

Meeting Report 18th February 2025

'Illegitimacy'

After a general introduction, referring to Eve McLoughlin's excellent book and the seven social grades of illegitimacy, there were contributions from Terry G, Mary G and Andy W.

An interesting debate arose from Terry's question about the circumstances of the birth of a child inside or outside marriage. Historically speaking, that is. There is no differentiation these days. Depending on the era, R.C. and non conformist marriages were not in themselves a guarantee of legitimacy for subsequent children born. Jews and Quakers were treated in a similar way to Anglicans. A minefield. Thanks, Terry! Georgina B was very helpful to the debate, having been a Registrar in her professional life. It's good to hear the inside story.

Mary G offered a reprise of her story about John's origins. Who would have thought that buying a house in the 1970s could have been so complicated by the requirement for a marriage and birth certificate? Mary explained the situation, and its consequences, very well. She finished off with a splendid family photo, following a formal tying of the knot to gather up the loose ends.

Andy's tale was a bit special. We know him as a commoner, like the rest of us, but he revealed some very blue blood in his DNA. Not everyone can prove Charles II as his ancestor, but Andy can. That made them sit up! His great great etcetera grandmother was Barbara Villiers, who was elevated to become 1st Duchess of Cleveland and Countess of Castlemaine as a fitting reward for bearing so many of Charles' children.



Unfortunately, as the day's topic suggests, Andy cannot claim to be part of a succession to the throne. Never mind, it was a great story and emphasised the benefits of being in the highest social grade of Eve McLoughlin's league table. No shame in being born a Fitzroy.

Four of my own forebears, on the other hand, would have had to struggle, to varying degrees, with social disapproval. There was Harriet Harvey, who didn't know where she was born, nor her precise age, but she had an allowance from her secret father. Elizabeth Clough, however, knew she was from Knottingley, and her age, but had no source of funds, growing up. Both ended up in a better social position in the end, marrying tradesmen. James Ingham knew he was from Hull, was baptised into the Methodist faith aged 23, and did alright in the end. Finally, Sarah Greaves, who was well cared for, raised in her grandfather's house in Wetherby, married twice and died in 1918, in the family home that I knew, and where my father was born.

Roger showed examples of Bastardy Orders from the parish of Spofforth, WRY. There were 42 issued in the years 1752 to 1846! One was singled out for attention, that of Ann Gibson in

1829. John Greaves was identified by the local JPs as the father, and fined £2 1s 1d for and towards her lying-in, and 2s 6d a week for ongoing support (although the language was far more florid than that). In other parishes, the Overseers of the Poor may have brought Orders or Bonds to bear on the likely father.