicates:

tell the girl that is with you that i am comming up with a chap with me next time an you can tell her that he is a good one to rub a bit on the leg an perhaps on something elch for a bit of fun.¹⁹

Master-servant relationships were another example of relationships based on opportunity, rather than conventional courtship, illustrated by two of the case studies, taken from the diaries of Thomas Jenkins and Rees Thomas. Rees Thomas's diary, which covers 1860-62, mentions encounters with three of his servants, one of which began on the day that the young woman arrived.²⁰ Though the diary frequently describes the anguish which his 'failings' caused him, there is no hint of any regret for the harm which he might have inflicted on the women involved, even when one of them became pregnant. Indeed there are few clues in either man's diaries to how the servants involved viewed the relationships. At the beginning of his diary, the behaviour of Rees's servants suggested tension between the two of them and their master, but when the time came for them and their successors to leave, several seemed genuinely to regret their departure. One was even prepared to encourage the chance of a pregnancy, in the hope, as Rees thought, of getting an allowance from him; though if he was correct about her actions, her objective may have been marriage.

Similarly Thomas Jenkins recorded sexual relationships with three of his women servants, all of which resulted in pregnancies, though unusually he married two of them.²¹ Again, his diary does not record his feelings about these relationships. The marriage to his first wife Ann Evans in 1839 took place three years after the birth of their illegitimate child, and his comment on his decision to marry appears to have been entirely based on practical considerations: 'Having now

¹⁹ Stevens, *Welsh Courting Customs*, p. 60-1, quoting a letter written in Pembrokeshire in 1890.

²⁰ S. Dubé, *My Failings and Imperfections: The Diary of Rees Thomas of Dol-Llan, 1860-1862*, (Carmarthen, 2011).

²¹ Thomas Jenkins, *The Diary of Thomas Jenkins of Llandeilo (1826-1870)*, D. C. Jenkins (ed.), (Facsimile reprint 2010).

some prospect of being able to maintain a wife, and having determined that that the wife should be Ann, I got the banns published this morning in Betws Lleucu Church for the first time. Paid 1/-'.²² The match may have been longer in the making than Thomas's laconic turn of phrase suggests. In the three years before the marriage, the diary records outings with Ann and their daughter Mary, and journeys to Cardiganshire to visit her parents, events which are consistent with a decision about an eventual marriage having been taken somewhat earlier in the relationship, and negotiated between the two families. A few years after Ann's death in 1848, Thomas struck up a relationship with another servant, Ann Thomas; she fell pregnant late in 1853, and they were married a few months later. Again, there is no reference in the diary to any semblance of courtship. Thomas appears not to have looked for romantic love as a basis for these marriages, though he found it in the years between, in his relationship with Sarah Davies, a serious young woman with strong religious convictions who lived several miles from Llandeilo. Their intense but rather formal courtship, conducted through letters and occasional visits, was brought to an abrupt end by her death.

The experience of the women servants in the two households described here was not unusual. Women in service were particularly vulnerable, not only to the attentions of their masters and other male family members, but also to fellow servants.²³ Those in small households, or farm servants, often worked alone and were at risk from male members of the household or passers-by. Women were also at risk when male and female servants shared the same sleeping quarters, though at least by the mid-nineteenth century this practice seems to have been uncommon.²⁴ When women brought actions for rape or assault, the courts were very unlikely to convict their assailants. As Barber comments, the law of rape was essentially designed to protect men's property rights in their women, and in this

²² Jenkins, *The Diary of Thomas Jenkins*, p. 23.

²³ We saw in Chapter 3 that just under 10 per cent of illegitimate baptisms in the period 1813-40 were to fellow servants or master and servant.

²⁴ J. Barber, 'Stolen Goods', pp. 124-5. In some Carmarthenshire parishes the 1841 census distinguished between servants accommodated in the farmhouse and those in outhouses. The usual practice was to house male servants (and sometimes farmer's sons) in the stables or other outhouses and female servants in the farmhouse. No female servants were shown as sleeping in outhouses, and, where outhouse accommodation was separately distinguished, it was unusual to find servants of both sexes in the farmhouse.

context servants, or indeed any unmarried lower-class woman, were worth little.²⁵ Steedman describes the commonly-held view, expressed by Locke, that ‘the rent or lease of the servant’s time and energies ... become that of the master or mistress’, and though there were limits to this contract, it implied a degree of ownership which some masters were ready to abuse.²⁶ Society might have censured married men for deceiving their wives with their servants, but not for any force or coercion they might have used with those servants. However it would be a mistake to regard all sexual relationships between masters and servants as abusive; the social distance between them was often small, and when an unattached man engaged a young woman in service, both were aware of the possible consequences. Some women who had illegitimate children by their employers subsequently married them, as did two of Thomas Jenkins’ servants, and his second marriage is an example of a relatively common situation, in which a widower with young children married his servant.

In summary, the evidence presented above suggests that young couples in south Wales were generally free to follow their own wishes in a choice of partner during courtship, throughout most of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth century, though once marriage became a prospect, the interests of family and friends could not be ignored, and could sometimes disrupt the match. The custom of night courtship, very widely practiced in inland rural areas and persisting over a long period in spite of disapproval from pulpit and press, provided courting couples with the opportunity to explore their relationship in private, free from the teasing interventions of their contemporaries, but also gave plenty of opportunity for ‘accidents of courtship’. The low level of illegitimacy in the first half of the eighteenth century suggests that an unwanted child was so disadvantageous, both to the reputations of courting couples and to their economic futures, that in the vast majority of cases, both sexes regulated their sexual behaviour to avoid that risk. From the middle decades of the nineteenth century the influence of Nonconformity had a growing effect on courtship behaviour, encouraging some heads of households to limit the freedom of the young unmarried women for whom

²⁵ J. Barber, ‘Stolen Goods’, p.131.

²⁶ C. Steedman, *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 53.

they were responsible, though the evidence shows that many parents continued to allow their daughters to entertain suitors at night, and many servants were prepared to resist employers' attempts to restrict their night-time activities.²⁷

Marriage

Courtship, of course, was not an end in itself but a stage on the road to marriage. We now consider the evidence for marriage practice in south Wales, in the context of the various forms of marriage which historians have described for England. Gwenith Gwynn's writings about informal marriage and besom weddings have been influential in forming views about marriage in the eighteenth century in Wales and also England, whether cited directly or taken from other historians such as Gillis who have relied on his work. Howell, for instance, wrote 'Marriage ceremonies themselves [in eighteenth century Wales], as in other parts of Britain, were frequently informal, clandestine or irregular ... a state of affairs which persisted to some extent after Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753'.²⁸ However, as Probert has demonstrated, Gwynn's conclusions were based on mistaken interpretations of his evidence. After a thorough examination of his findings and of evidence cited by other historians in support of cohabitation and informal marriage she concluded that church marriage was the norm in England and Wales, and informal marriages were rare.²⁹ Clandestine marriages were thought by some to have been common in Wales; Roger L. Brown quoted reports in the early 1720s of 'a panel of strolling curates in South Wales, and some such there was also in North Wales, who for a crown, or at most for a guinea, would marry anyone under a hedge', though it is not clear whether this assertion was based on any firm evidence or was an informed guess based on the sorry state of the church in Wales at the time.³⁰ Apart from Gwynn's work, Probert did not consider Wales in any detail, so that it is worthwhile to assess here the evidence for cohabitation, clandestine marriages and informal marriages in south Wales. We start with informal marriage,

²⁷ As was David Davies, as we saw earlier.

²⁸ D. Howell, *The Rural Poor in Eighteenth-Century Wales* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 146-8.

²⁹ Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, pp. 84-8.

³⁰ R. L. Brown, 'Clandestine marriages in Wales', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1982), p. 78.

using the records of the church courts for the early modern period, and the earlier analyses of baptism and census records.

Cohabitation, irregular and informal marriage

Prosecutions for sexual irregularities in the church courts were usually framed in terms such as ‘fornication’, ‘adultery’ or ‘bastardy’, and frequently all three. Cases which explicitly mentioned cohabitation were rare, and none of the other cases of sexual irregularity before the south Wales’ diocesan courts contain evidence to suggest that the couple were living under the same roof. Just four couples were recorded as having been presented for cohabitation by Carmarthenshire parishes, in 1704, 1705 (two cases) and 1750, with nine in the Glamorgan parishes of the diocese of Llandaff, all during the period 1741-49. The earliest, from the apparently outraged churchwardens of Llanelly, presented Catherine Gwynne as ‘a lewd woman guilty of fornication and incontinency’, the clergyman Lewis Nicholls ‘for keeping of her company above a Twelve Month ... without giving his parishioners the Satisfaction that he is Married unto her’, and their cohabitation as being ‘Soe Scandalous and offensive to his parishioners that most ... have ... left the frequenting their parish church’. In the following year, the churchwardens of Llanwrda presented John David and Mary Rees, in rather more measured terms, for ‘cohabit[ing] as man and wife, who as far as we are informed were not married according to the law and they have a child born to them to whom also as we are informed they have not given Christian baptism’.³¹ Even allowing for missing records in Llandaff before 1711 the numbers of cohabitations in the consistory courts of Carmarthen and the Glamorgan parishes of Llandaff seem low. For instance Probert found 38 couples presented for cohabitation in the Carlisle church court between 1731 and 1740, in a population of around 49,000. Even after adjusting for the four known to have married clandestinely, this is somewhat higher than the nine found in the Glamorgan parishes of Llandaff in the period 1741-49, with a broadly similar population.³² The possibility that churchwardens in south Wales failed to present all but a few cases of cohabitation cannot be ignored. However the very small number of cases mentioned by the Glamorgan diarist

³¹ St Davids, Churchwardens’ Presentations, SD/CPD/25 1672-1719.

³² R. Probert, *The Changing Legal Regulation of Cohabitation: From Fornicators to Family, 1600-2010*, (Cambridge, 2012), p. 34.

William Thomas, writing during the period 1762-95, also suggests that cohabitation in this later period may have been unusual, since he took every opportunity to record other sexual transgressions of the people who appear in the pages of his diary, with numerous references to their mistresses and bastards.³³ It would seem that either cohabitation during the eighteenth century was rather rare, or that substantial numbers of parishes were prepared to turn a blind eye.

The antiquary Lewis Morris is sometimes quoted in support of the popularity of informal unions in Wales. He described a style of marriage termed *priodas fach* (little wedding), taking place in Cardiganshire around the middle of the eighteenth century. These unions were said to combine features of clandestine marriages, informal unions, and trial marriages.³⁴ It is possible that Morris had conflated several different customs which he had observed in different contexts but which in practice were never combined. In any case, as he made clear, the 'little wedding' was a minority custom of Cardiganshire, being most popular among some of the poor, who could not afford a church wedding, and miners, the last of whom might have found temporary arrangements well suited to their work patterns. There are a few references to cohabitation among the accounts of English travellers in Wales at the turn of the eighteenth century, but Probert has argued that these are almost certainly derived from Morris's work, written earlier, but published posthumously in 1792.³⁵

If long-term cohabitation or informal unions had been common, evidence might be found in the incidence of repeated baptisms of illegitimate children of the same couple. However, such occurrences seem to have been rare; in the sample parishes of south Wales considered in Chapter 3, only 8 per cent of illegitimate children baptised between 1701 and 1840 with the names of both parents recorded had an illegitimate sibling, and more than half of these had only one parent in common. Thus the number of illegitimate children with a full sibling who was also illegitimate amounted to a very small proportion of all baptisms – less than a half

³³ A couple of examples of cohabitation in Thomas's Diary were referred to in Chapter 3.

³⁴ Written before his death in 1765, but published posthumously in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 62 Pt. I (1792), p. 325.

³⁵ Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, p. 261.

per cent – and, as we saw in Chapter 3, some of their parents had merely postponed marriage and others were in relationships such as concubinage, which were not intended to substitute for legal marriage.

It might be objected that many cohabiting couples unwilling or unable to marry in church were also unlikely, like John David and Mary Rees of Llanwrda, to have baptised their children. There is scant information about the living circumstances of illegitimate children and their parents in south Wales before the mid-nineteenth century census; pauper letters, which elsewhere have been informative, have largely been lost. As we saw in Chapter 4, out of 162 families with illegitimate children identified in a sample of parishes in the 1851 census, the evidence for cohabitation was minimal, and the few situations which were found did not endure for long. Just three couples were found in cohabiting relationships, and of these two evolved between censuses, from fellow servants to married couple in one case, and from separately domiciled parents via cohabiting couple to married status in the other. Two of the three cohabiting couples lived in Neath, an industrial town. In this and similar places there were almost certainly other couples in cohabiting relationships who passed as married, and whose status cannot be identified without detailed research into census, marriage and birth records. But the paucity of evidence for their existence leads to the conclusion that their numbers were probably small compared with the numbers of legally-married couples.

Contracts ‘per verba de praesenti’

Evidence from actions in the ecclesiastical courts suggests that binding vows to marry, whether by *verba de praesenti* or *per verba de futuro*, were still being exchanged not long before Hardwicke’s Marriage Act made such contracts unenforceable in law, though possibly the number of couples involved was not large. In the diocese of Llandaff between 1734 and 1750 two causes from Glamorgan parishes were brought for breach of contract and five caveats were issued to ensure that individuals who had been pre-contracted were forbidden from marrying anyone else, with a handful of similar causes at Carmarthen in the same period. In 1734 Jennet Williams of Wenvoe claimed that there had been a contract *per verba*

de praesenti between her and Charles Williams of Roath, but later withdrew, on the grounds that she had been persuaded to make the charge by ‘some evill persons’.³⁶ In an unusually protracted courtship, Edward Gwynn of Llancarfan initially made his addresses to Mary James of the same parish during the period 1714-17, at which time they contracted to marry, since when she had frequently asked him to fulfil his contract. More than twenty years later she brought a cause of breach of matrimonial contract to the consistory court. A witness described a sorry tale of Edward’s failed attempts in the previous few months to obtain a licence to marry the then heavily pregnant Mary. Eventually she seems to have decided against him.³⁷

In the cases of the marriage contracts described above there is nothing to suggest that they were viewed as an alternative to marriage, or as a licence for cohabitation, as some have suggested; instead it is clear that they were merely a stage in the marriage process, with the failure to complete that process the basis of complaint. However a few Nonconformists in south Wales were married according to their own rites, in ceremonies which at the time would have had the force of a contract *de verba de praesenti*. Welsh Quakers, in common with their co-religionists elsewhere, are known to have used their own rites, though their numbers were somewhat depleted by emigration in the late seventeenth century.³⁸ At Rhydwylym Baptist Church in Carmarthenshire, where William Jones was chief elder, marriages were performed ‘before elders without clerical authority’ in the late seventeenth century.³⁹ Marriage entries in the church book certified that the couples named ‘did, in the presence of God, and of us his people, enter into the honorable state of matrimony’, with the names of witnesses, at least some of them elders, entered below.⁴⁰ There is scant evidence however of other Nonconformist causes in south Wales adopting their own marriage practices; even Cilfowyr, a daughter church of Rhydwylym, had no marriage entries in its church book.⁴¹

³⁶ LL/CC/G/767 (1734).

³⁷ LL/CC/G/875 (1738/9).

³⁸ Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, pp. 150-162; D. Ifans (ed.) *Cofrestrï Anghdffuriol Cymru! Nonconformist Registers of Wales* (Aberystwyth 1994). Plate 3.

³⁹ Dictionary of Welsh Biography: <http://wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/s-JONE-WIL-1700.html>.

⁴⁰ NLW Minor Deposit 127A. There are seventeen marriages between 1682 and 1705, plus one entry dated 1748.

⁴¹ A marriage register survives from the Independent chapel at Mynydd bach, near Swansea, for the period 1700-1774, but it is not clear whether this merely records the Anglican marriages of its members (NLW MS 369A).

Probert has shown that although there is some evidence that similar marriages took place in England, the majority of Nonconformists married in an Anglican church.⁴²

The attempts in some consistory court cases to deny that a marriage had taken place suggest that, in the period before Hardwicke's Marriage Act, some families believed that it was possible to have an unwelcome marriage declared invalid, in spite of the costs involved and the likelihood of failure. In the three cases of restitution of conjugal rights referred to earlier it was alleged that the reluctant partner had been deceived in some way or forced into the marriage. The fact that all three cases concerned minors might have given some credibility to the claim that consent had not been freely given, though this was in the face of testimony to the contrary from the priest who had officiated. Other cases of restitution of conjugal rights or jactitation of marriage seem to have been quickly withdrawn, presumably because credible evidence was lacking.

Clandestine marriages

A clandestine marriage was one performed by an Anglican clergyman, but lacking the full requirements of the law in some respect, whether place (not in church, or in church but in a 'foreign' parish) or time (outside canonical hours), or without banns or licence, or in the case of minors, without the permission of a parent or guardian. Whether clandestine marriages were indeed common in Wales is unclear. The high level of clandestine marriages prosecuted in the 1660s, shown in Figure 6.3, probably reflected temporary factors resulting from the Restoration, in the same way as did the numbers of sexual offences recorded at this time. In later periods, numbers recorded in south Wales were not particularly high. Even in the peak period 1681-1700, the average number of couples prosecuted amounted to only 1.4 a year, a negligible figure compared with the likely annual total of marriages.⁴³ However there were occasional outbreaks of activity; for instance 17 clandestine marriages were recorded in the Glamorgan parishes of the archdeaconry of Carmarthen during 1701-3. Surviving records probably understate

⁴² Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, pp. 143-51.

⁴³ Numbers of marriages in this period are not known, but the annual average number of marriages in the set of hundreds which approximated to the archdeaconry of Carmarthen reported in the *Parish Register Abstracts* of the 1801 Census, for the 7 years after the introduction of Hardwicke's Marriage Act, was 427.

to some degree their true number; not only are there gaps in the records of the consistory courts, particularly those of Llandaff, but also in some periods the type of cause was not distinguished in the Act Books. Perhaps most significantly, there is evidence among the case studies that, as discussed in Chapter 6, some causes were settled before reaching the point where they would have been recorded in the Act Books. None of the three clandestine marriages in the case studies appears as such in the consistory courts' records, even though several witnesses in the Mansel case described their excommunication and subsequent absolution for attending that clandestine marriage. Several actions, in addition to that of Edward Vaughan Mansel, involved prominent local families, who were particularly likely to settle discreetly and informally.⁴⁴

Information from the consistory courts at Carmarthen and Llandaff indicates that the vast majority of clandestine marriages involved local clergy. Several were involved in more than one offence, with Michael Jones the most prolific, charged at Carmarthen with performing four clandestine marriages between 1689 and 1700. As Brown suggests, the notorious poverty of Welsh livings made the clergy dependent on offerings at services and hence vulnerable to the demands of their congregation, particularly the more influential members.⁴⁵ Most were curates, but not all were nonentities; the list includes Edmund Meyrick, a noted Carmarthenshire educationist.⁴⁶ There is little evidence that any of the clandestine marriages which came before the south Wales courts were celebrated by anyone other than an Anglican clergyman. In just one case, Morgan Rees of Cilycwm was accused in 1684 of allowing himself to be married by an excommunicated person, though whether that person was a clergyman is not stated.⁴⁷

Probert has suggested that the majority of provincial clandestine marriages took place in church, and that many were clandestine simply because the couple had

⁴⁴ An exception to this is the clandestine marriage of John Phillips to Elizabeth Grismond (c.1681), which resulted in the prosecution of the couple, the officiating clergyman and several witnesses. However the prosecution was promoted by the young woman's guardians, who were clearly unwilling to allow the offence to go unpunished (SD/CCCM(G)/43).

⁴⁵ Brown, 'Clandestine marriages in Wales', p. 76.

⁴⁶ Dictionary of Welsh Biography: <http://wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/s-MEYR-EDM-1636.html>

⁴⁷ SD/CCCM(G)/103. One instance of a marriage apparently celebrated by a layman was found in the Archdeaconry of Brecon: in 1726 Morgan Jones of Llys-wen, yeoman, was charged with unlawfully solemnising marriages (SD/CCB(G)/597).

not married in their own parish.⁴⁸ This may well have been the case in south Wales, though there is little evidence either way. The vast majority of surviving records of clandestine marriages before the consistory courts come from listings in the various Act Books, which give no indication of the basis on which the ceremony was alleged to be clandestine. The few exceptions mentioned unseasonal hours, marriage in a private place, lack of banns or licence, or lack of parental permission for the marriage of a minor, frequently in combination; there was no reference to marriage in a parish where neither of the couple resided.

Overall the evidence does not suggest that clandestine unions formed a large proportion of south Wales' marriages before the passing of Hardwicke's Marriage Act. Probert's suggestion, that outside London we should discount the possibility of 'large numbers of untraced clandestine marriages that did not take place in church', is likely to apply here also.⁴⁹ With the possibility that substantial numbers of couples chose cohabitation, contract or clandestine marriage discounted, it follows that the vast majority of unions in south Wales must have been formalised by a church ceremony, until the 1836 Act for Marriages in England provided for civil marriages and for nonconformist ministers to conduct ceremonies in their own churches.

Legal marriage

The courtship of David Davies and Hannah Rees, and several of the other studies remind us that the transition to the married state was often difficult. In the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth, the majority of unmarried young people were in service, apprenticed, or employed on their parents' farms or in similar family businesses. For most, getting married required sufficient resources to start up their own enterprise, or set up house and secure employment which would provide a wage sufficient to support a wife and family. Delays in setting up a home were mentioned or implied in several of the consistory court cases discussed above and may well have contributed to the disputes that

⁴⁸ Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, p. 192-6.

⁴⁹ Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice*, p. 193-5.

ensued. Thomas Jenkins' diary shows that three years passed from the birth of his first child before he felt sufficiently secure financially to marry the child's mother, and even then the couple were unable to move to their own house for several months after the marriage.⁵⁰ Journeymen such as David Davies, or farmers' sons, hoping to set up on their own account, would require substantial outlays for stock and equipment. Farmers' children usually had an expectation that some stock and a sum of money would be released on their marriage in recognition of their unpaid work, but poor harvests or the recent marriage of siblings could make this difficult. Personal circumstances were clearly important in marriage formation, but, as Southall and Gilbert found in a wider context, economic conditions had a remarkable influence on marriage rates across England and Wales.⁵¹

Emma Griffin, discussing patterns of marriage that emerged from a study of three hundred working-class autobiographies, considered that after 1790, 'the improvident marriage was a recurring theme, constituting between 10 and 15 per cent of the total'. In contrast with couples marrying earlier, those marrying after 1790 found access to marriage easier, as families and communities were less able to thwart their plans. Couples continued to understand the values which had supported the concept of a providential marriage, but, with expectations of continued employment at good wages, did not feel themselves obliged to observe them.⁵² In support of this argument, Griffin points to the relatively early ages of marriage of some of her sample during this period, quoting several examples of men employed in textiles and mining who married under the age of 20. She concluded that 'the social change and dislocation [associated with industrialisation] weakened the social forces that for centuries had controlled access to marriage'.⁵³ Analysis of age by marital status for men in south Wales RSDs from the 1851 census confirms that average age tended to be lower in industrial districts.⁵⁴ However there was little evidence of very early marriage; the numbers of married men below the age of

⁵⁰ Thomas Jenkins, *The Diary of Thomas Jenkins of Llandeilo (1826-1870)*, D.C. Jenkins (ed.), p. 25.

⁵¹ H. Southall and D. Gilbert, 'Marriage and economic distress, 1839-1914', *Economic History Review* 49 (1996), pp. 35-57.

⁵² E. Griffin, 'A conundrum resolved? Rethinking courtship, marriage and population growth in eighteenth-century England', *Past and Present* (2012), p. 152. Thomas Jenkins of Llandeilo, whose courtship and illegitimacies are considered here, is also found in Griffin's sample.

⁵³ Griffin, 'A conundrum resolved?' p. 163.

⁵⁴ See Table 5.11.

20 appeared to be miniscule, amounting to only 66 out of a population of nearly 12,000 in the age range 15-19, with little evidence of concentration in industrial districts. Thus those who migrated to industrial districts took the opportunity to marry earlier than would otherwise been possible, but long experience of grinding poverty in rural south Wales, and the encouragement to thrift which was fostered by Nonconformity probably ensured that few were tempted to wed precipitately. Furthermore, while biddings might have helped some young couples find the resources to set up home, the amount of money and goods brought to the bidding depended crucially on family and community support, which might not be forthcoming if the marriage incurred community disapproval.

Several of the relationships described in Appendix E seem to have come to grief as a result of the opposition of family members, and though the reasons for that opposition are not made clear, concerns about the man's character seem to have featured in several. In the case of Elizabeth Lewis and Morgan Beynon, who married clandestinely to avoid her uncle's opposition, her later claim that she had been deceived, and was unaware that a marriage had taken place, probably arose from family pressure rather than from a change of heart. Thomas Howell blamed Susannah Meyrick's father and his friend for tricking him into behaving in a way that led to the breakdown of his relationship with Susanna, though the evidence suggests several other possibilities, including doubts on her part about the advisability of taking a husband who could so easily be led astray by her father. Again, Mary William's father played a part in the breakdown of her relationship with John Rees, though the suspicion that the latter had been involved with another woman may have been the decisive factor for Mary. There are no indications as to why the father of Elizabeth Jones objected to her marriage to Rees Thomas Rees, her suitor for 3 years, thereby making her potentially the mother of an illegitimate child; both came from respectable farming families and attended the same chapel, though there is a possibility that Rees had previously fathered an illegitimate child.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Llangadog parish register lists a baptism in 1809 where the father was identified as 'a son of Thomas Rees William Bowen'; Rees would then have been about 19. See Chapter 6 for more details of this case.

Apart from family concerns about the personal attributes of a potential spouse, matters relating to property were probably among the most common issues which threatened a prospective match. Jenkins' description of customary patterns of marriage settlements among tenant farmers in rural Wales at the end of the nineteenth century are, like the area's courtship customs, likely to have been in force earlier in the century and before.⁵⁶ Custom dictated that on the marriage of each child, some of the assets should be transferred to the new household. For the majority of families who did not own substantial land assets, primogeniture was rare; allocation was usually on the basis of equal shares to each child, male or female, with the farm lease eventually transferring to one of the younger children once all the other children had been provided for. Thus the whole family had an interest in the intended marriage of each child. Once a couple had agreed between themselves to marry, negotiations began between their respective parents to agree a portion and to help find a holding. The expectation was that parents would by this stage have been aware of a couple's courtship, and made their views known. Information of this kind was, in the nature of things, not always clearly transmitted, nor were unwelcome views readily accepted. A common source of family opposition to marriage was a difference in status, particularly in the case of a marriage between a farmers' son and a labourer's daughter. Not only would she bring less to the marriage than a farmer's daughter, making it more difficult to establish the couple in a farm of their own, but the disparity in status was thought to reflect not just on the couple but also on the wider family. There was less concern over the marriage of a farmer's daughter to a labourer, since there was no expectation that they would take on a farming tenancy.⁵⁷ Clandestine marriages and ante-nuptial pregnancies were among strategies used to counter family objections, though they carried obvious risks, as the examples discussed, and the tragic case of Rees Thomas Rees and Elizabeth Jones illustrate.

Young people who had no expectation of receiving any assets from their family were in principle free to marry whoever they wished as long as they were above the age of consent. Many would already have been independent; nevertheless

⁵⁶ Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community*, pp. 122-3, 129-30.

⁵⁷ Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community*, pp. 129-30.

marriage was still a concern of family and community, and most couples would hope for their parents' blessing, if they were still alive. A few months after David Davies began courting Hannah, his employer took it upon himself to inform David's mother in Cardiganshire that the couple hoped to marry (though there was no settled intent at that stage), and suggested that she might visit, presumably to hear more of her son's plans.⁵⁸ As matters turned out, it was nearly two years before the couple married, though a date had been proposed on at least two previous occasions.

The custom of holding a 'bidding' (*W. cymortha*), common in south-west Wales, Scotland and sometimes found in England, particularly in the north, often eased a young couple's transition to marriage.⁵⁹ As mentioned earlier, a betrothed or recently-married couple would organise an event to which family and friends brought money and gifts; the couple would thus incur debts which were recorded and had to be repaid at some point in the future. William Thomas noted one such occasion in his diary for 19 May 1767 when George James, formerly servant to Mr Thomas of Llanbradach, married a serving maid:

An Inviting Wedding of gentrys and all Degrees ... About 200 persons in it, about 300 were Invited. They received 35£.5s.6d. after paid all charges towards meat and Drink.⁶⁰

Many couples raised extra funds through brewing home-made beer for sale at the bidding. The custom provided a kind of savings bank; people received goods or money on marriage, and then paid it back later on the marriages of the donors or a member of their families. The wording of a draft invitation in a notebook of Lewis Lewis of Gwynfe, Llangadog, dated 1788, shows how the custom worked:

D^r Friend

I had the pleasure to embrace this opportunity to present you my complements and the rest of your family in order to acquaint you that I shall Intend to enter in a holy state of matrimony with A-B and propose to have a Bidding on the occation Friday the 7th of November next at Llwyn gwyn which

⁵⁸ University of Swansea, Richard Burton Archives, LAC/114/4

⁵⁹ E. Griffin, 'A conundrum resolved?', p. 146, describes the custom as a 'Scottish pay-wedding'. R.A. Houston, *Bride Ales and Penny Weddings: Recreations, Reciprocity, and Regions in Britain from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries*, (Oxford, 2014), has numerous examples from Wales, lowland Scotland and the north of England. For Wales, see Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community*, pp. 130-5 and T. M. Owen, 'Some aspects of the bidding in Cardiganshire', *Ceredigion* (1960), pp. 36-46. The literal meaning of *cymortha* is 'help'.

⁶⁰ *The Diary of William Thomas*, p. 187.

good company shall esteem a great favour whatsoever benevolence you or any of your family will please to confer on us shall be ever gratefully acknowledged and retaliated on a similar occasion.

Yr Hum^{le} Ser^t

Twyn glas September 27 1788.⁶¹

The reckoning of bidding outlays and receipts within a family rather than to individuals created an institution which not only functioned as a savings bank but also facilitated the transfer of money down the generations, and from the childless to younger generations of their wider family.

The earliest surviving example of a bidding letter in the collections of the National Library of Wales and the National History Museum is dated 1759, the latest 1903, though the custom was widespread long before bidding letters became popular, with invitations to the event made in person by a *gwahoddwr*.⁶² The geographical distribution of the letters in these two collections suggests that the custom was most popular in the south-west, particularly in Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire, both in towns and rural areas. Though Michael Roberts has suggested that the existence of such a custom may 'indicate that service was neither as sufficient nor as widely practiced a financial basis for marriage as it may have been in England or in other parts of Europe', the emphasis should probably be on sufficiency rather than extent of service; Snell has shown that service was more common in Wales than in the southern counties of England, and Howell that the wages of farm servants were lower in the south west of Wales than in Glamorgan.⁶³ The remaining counties of south Wales were represented in the two collections by one or two examples each, though other sources show that the custom was well-known in West Glamorgan in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁴ As Jenkins has suggested, biddings were eventually undermined by continuing emigration,

⁶¹ NLW, Lewis Lewis papers, Parcel 1.

⁶² Literally a bidder, or more generally a host. The antiquity of the custom is noted in D. B. James, *Myddfai, its Land and Peoples*, (Bow Street, 1991), p. 173, where James refers to the prosecution of an unlawful bidding in Myddfai in 1317, the custom having been outlawed in the local Marcher Lordship.

⁶³ M. Roberts, 'Gender, work and socialization in Wales, c.1450-1850', in S. Betts (ed.), *Our Daughters' Land: Past and present* (Cardiff, 1996), p. 35; K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 94-5; Howell, *The Rural Poor*, p. 69.

⁶⁴ Late examples are to be found in the collection at the National History Museum, St Fagans.

whether to the industrial areas or further afield, as the reciprocity of gift-giving broke down.⁶⁵

In a recently-published book about bid-weddings and similar communal festivities across Britain, Houston found such occasions to be characteristic of Scotland, Wales and the north of England, where 'regions with contributory weddings did indeed have distinctive societies and economies'. Here the dominant economic structure was the small farm, usually tenanted rather than owned, with service the usual form of employment; society was relatively homogeneous, with a strong ethos of self-help, in which rate-based reliefs were slow to develop. These were societies in which giving and receiving provided 'the means whereby individuals belong to the whole'; thus Houston suggests that communal, not economic considerations were at the heart of the custom.⁶⁶ There is however no necessary contradiction between a custom which reinforced the ties that held a community together at the same time providing an economic prop to individual couples.

It will be evident that Houston's description of the characteristics of communities where bidding was popular applies equally to south Wales. He noted that in these communities, levels of illegitimacy tended to be relatively high, and fathers of illegitimate children were more readily recognised in parish registers than in the southern part of England – again characteristics of south Wales.⁶⁷ Though it is intriguing to find that the association between a particular set of social and economic characteristics and high levels of illegitimacy found in rural south Wales is repeated elsewhere, this does not offer any rationale for the association.

Discussing the decline of bride ales, Houston dismissed Jenkins' argument that migration was the primary cause, arguing instead that less flexible working practices consequent on industrialisation reduced leisure time, making attendance at

⁶⁵ Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community*, p. 135.

⁶⁶ Houston, *Bride Ales and Penny Weddings*, p. 84. An enduring association between higher illegitimacy in the 'highland' region of England and its distinctive set of customs was also noted by Adair (R. Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 127-8.

⁶⁷ Houston, *Bride Ales and Penny Weddings*, pp. 177-182.

customary festivities more difficult.⁶⁸ While there is a good deal of validity in this view, it is evident in south Wales that although biddings were to be found throughout the nineteenth century both in rural areas and in some of the industrial towns and villages of Carmarthenshire and west Glamorgan, they were absent in the new and expanded settlements of east Glamorgan and Monmouthshire. First-generation migrants may have returned to their native parishes to take part in biddings, as Houston suggests, but their children seem not to have continued the tradition in a new setting.

In conclusion, while the rapid industrialisation of south Wales from the end of the eighteenth century eased the route into marriage for those who migrated, most couples waited until they had put aside the resources to set up home, in contrast with Emma Griffin's improvident couples in proto-industrial England. Communitarian traditions of support to newly-married couples thrived throughout the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries, eventually eroding in the face of migration and changing work practices. The next section of the chapter looks in more detail at the differences in courtship and marriage customs between rural south Wales and England.

A comparison of courtship and marriage customs in south Wales and England

We have seen that, broadly speaking, many of the characteristics of courtship and marriage in eighteenth and nineteenth century south Wales were similar to those found in England. Young people from ordinary families in south Wales as in England were free to find a potential partner and to spend time together in privacy. The giving of gifts was an important aspect of courtship, though the precise significance varied over time and place. In spite of assertions to the contrary, there is no basis for presuming cohabitation and irregular marriage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to be any more common than in England; and the same is true for clandestine marriage in the eighteenth century. Other customs seem to be survivals of traditions once practiced throughout Britain but no longer

⁶⁸ Houston, *Bride Ales and Penny Weddings* pp. 214-8.

current in England. One such is the ritual described above of 'fetching and drawing', found in rural south Wales throughout the nineteenth century, but which seems to have no close parallels in English courtships of the period, though it resembles the interaction between young people at similar festivities described by Gillis in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶⁹ In fact, Gillis, in discussing courtship and marriage, treats several examples of Welsh customs recorded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as archaic survivals with which to illustrate English practices in earlier periods.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, there were some significant customs relating to courtship and marriage practised in eighteenth and nineteenth century rural south Wales which were rarely found in contemporary England. Some, like *caru yn y gwely* and the communal support of entry into marriage involved in the 'bidding', had once been common in parts of northern Britain, particularly the Scottish lowlands and Cumbria, but seem to have been rare in the south, and had largely died out even in the north by the nineteenth century. This distinction between north and south has been referred to in several areas of this study, notably in Adair's classification of England into 'Highland' and 'Lowland' regions in respect of illegitimacy; in several aspects of the poor law, for instance northern English resistance to the introduction of the New Poor Law as a whole, and objection to the removal of paternal responsibility in particular; and in Houston's analysis of communal gift-giving in a region he describes as 'middle Britain', excluding both southern England and the north of Scotland.⁷¹ In effect the cultural divide in courtship, marriage and illegitimacy, for most of the period of this study, was not between England and Wales, but between regions within Britain, with Wales, northern England and lowland Scotland seemingly forming one grouping, the remainder of England another, and northern Scotland a third.

⁶⁹ Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, pp. 27-30.

⁷⁰ Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, pp. 58-60, 65.

⁷¹ Houston, *Bride Ales and Penny Weddings*, xiii.

Chapter 8 **Conclusions**

The initial stimulus for this study was the absence of any sustained work on illegitimacy in Wales, in spite of the significance of the debate about the alleged sexual laxity of Welsh courting couples to the historiography of the nineteenth century. The research sought to locate illegitimacy in the chosen region – south Wales – within the established picture of European demography and in particular to analyse in some detail similarities and differences between Welsh illegitimacy and that in England and Scotland. The fundamental issue was whether the characteristics of illegitimacy in south Wales fell within the range of regional variation elsewhere in Britain or displayed a distinct pattern, perhaps related to different traditions of courtship and marriage, or to experiences such as industrialisation and religious revival, which developed in different ways in the two countries. The intention was not just to develop a coherent picture of Welsh illegitimacy, set in its cultural, social and economic context, but also to illuminate debates in the historiography of illegitimacy, particularly as it related to the rest of Britain.

At the outset it was not clear whether it would be possible to select a soundly-based sample of parishes from which to investigate illegitimacy in the parish register period, on account of the many missing registers and the poor quality of some of those which had survived. Some aspects of illegitimacy, such as the incidence of subsequent marriage of the mother, or maternal age at birth, could not be fully investigated, because of the problems created by the small pool of surnames in use in Wales. Nevertheless, although the selection of parishes was not altogether ideal, the sample proved to be broadly representative of the communities of Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan. The sample design was based on registration sub-districts, enabling comparisons to be made between estimates of illegitimacy based on baptisms and those derived from the civil registration system. This approach, which has not been used before, gives some confidence that the demographic findings discussed below have a fair degree of reliability. Thus, in spite of the potential problems raised by declining rates of Anglican baptism consequent

on the religious revival, it seems likely that similar studies should be feasible in the rest of Wales, as long as sample parishes are chosen with care.

During the eighteenth century the overall path of illegitimacy in south Wales was similar to that in England. The illegitimacy ratio grew throughout the century, though rather more rapidly in south Wales than in England, particularly in the second half. The paths of the two series diverged from the start of the nineteenth century, when illegitimacy in south Wales began a marked decline, whereas the downturn in England did not come until the middle of the century. A comparison with Adair's regional analysis of illegitimacy in England shows that from the late seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century, the path of the illegitimacy ratio in south Wales was closest to that of the West and South-west of England. This suggests that during this period the illegitimacy ratio for south Wales fell within the range of regional variation found for England, in the work of Laslett *et al.* and Adair. It is difficult to make any comparison with English regions for the next century, since no regional breakdown exists after 1754, until the development of the civil registration system in the 1840s. In the later period of this study (1847-1870) the level of the illegitimacy ratio in south Wales, though now somewhat lower than that in England as a whole, was again well within the range of regional diversity found there. The implication would seem to be that the socio-cultural and economic forces that shaped the incidence of illegitimacy in south Wales up to 1740 and to some extent after that were similar to those in England, itself an important finding. However the faster rate of growth in the second half of the eighteenth century, and the decline in the early decades of the nineteenth, suggests that in the hundred years or so from the middle of the eighteenth century there were other factors at work in south Wales.

Within the sample of parishes chosen for the study region there was a clear distinction between the level of illegitimacy in the more Anglicised coastal areas and in the largely Welsh-speaking inland areas, with the latter showing rather higher illegitimacy ratios, particularly during the second half of the eighteenth century, when ratios were rising. This difference was most marked in Glamorgan, where illegitimacy ratios in inland areas reached over 10 per cent in the first decade of the

nineteenth century, whereas ratios in coastal areas followed a similar path to those in England, varying between 3 and 6 per cent. There was also a discrepancy between coastal and inland areas in Carmarthenshire; but whereas ratios in inland Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan were similar, elsewhere in Carmarthenshire illegitimacy ratios were higher than in England, though still lower than in inland areas. By the mid-nineteenth century, economic development of the region had led to greater diversity in patterns of courtship and marriage behaviour. An analysis of marital and illegitimate fertility and age at marriage in the mid-nineteenth century (Table 5.2), which examined all registration sub-districts wholly or mainly in Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan, showed that the districts tended to fall into four groups. In *Anglicised rural areas* fertility, both legitimate and illegitimate, was low and age at marriage for women was relatively high, whereas in *Welsh-speaking rural areas* mean age of marriage was similar but legitimate and illegitimate fertility were much higher. *Industrial areas* had similar fertility rates to Welsh-speaking rural areas, but a lower female age at marriage. Longer-established *urban areas*, which were primarily centres of commerce, had similar ages at marriage to rural areas, and fertility rates lying somewhere between those for Welsh-speaking and Anglicised areas. The implication is that there were significant economic barriers to marriage everywhere except in the industrial districts, and a rather different courtship code operating in the Anglicised rural areas from elsewhere. Though the difference in illegitimacy rates between Welsh- and English-speaking rural districts was marked, it would be a mistake to attempt to extrapolate this finding to the rest of Wales, since in the mid-nineteenth century the highest levels of illegitimacy were to be found in Montgomery and Radnorshire, where the English language predominated.

The timing of the eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century turning-points in the illegitimacy ratio in inland south Wales does not fit readily with the 'courtship intensity' theory, since the fastest period of growth in illegitimacy occurred before industrial developments had reached a sufficient scale to impact widely on the opportunities for marriage. And if changing ideas about the body had sufficient impact on sexual behaviour to affect levels of illegitimacy, one might expect to see the greatest impact in the metropolis and areas of fashionable resort, not in remote parts of south Wales. A more straightforward explanation would

seem to lie in the gradual erosion of church discipline during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century in response to the emergence of a plurality of denominations, and a decline in the belief that individual sin might provoke God's punishment of the entire community. The withering of ecclesiastical authority can be seen in falling prosecutions for sexual offences, and the increasing reluctance of people to comply with orders to appear in the church courts, or to undergo penance. Communities continued to disapprove of illegitimacy, but the focus of the disapproval moved from fornication *per se* to the economic consequences for the parish of an unsupported child. As the adverse consequences of illegitimacy for a courting couple were marginally reduced, more were prepared to engage in risky sexual behaviour. This decline was far from uniform, with parishes occasionally resorting to the courts in the face of scandalous behaviour even after the middle of the eighteenth century, and was not paralleled among the nonconformist denominations, who continued to police their members' behaviour rigorously.

The decline in church discipline was common to England and Wales. However the increase in the growth rate of the illegitimacy ratio for south Wales from the 1740s suggests factors at work specific to that region. Within south Wales, it was Carmarthenshire and the inland rural areas of Glamorgan which had the fastest growth in illegitimacy during this period, with ratios in coastal and industrial parishes increasing only slightly more than in England. The 'courtship frustrated' hypothesis would go some way towards explaining the more rapid rise in illegitimacy rates in the difficult economic circumstances found in upland south Wales during the second half of the eighteenth century, in contrast with the slower rate of growth of illegitimacy in the more prosperous coastal plain. It might also be the case, that if the attitudes of couples towards the risks of illegitimacy were changing, Welsh courtship customs practiced in the rural heartland encouraged a level of intimacy which left couples more vulnerable to that risk than their counterparts in England.

Explanations for the decline in the illegitimacy ratio during the first half of the nineteenth century are not hard to find, though the sudden reversal from the start of the century cannot be readily explained. Two factors predominated: the easier

access to marriage which accompanied increased employment opportunities in the ironworks and coalfield; and the growing power of Nonconformity, which during the first half of the century expanded to gain adherents and build chapels in every community in south Wales. The effect of industrial development on marriage is evident in the 1851 census for the industrial districts of Glamorgan, which show many young families whose parents had recently removed from rural areas of south Wales and elsewhere. Moreover, the rather greater rate of decline in illegitimacy in Glamorgan than Carmarthenshire in the early nineteenth century, where easier access to marriage was afforded by the former's faster and more extensive industrialisation, fits in well with this hypothesis. In addition the discrepancy between the rates of decline in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire owes something to the impact of net migration of young people from Carmarthenshire to Glamorgan, since migration alone would have resulted in an increase in the bastardy ratio in the former, and a decrease in the latter, without any change in the underlying illegitimate fertility rate.

The influence of religious belief on sexual behaviour remains obscure. It was suggested earlier that illegitimacy grew in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as church discipline declined. However the obverse does not seem to hold; in spite of the determined efforts of its ministers to enforce discipline, the growing strength of religious Nonconformity in south Wales seems to have had relatively little impact on the courting habits of many of its adherents. Nonconformists were eventually effective in discouraging such customs as excessive drinking, popular music, dancing and traditional festivities, but courtship customs were more resistant to change, perhaps because they took place out of public view. Attempts to make the nature of Welsh courtship a subject for public discussion began to be seen from the second decade of the nineteenth century, when concerns about the tendency of Welsh courting couples to anticipate marriage were brought to a wider audience through articles in denominational newspapers, some of which not only condemned the inherently sinful nature of Welsh courtship customs, but also explicitly identified them as a threat to the character of the nation, a theme later taken up in the 1847 Reports. While Nonconformity may have a small impact on illegitimacy rates by encouraging couples to marry once a pregnancy became

evident, it is probably the case that the 'carrot' of better marriage prospects had a greater effect in reducing illegitimacy than the 'stick' of Nonconformist discipline.

Welsh rural society, made up for the most part by poor communities whose members were held together by kinship links and economic interdependency, had developed customs which were intended to facilitate the difficult path to marriage faced by young people. Marriage, 'making their world', as it was commonly described, was the means by which young people become fully adult members of the community. This was particularly true for women, who otherwise faced a life in service or caring for family members. The freedom of young people to find a partner, the custom of *caru yn y gwely*, together with the freedom of movement of young men provided by their sleeping arrangements, set up a system of courtship which was distinct from that found in most of England, though there were parallels in some Scottish communities, and elsewhere in Europe. These customs gave couples a time and place to explore and maintain relationships, in a situation where the rigours of a subsistence economy often forced a long delay in marriage. Illegitimacy might result from an 'accident of courtship', but it might also be a lever to force a reluctant partner into marriage, or to hasten a marriage by persuading parents to release resources. The financial difficulties of transition to the married state were often eased by the 'bidding', one of the many links that bound communities together.

It has been shown that differences in patterns of illegitimacy between south Wales and England can be partly explained by cultural differences and by variations in the timing and nature of industrial development between the two countries. Further differences can be seen in the application of the poor laws to illegitimacy. Though the English Elizabethan Poor Laws applied equally to Wales, parishes there were slower to establish regular systems for relieving the poor. This was particularly true of country parishes, where payments in respect of illegitimate children do not seem to have become a regular item in overseers' accounts until the second half of the eighteenth century. As the population grew, and bastardy rates rose, payments to support illegitimate children became a more significant element, though even at the peak of illegitimacy at the beginning of the nineteenth

century they remained small in relation to other items such as support for widows. Only a minority of illegitimate children were relieved by the parish; the remainder were for the most part supported by their parents, or by the wider family.

Outside the anglicised coastal areas of south Wales, parish support for illegitimate children was often provided through an allowance paid on behalf of the child to grandparents, or apparently unrelated foster parents, who cared for the child while the mother returned to service. Relief in a workhouse or poorhouse was rare. Mothers were often expected to contribute something from their wages towards the child's care, a practice which although envisaged by those who framed the poor laws seems to have almost withered away in England. The wording in south Wales' vestry books suggests that some mothers of children supported by the parish had little involvement in decisions about a child's future, which were apparently negotiated between parish officials and the grandparents. Payments of relief for illegitimate children were generally low, at between 12d and 24d a week, with only parishes in the south east of Glamorgan regularly recording payments as high as 36d a week. Although most vestries put some effort into apprehending absconding fathers, spending on this aspect of poor law administration was generally small. The lack of clarity in the accounts about the treatment of parental contributions makes it difficult to assess the total level of support provided, though it seems likely that most contributions from fathers went direct to the mother, and together with contributions from the mother's family were the main form of support for illegitimate children.

Although only a minority of illegitimate children were supported by the parish, it would seem that from the second half of the eighteenth century, the bastardy laws came to be an essential prop of Welsh courtship customs, either directly or through encouraging fathers to make private provision for their children. Thus, once the New Poor Law was fully implemented through the opening of workhouses, and the rigours of the bastardy clauses became apparent, there was widespread distress among mothers of illegitimate children, and opposition among the community at large. Fear of entering the workhouse seems to have been particularly acute in Wales, with some mothers seeming to prefer a state of near-

starvation. Although the crisis was somewhat abated in 1844 by the restoration to mothers of the power of affiliation, many remained unable to obtain redress from their child's father. However in south Wales the outcome was not that large numbers of illegitimate children received indoor relief with their mothers, as the new law had intended. By the mid-1850s, the number of illegitimate children relieved with their mothers in relation to the population was lower there than in the rest of Wales, where more mothers and children received out-door relief, or than England, where a higher proportion were relieved in the workhouse. Instead a smaller proportion of illegitimate children in total were relieved by the New Poor Law than in the years immediately after its introduction, and the majority of those receiving relief were apparently counted in the category 'orphan and other children living apart from their parents', whether in the workhouse or fostered in the community. The implication is that most illegitimate children in the workhouses of south Wales had been abandoned by their families, and though no doubt a proportion of those receiving out-door relief were cared for within the family, many others would have been boarded out with strangers. Information collected in a return of 1849 suggests that the desertion of children by their mothers in the workhouse was particularly acute in Carmarthenshire, where over 60 per cent of illegitimate children were unaccompanied by their mothers, compared with around 30 per cent in Glamorgan and a similar proportion in England. And while the poor law authorities in south Wales were prepared to 'bend' the rules for many other classes of paupers, resulting in generally higher levels of out-door relief than in England, their treatment of mothers of illegitimate children seems to have been at least as harsh as in English unions.

In placing the responsibility for illegitimate children with their mothers, the New Poor Law represented a departure from earlier practice in south Wales, when fathers seem to have been regarded as mainly responsible, both economically and morally. Before the end of the eighteenth century, fathers of illegitimate children were more likely to be named than mothers in parish registers. In the church courts of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries men were much more likely to be charged with concubinage, fornication and adultery than women. Indeed women seem sometimes to have been viewed as little more than accessories to the

crime, suggesting that some of these cases may have been pursued as personal vendettas rather than as cases of moral correction. Though the role of the consistory courts declined during the eighteenth century as the desire to police moral crimes withered among the community at large, nonetheless the growing Nonconformist communities created their own systems for disciplining their adherents, which tended to be more effective than the Anglican courts, with less bureaucratic, more personal and more timely processes. The gender bias of Nonconformist discipline also differed from that of Anglicans, with women appearing in the discipline lists for sexual offences more frequently than men, partly for the practical reason that a woman pregnant by a partner who was not a member of the denomination was more likely to be detected than a man in a like situation, but also possibly because of gendered attitudes towards the apportionment of guilt for acts of fornication. By the mid nineteenth century the leaders of Nonconformity represented the dominant moral force in Welsh life, and though they had been opposed to many aspects of the New Poor Law, they were in broad agreement with the objectives of the bastardy clauses. They sought to replace the negative image of the unchaste Welsh woman in the 1847 Reports with a vision of *y gwir Gymraes* (the true Welshwoman), whose character was moral, religious and respectable. In the process mothers of illegitimate children came increasingly to be stigmatised and marginalised.

The findings of this study have implications for several areas of research into courtship and illegitimacy in Britain and in a wider European context. Arising from the demographic research are lessons for the design of similar studies, and new evidence in respect of the factors which influenced illegitimacy. The research also offers insights into a number of issues specific to Welsh historiography: the nature of courtship and marriage; controversies arising from the 1847 Report; the operation of the poor law in Wales; and some aspects of cultural differences between Welsh and English rural society

Demographic studies of illegitimacy in Britain have tended to fall in to two groups: large-scale studies such as those of Laslett et al. and Adair in England, and Smout in Scotland; and numerous small-scale studies based on single parishes or

groups of parishes.¹ Adair analysed the variation in illegitimacy between English regions up to 1754, but there seem to have been few examinations of possible systematic variation in illegitimacy on a regional or county scale for later periods. This study has shown that within a small region can be found large systematic differences in illegitimacy ratios aligned with cultural and economic divisions. The existence of language areas is of course an additional layer of complexity not found in England, but it is not the only factor associated with variation in illegitimacy ratios. At the very least, the results found here imply that care should be taken in extrapolating from single parishes and small groups of parishes. Results from such studies should not be taken to apply to a wider population unless based on samples of units chosen with regard to the diversity of social and economic factors in the community at large. A simple rural/urban dichotomy, for example, may be misleading. Illegitimacy in rural areas might vary with the type of agriculture; in urban areas it might depend on whether the settlement is long-established or an industrial town full of migrants. Laslett *et al.* and Adair found illegitimacy to be higher in rural areas, while studies by Goose and Griffin have found the opposite. However a methodology based on cases selected without regard to type of area, such as that used by Griffin which aggregates illegitimacies found in personal narratives without considering their wider geographical context, is a potentially misleading basis for making demographic inferences.

This study has contributed new material to the historiography of Wales during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It has provided a demographic basis for the history of courtship, marriage and illegitimacy to set against older accounts based largely on anecdote and folklore. Evidence has shown that Probert's re-writing of the history of informal marriage and cohabitation is equally applicable in south Wales; such relationships existed but were not the norm. The demographic findings allow us to see that the facts of courtship practices in Wales described in the evidence to the 1847 Report, though often expressed in crude and offensive terms, were broadly accurate, and that many of those who objected to the Report must have been aware of that. Moreover the identification of pre-marital sexuality as a national defect was not a smear invented by the Report's authors but

¹ See Chapter 2 for details of these studies

had been made by Welsh Nonconformists decades earlier. The offensive nature of the Report lies not in the facts it presented, as is popularly supposed, but in the authors' portrayal of the life of the poor in Wales as uniquely depraved, ignoring the many parallels which they could have found in parts of England, had they cared to subject them to the same detailed examination.

In the 'regional cultures of welfare' identified by Snell, Wales was shown to be the region most likely to provide relief outside the workhouse. However we now have a more nuanced picture of poor law relief in Wales; clearly the permissive attitude towards the provision of out-door relief did not extend to mothers of illegitimate children in the two counties of this study. Here mothers were not only much less likely to obtain outdoor relief than paupers in Wales generally, but also less likely than their counterparts in Wales as a whole, or in England. Further analysis of poor law reports might reveal rather different approaches to the treatment of different classes of paupers within other regions.

It would be naive to claim that this study adds a great deal of clarity to the murky pool of theories about the causes of changes in the level of illegitimacy. However the different chronology of illegitimacy in south Wales casts doubt on some of these theories, and thus contributes to the debate about illegitimacy in a European context. For instance the earlier acceleration of illegitimacy ratios in south Wales in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, as compared with England, provides little support for theories based on changing sexual practices arising from a new understanding of reproductive function. Nor is there evidence that the greater employment opportunities resulting from industrialisation led to a rise in improvident marriages, as suggested by Griffin. The most coherent explanation of the patterns of illegitimacy found in south Wales is that different types of courtship regimes, such as the presence or absence of *caru yn y gwely*, had significant and enduring effects on the level of illegitimacy, and that changes in the economic climate led to changes in this level, through making marriage more or less available (the 'courtship frustrated' hypothesis). Adair described differences in illegitimacy levels which he ascribed to variations in courtship regimes at a broad regional level. This study goes further, showing that within a relatively small

geographic area different local customs of courtship and marriage, and the employment opportunities offered either locally or through migration, interacted to influence the decisions made by courting couples which determined the outcome of an ante-nuptial pregnancy. Moreover, the study qualifies the view that industrialisation brought greater choice to mothers of illegitimate children, since the heavy industries which characterised south Wales provided few employment opportunities for women.

This study was of necessity limited both geographically and temporally, and there is a good deal more work to be done to obtain a fuller and more rounded picture of illegitimacy in Wales. Although the research described here suggests that there may be a distinct pattern of illegitimacy in south Wales, reflecting cultural differences within the region, more work is needed to investigate how these differences play out elsewhere in the country. Is the long-standing language divide between north and south Pembrokeshire associated with different courtship traditions and patterns of illegitimacy? Does the history of illegitimacy in Montgomery and Radnorshire – and nearby areas of high illegitimacy on the English side of the border – resemble that of English proto-industrial areas such as Lancashire, or are there specifically Welsh characteristics? Is the temporal path of illegitimacy different in those parts of Wales – for instance the north-west – where industrial expansion and religious revival occurred later than in south Wales? The archive material should be adequate to explore at least some of these threads, though it might be more challenging to extend the analysis back in time, to allow a fuller comparison with Adair's work. Answers to the questions posed above would cast more light both on the nature of the cultural distinctiveness of Wales, as well as on the factors which influenced levels of illegitimacy in both England and Wales.

An investigation of the micro-history of migration to the industrial areas of south Wales and its impact on courtship and marriage would reveal more about the relationship between a decision to leave the countryside for work in the industrial areas, and a decision of whom and when to marry. This would contribute to the recent body of work on courtship by King, Hurren, Griffin and others, to the benefit of a better understanding of courtship decisions and their impact on

illegitimacy in England as well as Wales. Such a study would be greatly helped by access to civil registers, currently possible in Scotland but not in England and Wales.

Finally, a close reading of Welsh-language literary sources was beyond the scope of this study, but would offer rewarding opportunities for an investigation into attitudes towards courtship and its consequences, both in poetry and popular material such as ballads and interludes, to complement demographic studies of the topic.²

² See S. Williams “‘Blooming virgins all beware’: Love, courtship and illegitimacy in eighteenth-century British popular literature”, in A. Levene, T. Nutt, and S. Williams, *Illegitimacy in Britain, 1700-1920* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 18-33 for a discussion of English-language ballads in this field.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Measuring illegitimacy

Ideally fertility, whether legitimate or illegitimate, should be measured in relation to the population at risk, that is, married or non-married women of fertile age, using age-specific fertility rates to allow for the age distribution within the group. Coale proposed the use of age-specific fertility rates from an 'ideal' population which did not control fertility to define a set of indices of fertility. That for illegitimate fertility I_h uses the formula:

$$I_h = \frac{B - B_m}{\sum A_i(P_i - M_i)}$$

where:

A_i = age specific fertility rate of ideal population in age-group i

P_i = female population in age group i

M_i = married female population in age group i

B = total births

B_m = births to married women.

The index is in effect the ratio of the number of children produced by the population under consideration (in this case not married women of fertile age) to the number which would have been produced at the fertility rate of the 'ideal' group. The index of marital fertility I_g is calculated using the formula:

$$I_g = \frac{B_m}{\sum A_i M_i}$$

and that for nuptiality:

$$I_m = \frac{\sum A_i M_i}{\sum A_i P_i}$$

The latter formula is a weighted ratio of married women to all women, using 'ideal' fertility rates as a standardising variable, thus ignoring the non-fertile age range.

An indirect measure of the mean age of marriage may be calculated using the ‘singulate mean age of marriage’ (SMAM).¹ This uses census data to calculate the average number of years spent unmarried experienced by the married population. The formula is given below:

$$SMAM = \frac{t \frac{\sum (P_i - M_i)}{P_i} - uN_u}{1 - N_u}$$

where:

u = upper age limit

t = interval in years of each age group

N_u = proportion aged over u years never marrying.

It is usual to assume that $M_i = 0$ for ages below 15, that $t = 5$ and that $u = 50$. N_u , the proportion of the population never marrying, is estimated from the proportion never married at age 50.

These formulae require detailed population information, which is not generally available before the nineteenth century, except to some degree in the case of family reconstitution studies. The earliest period for which it is possible to calculate Coale indices for Welsh data is around the time of the 1851 census, though deficiencies of coverage in both the census and vital registration in this period mean that these indices must be treated with some caution.

Moreover, regional comparisons of the index of illegitimacy may be misleading where there is a mobile workforce of single women, since the census figures may substantially understate the numbers at risk. Blaikie *et al.* showed that the unusually high level of I_h in Rothiemay, in north-east Scotland, was due, at least in part, to single woman from the parish migrating elsewhere in search of work, returning to give birth, and subsequently moving away again, often leaving the baby with kin.² In such circumstances, the number at risk is not just not-married women

¹ J. Hajnal, ‘Age at marriage and proportions marrying’, *Population Studies* (1953), pp. 129-130.

² A. Blaikie, E. Garrett, and R. Davies, ‘Migration, Living Strategies and Illegitimate Children: A Comparison of Two Scottish Settings, 1871-1881’, in A. Levene, T. Nutt and S. Williams (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 165-6.

in the fertile age range resident in the parish, but also potentially all those born in the parish who retain close kinship links there.

Appendix B: Geographical Scope of the study

The scope of the study was defined as the historic counties of Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan and the parishes within them. However the introduction of poor law unions and registration districts cut across county and parish boundaries and introduced greater complexity to the analysis. Table B1 lists the sample of parishes used to compile statistics of illegitimacy discussed in Chapter 3. ‘Linked’ parishes are those used to investigate the living arrangements of illegitimate children and their mothers discussed in Chapter 5.

**Table B1 List of sample parishes in parish register analysis
(a) Glamorgan Parishes**

Registration sub-district	Parish	Linked Parish ¹	PLU/registration district
Gower	Bishopston		Swansea (Gower PLU) from 1857)
	Cheriton		
	Ilston		
	Llanddewi & Knelston		
	Llangennith		
	Llanmadog		
	Llanrhidian		
	Nicholaston		
	Oxwich		
	Oystermouth		
	Penmaen		
	Pennard		
	Penrice		
	Port Eynon		
	Reynoldston		
	Rhosili		
Llansamlet	Llansamlet		Neath
Maesteg	Betws		Bridgend
	Coychurch		
	Llandyfodwg		
	Llangeinor		
	Llangynwyd	✓	
	Llanharan		
	Llanilid		
	St Bride’s Minor	✓	
Margam	Aberavon		Neath
	Margam		
	Michaelstone-super-Avon		

Registration sub- Parish district		Linked Parish ¹	PLU/registration district
Llansadwrn ²	Llansadwrn	✓	Llandovery
	Llanwrda	✓	
Myddfai ²	Myddfai	✓	Llandovery
Pembrey	Cydweli Pembrey		Llanelli

Notes:

- (1) 'Linked' parishes are those where illegitimacies identified in parish registers have been linked with census entries.
- (2) These RSDs are grouped together under the heading 'Upper Tywi'.
- (3) In Pembrokeshire
- (4) Split between Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire

The demographic analysis in Chapter 5 uses the registration sub-districts (RSD) at 1851 as the basic geographical unit. All RSDs wholly or mainly in Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan were included in the analysis. These are listed below.

Table B2 List of registration districts and sub-districts in 1851 analysis
(a) Glamorgan

Registration district	Registration sub-district
Bridgend	Bridgend Cowbridge Maesteg
Cardiff	Caerphilly Cardiff Llantrisant St Nicholas
Merthyr Tydfil	Aberdare Gelligaer Merthyr Tydfil, lower Merthyr Tydfil, upper
Neath	Cadoxton Llansamlet Margam Neath Ystradfellte ¹ Ystradgynlais ¹
Swansea	Gower Llandeilo Talybont Llangyfelach Swansea

Registration district	Registration sub-district
(b) Carmarthenshire	
Carmarthen	Carmarthen Cynwyl Elfed Llangyndeyrn St Clears
Lampeter ³	Llanybyther Pencarreg ²
Llandeilo Fawr	Llandybie Llandeilo Fawr Llanfynydd Llangathen Talley
Llandovery ³	Cilycwm Cynwyl Caeo Llanddeusant Llandingad Llanfair-ar-y-bryn Llangadog Llansadwrn Myddfai
Llanelly	Llanelly Llanon Loughor ⁴ Pembrey
Narberth ³	Amroth ⁵ Llanboidy ⁵ Narberth ⁵
Newcastle in Emlyn ³	Cenarth ⁵

Notes:

- | | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|-----|-------------------------|
| (1) | Partly in Breconshire | (4) | In Glamorgan |
| (2) | Partly in Cardiganshire | (5) | Partly in Pembrokeshire |
| (3) | Part district only | | |

Appendix C Variables used in analysis of 1851 fertility indices

Topic	Measure	Period
Illegitimacy	Illegitimate births/baptisms as a percentage of all births/baptisms	Average, 1847-55
	Rate of illegitimate births/baptisms per 1,000 of the population	Average, 1847-55
	Rate of illegitimate births/baptisms per 1,000 women	Average, 1847-55
	Rate of illegitimate births/baptisms per 1,000 women aged 15-44	Average, 1847-55
	Rate of illegitimate births/baptisms per 1,000 women aged 20-34	Average, 1847-55
Indices of fertility and nuptiality (see Appendix A for details of calculation)		
	Index of married fertility I_g	Average, 1847-55
	Index of illegitimate fertility I_h	Average, 1847-55
	Index of general fertility I_f	Average, 1847-55
	Index of nuptiality I_m	Average, 1847-55
	Singulate mean age of marriage SMAM	Average, 1847-55
Population	Population density – persons per acre	1851
	Log population density	1851
	Sex ratio: men per 100 women at all ages	1811, 1851
	Sex ratio: men per 100 women aged 15-44	1851
	Sex ratio: men per 100 women aged 20-34	1851
	Average population growth rate per annum from 1811 to 1851	
	Change in population density	1851-1801
Births	Births per 1000 women	1851
	Births per 1000 women aged 15-44	1851
Household size	Population per household	1851
Wealth	Value of living per head of the population (pence); source <i>Imperial Gazetteer</i>	1860s
	Value of property per head of population (£); source <i>Imperial Gazetteer</i>	1860s
Employment		
(a) households	<i>Expressed as a percentage of all households</i>	
	Agricultural households	1831
	Households principally engaged in manufacturing and trade	1831
	Other households	1831
	Agricultural households employing men	1831
	Agricultural households not employing men	1831
	Households of capitalists, bankers, professional and other educated men	1831
(b) men aged	<i>Expressed as a percentage of all men aged 20 and over</i>	

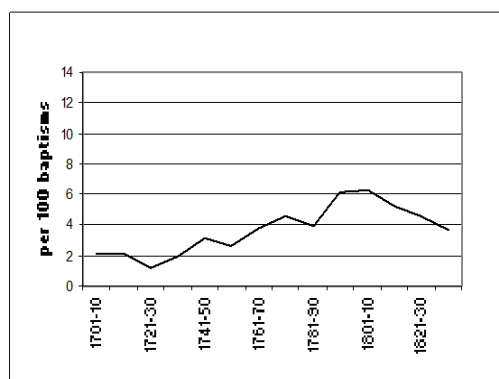
Topic	Measure	Period
20 and over		
	Agricultural labourers	1831
	Other labourers	1831
	Servants	1831
	Manufacture	1831
	Trade etc	1831
	Other men	1831
	Capitalists, bankers, professional and other educated men	1831
(c) women	Female servants as a percentage of all women	1831
Religion	<i>Expressed per 1,000 of the population</i>	1851
	Total attendance	1851
	Maximum attendance	1851
	Church of England attendance	1851
	Calvinistic Methodists attendance	1851
	Independents attendance	1851
	Old dissent attendance	1851
	Wesleyan Methodists attendance	1851
	Index of religious diversity ¹	1851
Language	Language character of the RSD: parishes scored on a scale 1 – 5 and averaged over RSD (weighted by population)	1848
Poor rate	Pence / head	1852
Poor relief	Pence/head	1852

¹ For details of the calculation of this index, see K. D. M. Snell and P. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: the Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 436-6.

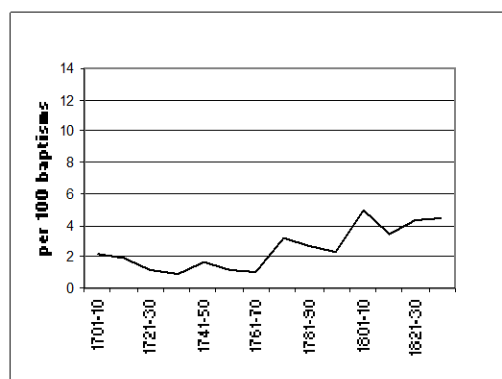
Appendix D: Additional Tables and Figures

Figure D1 Illegitimacy ratios from parish records, Glamorgan RSDs, 1701-1840

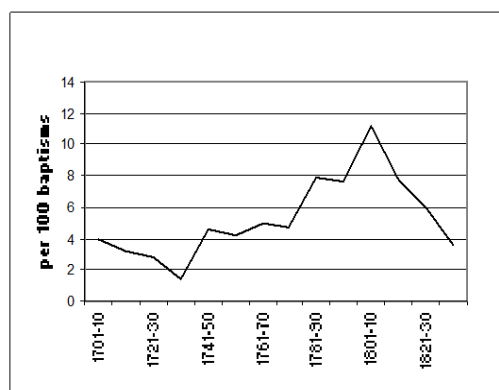
Gower



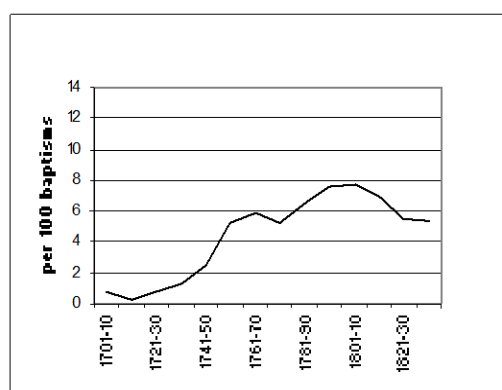
Llansamlet



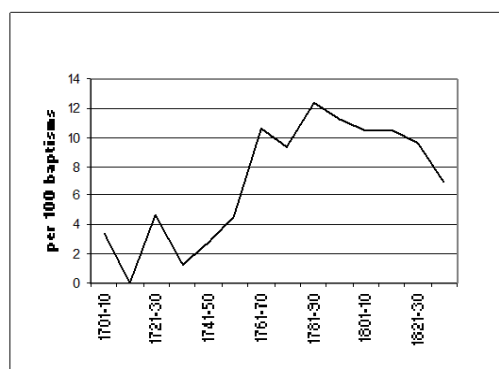
Margam



Neath



Maesteg



St Nicholas

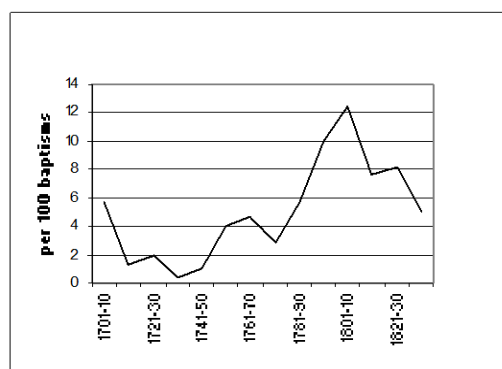
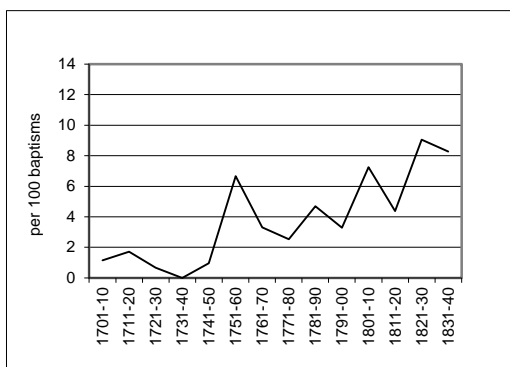
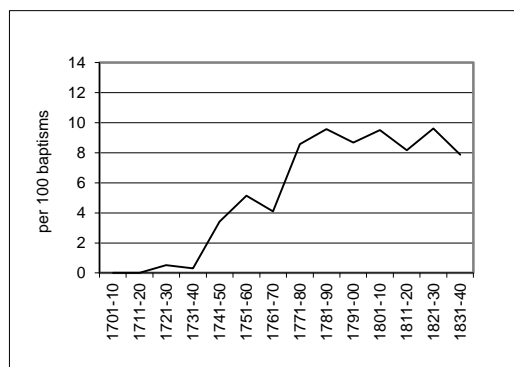


Figure D2 Illegitimacy ratios from parish records, Carmarthenshire RSDs, 1701-1840

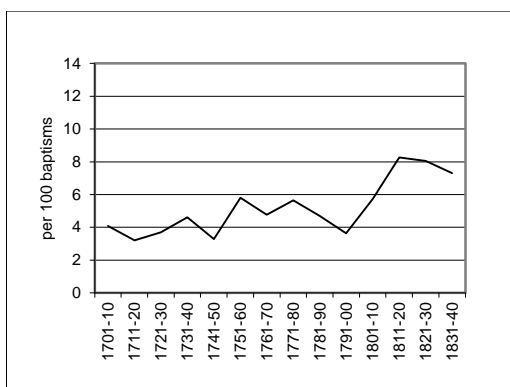
Cenarth



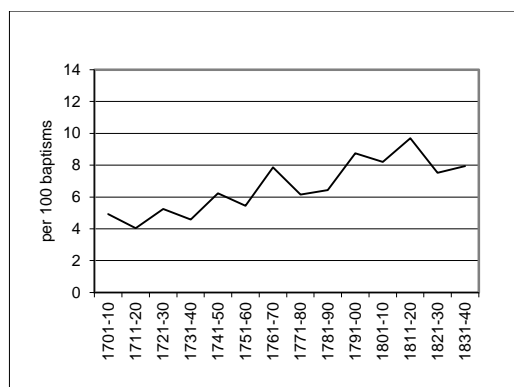
Llangathen



Llangyndeyrn



Pembrey



Upper Tywi Valley

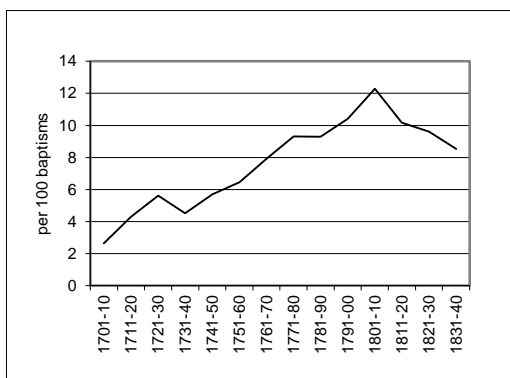


Table D1 Average amounts of relief for the support of illegitimate children, selected parishes in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire, pence per week, 1760-1837

	1756- 60	1761- 65	1766- 70	1771- 75	1776- 80	1781- 85	1786- 90	1791- 95	1796- 1800	1801- 05	1806- 10	1811- 15	1816- 20	1821- 25	1826- 30	1831- 35	1836- 37	number of children
Carmarthenshire																		
Cilycwm																14	12	10
Llandefaelog							11	11	15	15	25			20	22	21		36
Llanegwad							11	16										8
Llangathen						12	12	12	13	18	16	17						30
Llangadog								12	12	13	10	16	18	21	18		16	34
Llandeusant														15	18	13	12	
Llanarthne									20	20	23	21	20		14	13	15	51
Carmarthenshire average						12	11	12	13	17	17	17	18	19	18	14	14	
number of children						1	12	11	24	25	28	21	3	16	17	58	29	169
Glamorgan																		
Llanrhidian																17	18	9
Llansamlet													20	15	17			6
Baglan							24						20	15				6
Llangynwyd												41	14	18	19	21	24	16
Bettws					18	14	10	13										7
Llanharan																30	30	1
St Nicholas										17	25	33	14	23	24			10
Penmark	15	14					24	12	24			36	34	30	33	25	24	23
St George														25	25			3
Wenvoe										22	28	36	30	26	25	25	25	18
Glamorgan average	15	14			18	14	14	13	24	20	28	36	25	23	25	23	24	
number of children	2	1			1	2	10	4	4	4	4	11	24	27	25	29	16	106

Appendix E: Eight Case Studies of Courtship and Marriage, 1717-1870

Five of the examples given below are taken from consistory court papers of the eighteenth century to illustrate some of the circumstances of courtship and marriage in south Wales, and also the ways in which family members might intervene to try to disrupt courtship or invalidate an unwelcome marriage. The remaining three examples come from nineteenth-century diaries, somewhat inevitably all kept by men, but spanning the social scale, from book binder to minor land-owner.

El Morgan Beynon, yeoman, against Elizabeth his wife: restitution of conjugal rights (Carmarthenshire, 1745-50)

On 24 March 1744 Morgan Beynon of Myddfai and Elizabeth Lewis of Llangadog attended a dance, after which they went to the house of John Thomas William, victualler. There they agreed to marry, Elizabeth saying that they should do it that night, for if she returned to her uncle's house she would never have the opportunity of seeing Morgan again. The ceremony was performed by Rev. Evan Griffiths, the curate of Llangadog. The marriage was said not to have been consummated that night, but on a later occasion. Several witnesses described seeing them in bed together, on several different occasions. They did not set up house together immediately; the next day Morgan returned to his employer Mr James Price of Cilgwyn and Elizabeth to her uncle Griffith Jenkin, who promptly threw her out, though she returned to his house later. However when Morgan was in a position to provide a home for Elizabeth she refused to recognise that a marriage had taken place, so he brought a case of restitution of conjugal rights. The judgement of the court was that they had contracted matrimony, which had been consummated, and Elizabeth was admonished for her failure to live with her husband.¹

¹ SD/CCCm(G)/316, 528 & 436 (1745-6).

E2 John Rees against Mary Rees, formerly Williams, both of Llangennech; restitution of conjugal rites (Carmarthenshire, 1750)

On 7 June 1750, James Pinaud, vicar of Llanelly, married John Rees and Mary Williams by licence at the house of John Evan, at night. The clandestine nature of the marriage was said to have been designed to avoid it coming to the attention of Sir Thomas Stepney, the local landowner. Several witnesses testified to the affection between the couple both before and after the marriage; Robert Lewis, carpenter, said that he was at a dance with them at Llangennech House, where he saw Mary sit on John William's lap with both her arms about his neck; he 'never saw two persons so fond'. Samuel David, a shopkeeper, had seen the couple often in bed together at his house before marriage, but 'whether they were naked he cannot say'. Elinor Lewis said that Mary often spoke to her about going to live with John Rees at Clynwernen and taking her servant Jemima with her (Mary was then about 18 years old). A further witness said that Mary's father had a volatile relationship with John Rees; 'sometimes calling him dear son-in-law and other times using abusive language'. Later Mary expressed doubts about going to live with John, and her father was heard to say that she should not go to his house 'till such time as she had bedcloaths & other things for that she should not go into another person's bedclothes'. This statement and further testimony suggests that Mary may have suspected John of having had a relationship with another woman.²

E3 Anne Mansel formerly Rice against Sir Edward Vaughan Mansel, Bart.: restitution of conjugal rights; Sir Edward Vaughan Mansel of Trimsaran against Anne, daughter of Mr Woodford Rice of Gellyfergam, Llanllawddog, jacitation of marriage (Carmarthenshire, 1756).

The action at Carmarthen Consistory Court was dated 1756-7, and continued in the Court of Arches in 1759-61, but the marriage at issue seems to have taken place on 28 April 1749, when Edward was about 19, and Anne about 13 years old. It may be relevant that Edward did not succeed to the baronetcy until the death of his uncle in 1754, and could not have been sure at the date of his alleged marriage that he would become his heir. Rev. John James testified that he had married the couple, having first ascertained that they 'knew what they were

² SD/CCCm(G)/355 (c. 1750).

about', and that the marriage was quite voluntary. After the ceremony was complete they lay upon a bed and he covered them with a rag or quilt, leaving them with his blessing. Several witnesses testified that they had been excommunicated for being present at the clandestine wedding, but had subsequently been absolved. The absolution seems to have involved simply taking an oath not to offend again, rather than a public apology in a white sheet. Lewis Phillips, tailor and shopkeeper of Carmarthen, in whose house Mansel lodged when he was in town, said that he saw the couple frequently together during the two months before their marriage, and that after the marriage they were generally taken to be lawful man and wife. Phillips seems to have regarded Mansel as an unreliable young man; on one occasion he refused to lend him his horse to go to visit Anne Rice, 'not caring to trust him with it'. The papers are incomplete, with no outcome recorded, but there is a suggestion that an attempt was made by Mansel in the Court of Arches to plead for nullity, not jactitation.³

E4 Susanna Meyrick against Thomas Howell, both of Pendoylan (1717-20), defamation; Thomas Howell against Susannah Meyrick and Godwin Meyrick her father, defamation (Glamorgan, 1719-20)

Thomas Howell had courted Susanna Meyrick before the actions for defamation. His friend David John, a tailor, recounted how in winter 1718/9 Thomas had sent him to Susanna with a gift of a bag of walnuts, and she in return had sent Thomas 'a large fair apple'. Howell Roberts, a yeoman, testified that he believed there to have been a promise of marriage between the couple. Matters seemed to have soured however after Thomas went to an alehouse with Godwin Meyrick and William Nicholls, gent., whom Roberts described as 'an idle person and frequenter of Alehouses and Cockmatches and a promoter of quarrels ... in his neighbourhood'. A good deal of ale was drunk that night, and Nicholls teased Thomas that Susanna had no love for him, whereupon Thomas replied that he had had carnal knowledge of her a hundred times. In consequence, Susanna brought a case of defamation against him in the consistory court. The hapless Thomas's only defence was that he was so drunk that he did not know what he had said. Various witnesses gave evidence that Susanna had told them she was not responsible for

³ SD/CCCm(G)/397, 649 (1756).

instigating the defamation case, but she denied this. Thomas subsequently sued Susanna and her father for the derogatory phrases they had used to describe him.⁴

E5 Elizabeth Love, an infant, by Thomas Love of Penmark, her father, against Ann, wife of Rees Watkin, defamation; Office, promoted by Thomas Morris of Llanblethian, against Elizabeth Love of Penmark, incontinence (Glamorgan, 1734).⁵

See Chapter 6 for details of this case.

E6 David Davies, Treboeth, Swansea (Glamorgan, 1821-3)⁶

At the outset of his courtship in early 1821, David Davies was a skilled craftsman who worked for Daniel Evans, a bookbinder of Treboeth, near Swansea. The area was still largely rural, though it contained some coal mines and was close to the copper and iron works of the lower Tawe valley. The object of David's affections was Hannah Rees, daughter of John Rees, Cadle, a local farmer. Although Davies spoke Welsh as his first language, the diary is mainly in English, with occasional entries and some poetry in Welsh, and a few intimate thoughts written in a runic script.⁷

David's life revolved around work and attendance at chapel, to which he went three times on Sunday and usually at least once in the week. As his employer also provided his accommodation and was the minister of the local chapel, and much of the bookbinder's output was copies of prayer books, bibles and other religious material, work and leisure tended to merge seamlessly together. There were frequent opportunities to meet young women, after chapel, at the many local taverns and at Llangyfelach fair, as the lively social life portrayed in the diary entries shows.

David was acquainted with Hannah and her family when he met her by chance in a tavern after morning chapel in March 1821, and struck up a

⁴ LL/CC/G/106, 167 (1718-20).

⁵ LL/CC/G/729, 754 (1734).

⁶ RBA, LAC/114/4-5, NLW MS 22106A.

⁷ The script appears to be similar to the *Coelbren y Beirdd* (alphabet of the bards) invented by the antiquarian and literary forger Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams) in the late eighteenth century. It has not been possible to decode all of these entries.

conversation with her. They met again that evening after chapel and he took her home, recording that he 'stayed a while with her in the cow house and out again, bade farewell in hopes of future converse'.⁸ Over the next nine months meetings continued, after chapel and at other social events such as Llangyfelach fair. These occasions usually ended with the journey to Cadle and an opportunity for physical intimacy in the barn. The relationship had its ups and downs; there were a number of competitors for Hannah's affections, which caused friction between the pair, as did Hannah's occasional rebuffs of his attempts to take physical relations a stage further. On the two occasions when they broke off the courtship, David turned to a former girlfriend, Jane Rees, of whom he said 'I think to prosper better than ever I did in Cadle'.⁹ However the couple made it up for the second time at Christmas 1821. Now the relationship was on a firmer footing, and in December 1822 they agreed to marry at the time of the next Llangyfelach Fair (1 March).¹⁰ By this time David's role as Hannah's intended was recognised by her family, and their courtship had moved from the barn to sitting up in front of the kitchen fire after her parents had retired. Diary entries from early 1823 imply that they spent the night together on several occasions. The marriage was delayed, for reasons which are unexplained, and eventually took place on 12 July 1823; the ceremony was followed by a 'bidding'. Their first son was born on 15 October of the same year.¹¹ On his wedding day David wrote 'All was well done and we could not be blamed on any account'. He justified their pre-marital relations by Biblical precedent, saying that once the couple had exchanged vows no '*ffeurad diffaith anfad* (wicked wastrel priest)' was necessary to make a valid marriage. The chapel took a more orthodox view, temporarily expelling the couple for their ante-nuptial fornication.¹²

The courtship lasted nearly 2 ½ years. This length of time was no doubt due, at least in part, to David's poverty. As an employee, his weekly wage was 3s. with his keep, or 4s. without, insufficient to keep a wife and family, and hardly likely to impress Hannah's parents. On 5 Jan 1822 his diary records that he cried because

⁸ RBA, LAC/114/4, 18 March 1821.

⁹ RBA, LAC/114/4, 19 August, 1821

¹⁰ NLW MS 22245A, David Davies, Treboeth: Diary 1822-24.

¹¹ RBA, LAC/114/5, Introduction.

¹² RBA, LAC/114/5, 12 July 1823; E. C. Williams, 'Davies the diarist: a Treboeth Journal, 1819-1833', *Gower: Journal of the Gower Society*, p. 65.

of his poverty; the immediate reason was a lack of shoes to go to town, but no doubt the difficulty of reaching a sound economic basis for marriage also contributed to his misery. Eventually the possibility of working on his own account solved the problem, though poverty continued to be an issue through much of his married life.

E7 The diary of Thomas Jenkins of Llandeilo (Carmarthenshire, 1826-1870)¹³

Thomas Jenkins is usually described as a cabinet maker, but that hardly does justice to his wide-ranging interests. His many activities included founding the Llandeilo Mechanics' Mutual Instructing Institution, making himself a 3-wheeled velocipede which he used to travel around the countryside, designing pile-drivers and pumps for the construction of a new bridge over the Tywi at Llandeilo, and providing the town with public lighting, and piped gas and water. His diary begins in 1826, when he was 13 years old, living with his father in Llandeilo. In 1833 he hired a servant, Ann Evans, with whom he later struck up a relationship. Two years later she became pregnant; their daughter Mary was put out to nurse, and Ann went into service elsewhere. Nearly three years after Mary's birth, he wrote in his diary 'Having now some prospect of being able to maintain a wife, and having determined that that the wife should be Ann, I got the banns published this morning in Betws Lleucu Church for the first time. Paid 1/-'. The couple were married in August 1839, but it was not until the end of December that they moved into their own home. Mary does not seem to have joined them there, but instead spent her childhood with her foster parents, and is only occasionally mentioned in her father's diary. In 1848 Ann was taken ill following childbirth and died, leaving Thomas with four children. Sometime in 1849 he started to court Sarah Davies, who lived on a farm several miles from Llandeilo, with whom he had an intense (but probably celibate) relationship. They corresponded regularly over two years, and might have married had she not died, in 1851. In spite of his obvious devotion to Sarah, sometime during 1850 Thomas had begun a relationship with his servant Jane Thomas, who left his employ at the end of that year, at which time she was

¹³ Thomas Jenkins, *The Diary of Thomas Jenkins of Llandeilo (1826-1870)*, D.C. Jenkins (ed.), (facsimile reprint, 2010).

probably about a month pregnant. The child was born the following August. It is not clear what arrangements Thomas made to support mother or child; in January 1852 he was summoned before Llangadog Petty Sessions and ordered to pay 1/6d per week to maintain his child. At the end of 1851 he engaged another servant, Ann Thomas, whom he married in February 1854, when she was 2 months pregnant.

The diary is for the most part focussed on events and activities, rather than Thomas's thoughts or emotions. As a result he sometimes comes across as devoid of feeling, particularly in his relations with women. Emma Griffin, who describes his offer of marriage to Ann Evans as 'miserable', was perhaps led by his offhand style to overlook the fact that, in the period between Mary's birth and the couple's marriage, Thomas had maintained regular contact with Ann, Mary, and Ann's parents in Cardiganshire.¹⁴ The decision not to marry until Thomas's prospects had improved may well have been taken jointly with Ann and her family. A postponement of marriage not only allowed Thomas to build up his business but also to delay the expense of an expanding family which marriage would inevitably have brought.

E8 The Diary of Rees Thomas of Dôl-Llan, (Carmarthenshire, 1860-1862)¹⁵

Rees Thomas of Dôl-Llan, in the parish of Llanfihangel ar Arth, was a yeoman farmer and landowner, aged 36 in the year he began his diary. Rees was a single man who after the death of his two older brothers had become head of the family, and sole executor of the will of his brother Thomas, who died early in 1860. Rees was under great stress during the period the diary was written, attempting to sort out Thomas's financial affairs, and those of his mother, for which he received little gratitude from family members. He sought compensation in bouts of drinking, and in the arms of his women servants, behaviour which when sober filled him with disgust and which he periodically sought to change, to no avail; but his

¹⁴ E. Griffin, 'Sex, Illegitimacy and social change in industrialising Britain', *Social History* (2013), p. 150.

¹⁵ Steve Dubé, *My Failings and Imperfections: The Diary of Rees Thomas of Dol-Llan, 1860-1862*, (Carmarthen, 2011).

Nonconformist conscience ensured that his failures left him wracked with guilt.¹⁶ At the start of the diary Rees was having trouble with his two women servants, Hannah and Betsy, constantly resolving to get rid of them, though he did not succeed until the annual hiring period in November of that year. He regularly quarrelled with Betsy, so that it comes as a surprise to read, when she left, 'She was perfect, honest, upright and straightforward in all her transactions. The only fact I had against her was her temper'.¹⁷ It seems likely that Rees and Betsy occasionally had sex; possibly the problems in their work relationship stemmed at least in part from the tensions that this created.

Two months after the arrival of the next servant, Anne, in late 1860, she and Rees became lovers, although she had a fiancé. For reasons which are not explained, Rees felt deceived by Anne, who did not tell him about her fiancé until the latter had visited her at night. Over the next few months Rees and Anne's night-time assignations became more frequent; Rees recorded (in code) his success in practicing coitus interruptus, including an occasion on which he thought Anne tried to prevent his withdrawal. Anne refused to stay an extra year, but was reluctant to leave when the time came – perhaps she had hoped for a better offer. Rees then engaged Hannah and Rachel for a year from November 1881. He and Hannah had sex on the night of her arrival, and their night-time encounters continued regularly for several months. However his luck had run out this time; on 24 March Hannah told him she was pregnant. Two attempts by the local doctor to procure an abortion failed, and at the start of August Rees paid Hannah £7.5s for the support of her child for a year from the end of November.

Rees's relationships with his servants were complex. While they were in his employ he constantly complained about them, yet after the departure of both Betsy and Anne he expressed regret, and obviously missed each of them, particularly Anne, of whom he wrote 'My thoughts still take a very often flight to the b[o]s[o]m of my old S[ervan]t A. No 3 consecutive hours have passed without the above taking place'.¹⁸ It is impossible to tell to what extent the relationships were

¹⁶ Thomas came from a prominent Unitarian family.

¹⁷ Dubé, *My Failings and Imperfections*, p. 36.

¹⁸ Dubé, *My Failings and Imperfections*, p. 67.

consensual. Anne, who had been Rees's brother's maid before she came into his service, may well have known what might be expected of her.

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