

# Contents

LIST OF PLATES	xvii
LIST OF FIGURES	xix
LIST OF TABLES	xxi
ABBREVIATIONS	xxiii

I General Introduction	i
1. THE BACKGROUND: A NON-SEPARATING AND NON-DIVORCING SOCIETY	1
2. THE HISTORIOGRAPHY: FAMILY HISTORY	8
3. THE OBJECTIVES	11
4. A MODEL OF LEGAL CHANGE	18
5. MORALS	21
6. THE LEGAL SYSTEM	24
7. THE EVIDENCE	27
a. The Use of Legal Records	27
<i>i. Advantages</i>	27
<i>ii. Limitations</i>	29
<i>iii. Fact or Fiction</i>	32
b. The Court of Arches	33
c. Provincial Consistory Courts	41
d. The London Consistory Court	43
e. Other Records	44
8. SOME DEFINITIONS	45

## PART I

THE MAKING OF MARRIAGE	49
------------------------	----

II The Law and Custom of Marriage	51
-----------------------------------	----

1. INTRODUCTION: THE LAW OF MARRIAGE	51
--------------------------------------	----

2. COURTSHIP	59
3. CUSTOMARY UNIONS AND CONCUBINAGE	64
<b>III Contract Marriage</b>	<b>67</b>
1. THE FIRST SUPPRESSION AND THE REVIVAL, 1540-1660	67
2. THE SECOND SUPPRESSION, 1660-1753	71
a. The Ambiguities of the Law	71
b. The Problem of Proof	72
c. Ritual Exchanges	74
d. Legal Policy	76
e. The End of Contract Litigation	79
f. International Comparisons	80
3. LEGAL IMPERIALISM BY THE COMMON LAW JUDGES	81
4. SUITS FOR SEDUCTION OF A DAUGHTER	83
5. SUITS FOR BREACH OF PROMISE	85
<b>IV Clandestine Marriage</b>	<b>96</b>
1. DEFINITION AND DEVELOPMENT	96
2. DEMAND FROM THE LAITY	98
3. SUPPLY BY THE CLERGY	102
a. Surrogates	102
b. Rural Clergy	104
c. London Clergy	106
4. PARLIAMENTARY LEGISLATION, 1666-1718	108
5. FLEET MARRIAGES, 1696-1753	110
6. THE DEMAND FOR REFORM	115
7. CONCLUSION	119
<b>V From the Marriage Act of 1753 to 1868</b>	<b>121</b>
1. THE MARRIAGE ACT OF 1753	121
2. FROM 1753 TO 1868	128
3. CONCLUSION	135

## PART II

THE BREAKING OF MARRIAGE	139
VI Desertion, Elopement, and Wife-sale	141
1. MODES OF MARITAL BREAK-UP	141
2. ELOPEMENT AND DESERTION	141
3. WIFE-SALE	143
VII Private Separation	149
1. THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE PRIVATE SEPARATION DEED, 1650-1760	149
a. Origins: c. 1650	149
b. Evolution, 1650-1760	151
2. THE LEGALITY OF THE PRIVATE SEPARATION DEED, 1740-1860	153
a. The Eighteenth Century	153
b. The Conservative Reaction 1800-1840	154
c. The Liberal Response; 1820-1860	156
3. THE POPULARITY OF THE PRIVATE SEPARATION	158
4. THE ADVANTAGES TO THE HUSBAND	159
5. THE ADVANTAGES TO THE WIFE: FINANCIAL FREEDOM	160
6. THE ADVANTAGES TO THE WIFE: PERSONAL FREEDOM	162
a. Freedom from Legal Harassment	162
b. Freedom from Forcible Seizure and Confinement	164
c. The Loneliness of the Separated Wife	169
7. THE PROBLEM OF CHILD CUSTODY	170
a. Theory	170
b. The Law	171
c. Private Negotiations	174
d. Legitimacy	180
8. CONCLUSION	181

VIII Judicial Separation	183
1. INTRODUCTION	183
a. The Ecclesiastical Courts	183
b. The Number of Litigants	184
c. Types of Litigants	186
d. The Sex Ratio of Plaintiffs	186
e. Costs of Litigation	187
2. TYPES OF SUITS	190
a. Nullity	191
b. Jactitation	192
c. Separation from Bed and Board	192
d. Restitution of Conjugal Rights	194
3. PROCEDURE	195
a. Launching a Suit	195
b. The Rules of Evidence	197
c. The Legal Definition of Cruelty	198
d. Legal Defences	206
i. <i>Condonation</i>	206
ii. <i>Collusion</i>	207
iii. <i>Connivance</i>	208
iv. <i>Recrimination</i>	209
e. Alimony	210
4. SERVANTS AND MASTERS	211
a. The Absence of Privacy	211
b. The Reputation of the Servants	215
c. The Lives of Servants	216
5. SERVANTS IN COURT	220
a. Servants as Observers	220
b. Servants as Delators	224
c. Servants as Witnesses	226
d. Conclusion	228
IX The Action for Criminal Conversation	231
1. THE NATURE OF THE ACTION	231
2. THE PRINCIPLES OF THE ACTION	236
a. Introduction	236
b. Male Honour and the Duel	237
c. Property	241
d. Female Purity	243

3. THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE ACTION:	
1620-1760	244
a. The Pre-History, 1620-1692	244
b. The Era of Stagnation, 1692-1760	246
4. PUBLICITY AND THE PRESS	248
a. The Causes of Publicity	248
b. Types of Publications	249
c. The Motives of the Readers	251
d. The Consequences of the Publicity	253
5. THE APOGEE OF THE ACTION	255
a. The Evidence of Growth	255
b. The Causes of Growth	256
i. <i>A Rise in Wifely Adultery?</i>	256
ii. <i>A Rise in Litigation?</i>	260
6. THE ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGES	262
a. The Status and Wealth of the Plaintiff	262
b. 'Loss of Comfort and Society'	263
c. The Moral Responsibility of the Husband	265
i. <i>Quarrels or Neglect</i>	265
ii. <i>Prior Private Separation</i>	266
iii. <i>Prior Adultery by the Husband</i>	267
d. The Moral Turpitude of the Adulterous Couple	267
e. The Status of the Defendant	270
f. The Capacity of the Defendant to Pay	272
7. THE MORAL PANIC OF THE 1790S	273
a. Lord Kenyon and Thomas Erskine	273
b. Fear of the French Revolution	277
8. THE RESULTS OF THE MORAL PANIC	278
a. The Ruin of Defendants	278
b. Entrapment and Connivance	279
c. Collusion	282
d. Flight	284
e. Conclusion	285
9. THE MORAL REACTION	286
a. Moral Scruples about Taking Damages	286
b. Legal Justice for Women	288
c. The Ideal of Victorian Domesticity	289
10. THE ABOLITION OF THE ACTION IN 1857	290
a. The Opposition to Crim. Con.	290
b. The Defence of Crim. Con.	293
c. Compromise	294

## Contents

II. CONCLUSION	295
a. Stages of Evolution of the Action	295
b. Society and the Law	297
X Parliamentary Divorce	301
I. ESTABLISHING THE RULES	301
a. Introduction	301
b. The Period of Uncertainty, 1534-1597	301
c. Fixing the Rules, 1597-1603	305
d. The Interregnum, 1642-1660	308
2. CREATING THE EXCEPTIONS, 1670-1750	308
a. The Roos Case, 1670	309
b. The Norfolk Case, 1692-1700	313
c. Other Cases in the 1690s	317
d. The Debate about Parliamentary Divorce, 1690-1700	319
3. THE RESHAPING OF THE PROCEDURE, 1750-1830	322
a. The Standardization of the Rules	322
b. The Rise in Numbers	325
c. The Changes in Social Composition	326
4. CHANGES IN PURPOSE AND FUNCTION, 1750-1857	327
a. From the Protection of Property to the Pursuit of Happiness	327
b. The Rise of Connivance and Collusion	328
i. <i>Connivance</i>	328
ii. <i>Collusion</i>	329
iii. <i>The Reaction: Lord Loughborough's Rules of 1798</i>	332
iv. <i>The Reaction: The Anti-Adultery Bills, 1771-1809</i>	335
5. DIVORCED AND REMARRIED WIVES, 1750-1857	339
a. Introduction	339
b. Separation from Children	340
c. Social Ostracism	341
d. Financial Position	345
6. CONCLUSION	346
XI Divorce Reform Proposals, 1604-1850	347
I. REFORM PROPOSALS FROM 1604 TO 1800	347

## Contents

2. OPPOSITION TO REFORM, 1604-1800	350
3. RISING DEMANDS, 1800-1850	353
a. Social Changes	353
b. The Exclusion of All but the Rich	354
c. The Revolt of the Lawyers	357
d. The Exclusion of Wives as Petitioners	360
e. Women's Demand for Legal Justice	362
4. THE DEBATES OVER THE ELLENBOROUGH DIVORCE AND DR PHILLIMORE'S BILL, 1830	364
5. CONCLUSION	366
XII The Passage of the Divorce Reform Act, 1850-1857	368
1. PRELIMINARY SKIRMISHES	368
2. THE DEBATE OVER THE DIVORCE BILL, 1856-1857	371
a. Government Objectives	371
b. Outside Pressure Groups	372
c. The Drive for Women's Legal Rights	374
d. The Battle over the Bill, 1857	378
XIII Epilogue: The Century of Divorce Law Reform, 1857-1987	383
1. THE EFFECTS OF THE ACT OF 1857	383
a. Conservative Moral Attitudes	383
b. The Number of Divorces, 1858-1900	387
c. The Benefits to Women	388
d. Conclusion	388
2. DIVORCE LAW REFORM, 1906-1923	390
a. Reformist Moral Attitudes	390
b. The Royal Commission of 1912	392
c. The Divorce Law Reform Bill 1918-1923	394
d. The Results of the Act of 1923	396
3. THE DIVORCE REFORM ACT OF 1937	397
a. The Need for Reform	397
b. The Passage of the Act	398
c. The Effects of the Act	401

*Contents*

4. THE DIVORCE REFORM ACT OF 1969	401
a. The Royal Commission of 1956	401
b. The Debate in 1968-1969	406
5. THE DIVORCE REVOLUTION, 1960-1987	409
a. Facts	409
b. Causes	410
c. Consequences	416
Appendix: A list of Pamphlets concerning the Marriage Act of 1753	423
TABLES	424
INDEX	447



# *List of Plates*

*Between pages 130 and 131 and pages 290 and 291*

1. The Pillory for Perjury (E. Aylett, attorney) 1786  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
2. The Court of Arches, by T. Rowlandson, 1808  
(R. Ackerman, *Microcosm of London* (London, 1808). Photo: Princeton University Library)
3. The Consistory Court of Chester, in Chester Cathedral  
(from E. R. C. Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court of Stratford* (London, 1972), by permission of Phillimore and Co. Ltd.)
4. The London Consistory Court, Doctors' Commons, 1825:  
The Suit for Separation of Sir Wastel Brisco  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
5. Courtship in High Life, c.1800  
(Library of Congress)
6. Courtship in Low Life, by T. Rowlandson, 1785  
(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Elisha Whittelsea Fund, 1959)
7. Breach of Promise, c.1770  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
8. £3,000 Damages for Breach of Promise by Mr Hayne to Miss  
Maria Foote, 1824  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
9. A Fleet Marriage of an Adventurer to an Elderly Widow, c.1730  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
10. A Fleet Marriage Certificate  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
11. A Street Scene near the Fleet, by W. Hogarth, 1747  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
12. A Fleet Wedding Feast, c.1747  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
13. Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, by T. Hudson, 1736  
(Copyright photograph from the National Portrait Gallery)
14. Elopement to Gretna Green, 1789  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
15. Elopement of Georgiana Lady Astley with Lt Thomas Garth,  
1826  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)

16. Lord Eldon Depriving Mr Wellesley Pole of Child Custody, 1827  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
  17. Adultery Interrupted  
(*Worgan v. Mulley* in *Trials for Adultery* (London, 1780). Photo: Bodleian Library)
  18. Curiosity, 1817  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
  19. A Master and his Maid, c.1788  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
  20. Court of King's Bench, by T. Rowlandson, 1808  
(R. Ackerman, *Microcosm of London* (London, 1808). Photo: Princeton University Library)
  21. Adultery Discovered, by T. Rowlandson, c.1800  
(Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, University of Indiana)
  22. *Trials for Adultery* (London, 1796): Title page  
(Photo: Bodleian Library)
  23. *Trials for Adultery* (London, 1796): Preface  
(Photo: Bodleian Library)
  24. Lt Peter RN v. J. Hancock, Grocer, for Crim. Con., 1824  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
  25. Mrs Parslow and Captain Sykes, 1789  
(photo: Bodleian Library)
  26. Adultery in a Hotel: Lord Grosvenor and a Prostitute, 1770  
(*Trials for Adultery* (London, 1780); Photo: Bodleian Library)
  27. Adultery of Caroline Lady Harrington and her Footman, 1778  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
  28. Lord Chief Justice Kenyon, by John Opie  
(by courtesy of Lord Kenyon)
  29. Thomas Erskine, Barrister, fainting at his own Eloquence, 1791  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
  30. Lord Erskine's Marriage to Sarah Buck at Gretna Green, 1820  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
  31. The Danger of Crim. Con. Damages, 1797  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
  32. Sir Richard Worseley and Mr G. M. Bissett, 1782  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
- ENDPAPER The Court of King's Bench  
(by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)

## *List of Figures*

	<i>Page</i>
1.1 Court of Arches: All Cases 1660–1849 [Table 1.1]	34
1.2 Court of Arches: All Matrimonial Cases 1660–1849 [Table 1.1]	35
1.3 Court of Arches: Matrimonial Cases as a Proportion of All Cases 1660–1849 [Table 1.1]	36
1.4 Court of Arches: Types of Cases: Marriage or Separation 1660–1849 [Table 1.3]	36
1.5 Court of Arches: All Separation Cases and Cases in Process Books 1660–1849 [Table 1.4]	37
1.6 Map of English Dioceses	39
1.7 Office Prosecutions in Chester and Lichfield Consistory Courts 1660–1779 [Table 1.5]	40
1.8 Matrimonial Cases in Chester, Lichfield, and Exeter Consistory Courts 1660–1799 [Table 1.7]	42
5.1 Proportion of First Marriages in Civil Registry Offices (England and Wales) 1841–1978 [Table 5.1]	134
6.1 Recorded Wife-Sales 1730–1919 [Table 6.1]	145
9.1 Recorded Criminal Conversation Actions 1680–1849 [Table 9.1]	247
9.2 Parliamentary Divorces Preceded by Criminal Conversation Actions 1700–1857 [Table 9.2]	260
9.3 Damages over £2,000 in Criminal Conversation Actions 1680–1857 [Table 9.3]	261
10.1 Parliamentary Divorce Petitions and Acts 1700–1857 [Table 10.1]	325
10.2 Social Status and Parliamentary Divorce 1700–1857 [Table 10.2]	326
10.3 Proportion of Parliamentary Divorce Petitions Withdrawn or Rejected 1700–1857 [Table 10.3]	334
10.4 Proportion of Successful Petitioners for Parliamentary Divorce with No Known Living Issue 1700–1857 [Table 10.4]	
13.1 Divorce Rate per 1,000 Married Couples (England and Wales) 1851–1939 [Table 13.1]	385
13.2 Proportion of Divorce Decrees Awarded to Wives (England and Wales) 1830–1986 [Table 13.2]	386

*List of Figures*

13.3	Divorce Rate per 1,000 Married Couples (England and Wales) 1940-1987 [Table 13.1]	402
13.4	Declared Grounds for Divorce Decrees (England and Wales) 1950-1986 [Table 13.4]	404
13.5	Remarriages as a Proportion of All Marriages (Great Britain) 1901-1986 [Table 13.7]	411
13.6	Average Age at First Marriage (Great Britain) 1901-1986 [Table 13.8]	412
13.7	Proportion of First Marriages Ending in Divorce (England and Wales) by Male Birth Cohort 1900-1954 [Table 13.9]	417
13.8	International Comparisons: Divorce Rates per 1,000 Married Couples 1961-1985 [Table 13.10]	418
13.9	Illegitimate Births as a Proportion of All Births (England and Wales) 1800-1986 [Table 13.11]	419
13.10	Total Children under 11 Years of Divorcing Couples (England and Wales) 1970-1980 [Table 13.12]	419
13.11	Number of Divorced Persons Not Remarried (England and Wales) 1951-1986 [Table 13.13]	421

# *List of Tables*

	<i>Page</i>
1.1 Court of Arches: All Cases and Matrimonial Cases 1660-1849	424
1.2 Court of Arches: Proportion of Matrimonial Cases Reaching Sentence 1660-1745	424
1.3 Court of Arches: Types of Cases 1660-1849	425
1.4 Court of Arches: Proportion of Separation Cases in Process Books 1660-1849	426
1.5 Office Prosecutions in Chester and Lichfield Consistory Courts 1660-1779	426
1.6 Court of Arches: Social Status of Plaintiffs 1660-1819	427
1.7 Matrimonial Cases in Chester, Lichfield, and Exeter Consistory Courts 1660-1799	427
1.8 London Consistory Court: Numbers, Types of Cases, and the Sex Ratio of Plaintiffs 1670-1857	428
5.1 Proportion of First Marriages in Civil Registry Offices (England and Wales) 1841-1978	429
6.1 Recorded Wife-Sales 1730-1919	429
9.1 Recorded Criminal Conversation Actions 1680-1849	430
9.2 Parliamentary Divorces Preceded by Criminal Conversation Actions 1700-1857	430
9.3 Damages over £2,000 in Criminal Conversation Actions 1680-1857	430
9.4 Men of Title Involved in Criminal Conversation Actions and Parliamentary Divorces 1700-1857	431
9.5 Recorded Taxed Costs in Criminal Conversation Actions 1821-1857	431
10.1 Parliamentary Divorce Petitions and Acts 1701-1857	432
10.2 Social Status and Parliamentary Divorce 1700-1857	433
10.3 Proportion of Petitions for Parliamentary Divorce Withdrawn or Rejected 1700-1857	433
10.4 Proportion of Successful Petitioners for Parliamentary Divorce with No Known Living Issue 1700-1857	434
13.1 Divorce Decrees, Divorce Rate per 1,000 Married Couples, and Petitions for Judicial Separation (England and Wales) 1851-1987	435-6

*List of Tables*

13.2	Proportion of Successful Divorce Petitions Filed by Wives, and Proportion of Petitions Supported by Legal Aid (England and Wales) 1830-1986	437-8
13.3	Maintenance Orders by Magistrates Courts 1900-1965	439
13.4	Declared Grounds for Divorce Decrees (England and Wales) 1950-1986	440-1
13.5	Average Duration of Marriage and Proportion of Life Spent Married (England and Wales), by Male Birth Cohorts 1900-1945	442
13.6	Proportion of Divorces by Years of Marriage (Great Britain) 1951-1985	442
13.7	Remarriages as a Proportion of all Marriages (Great Britain) 1901-1986	442
13.8	Average and Median Ages at First Marriage (Great Britain) 1901-1986	443
13.9	Proportion of Marriages Ending in Divorce (England and Wales) by Male Birth Cohorts 1900-1954	443
13.10	International Comparisons: Divorce Rates per 1,000 Married Couples 1961-1985	444
13.11	Illegitimate Births as a Proportion of all Births (England and Wales) 1700-1986	445
13.12	Number of Children under 11 Years of Divorcing Couples (England and Wales) 1970-1980	445
13.13	Number of Divorced Persons Not Remarried (England and Wales) 1951-1986	445