

Natural Alliances: Illegitimate Children and Familial Relationships in Long Eighteenth Century England

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Being an illegitimate child in England in the long eighteenth century is usually perceived as a lonely experience. Depicted by contemporaries and historians as their parents' first and only child, they are often seen as forced to make their own way through the world seemingly cut off from biological family. This assumption was mirrored in their legal status as 'fillius nullius', the child of nobody. Until the Legitimacy Act of 1926, illegitimate children had no legal kin except their mother, a decisive impediment in matters of property inheritance and poor law settlement.¹ Historical research has tended to agree; although much work has been done on the unmarried mother and her child, and more recently on reputed fathers, the relationships between children and wider kin have been neglected.² Although illegitimate children did tend to be first children, it is statistically unlikely that they were only children.³ Historians have found that having one illegitimate child did not greatly impair women's marriage chances,

¹ Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England. In four books. By William Blackstone, Esq. Solicitor General to Her Majesty* (4th Edition, Oxford, 1770, 4 vols), vol. 1, p. 459, vol. 2, pp. 247-8; Ginger Frost, "'Revolting to Humanity': Oversights, Limitations, and Complications of the English Legitimacy Act of 1926', *Women's History Review* 20.1 (2011), pp. 31-46.

² On unmarried parenthood generally see Patricia Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England, 1580-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). On motherhood see Tanya Evans, *Unfortunate Objects: Lone Mothers in Eighteenth-Century London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Samantha Williams, "'A good character for virtue, sobriety and honesty": Unmarried Mothers' Petitions to the London Foundling Hospital in the Early-Nineteenth-Century', in Alys Levene, Thomas Nutt and Samantha Williams (eds), *Illegitimacy in Britain, 1700-1920* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 86-101. On fatherhood see John Black, 'Who Were the Putative Fathers of Illegitimate Children in London, 1740-1810', in Levene, Nutt and Williams (eds), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, pp. 50-65; Thomas Nutt, 'The Paradox and Problems of Illegitimate Paternity in Old Poor Law Essex' in Levene, Nutt and Williams (eds), *Illegitimacy in Britain*, pp. 102-121; Thomas Nutt, "'There may be supposed something of natural affection": Fatherhood, affiliation and the maintenance of illegitimate children in eighteenth and early-nineteenth century England', paper given at the Australian Research Council Network for Early European Research conference, Perth, Australia (3-8 July 2007); Ben Harvey, 'The Putative Fathers of Swinton, England: Illegitimate Behaviour under the Old Poor Laws, 1797-1835', *Journal of Family History* 40.3 (2015), pp. 373-98.

³ Alice Reid, 'The Influences on the Health and Mortality of Illegitimate Children in Derbyshire, 1917-1922' in Levene, Nutt and Williams (eds) *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 178.

indicating that most must have had at least maternal legitimate half-siblings.⁴ However, illegitimate siblinghood was both inclusive and exclusive. An illegitimate child with full siblings who were also illegitimate was rare; Anna Brueton's study of baptisms in South Wales found that less than half a per cent of illegitimate children had a traceable illegitimate full sibling.⁵ Illegitimacy therefore bestowed liminality on a child, by making them either biologically or legally different from their siblings.

In the last ten years, work on normative sibling relationships by Leonore Davidoff and Amy Harris among others has emphasised that they were governed by shifting dynamics of equality and rivalry based on gender and birth order.⁶ But, no work has been done on the effect of illegitimacy in this division of power between siblings. It must be acknowledged that composite families were not unusual in a high mortality demographic regime. However, unlike stepchildren, illegitimate siblings had no claim to inheritance and could also still have a separate living parent, thereby changing the nature of competition for communal emotional and material resources. Stepfamilies were also socially recognised; there were numerous advice manuals on ideal stepparent behaviour, for example, but none I have found comment on the difficulties of bringing up a spouse's illegitimate child. Prescriptive literature encouraged parents to treat all children equally and exhorted children to love and respect their siblings: 'those who join in Blood...Should live in Unity and Peace'.⁷ However, the literature also assumed that all children would be legitimate. This paper uses correspondence and life writing from a range of case studies that are part of a larger sample. They range chronologically from the 1680s to the 1820s, and incorporate individuals from all levels of society, from a

⁴ Richard Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 79-80. The most reliable statistics are from the nineteenth century due to the greater ease of record linkage with census data. 77% of mothers in Rothiemay in the 1870s married, and 85% in Skye, in Andrew Blaikie, Eilidh Garrett and Ros Davies, 'Migration, Living Strategies and Illegitimate Childbearing: A Comparison of Two Scottish Settings, 1871-1881' in Levene, Nutt and Williams, *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p. 159. At least 52% of mothers went on to marry in Colyton, Devon between 1851 and 1881, of which only 15% married the father of their child, J. Robin, 'Illegitimacy in Colyton, 1851-1881', *Continuity and Change* 2.2 (1987), pp. 313-6.

⁵ Anna Brueton, 'Illegitimacy in South Wales, 1660-1870', Unpublished PhD Thesis (University of Leicester, 2015), p. 227. In Colyton between 1740 and 1839, nearly a quarter of unmarried mothers had more than one child, but usually by different fathers, Pamela Sharpe, *Population and Society in an East Devon Parish: Reproducing Colyton, 1540-1840* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), p. 285, cited in Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children*, p. 51.

⁶ Leonore Davidoff, 'Kinship as a Categorical Concept: A Case Study of Nineteenth-Century English Siblings', *Journal of Social History* 39.2 (2005), p. 413; Amy Harris, *Siblinghood and Social Relations in Georgian England: Share and Share Alike* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 3, 12-13, 30-31.

⁷ John Marchant, *Puerilia: or, Amusements for the Young* (London, 1751) pp. 23-4, quoted in Harris, *Siblinghood*, pp. 27, 29.

vagrant to an earl. Despite these differences, they indicate striking similarities in the ways that families interpreted the cultural ideal of siblinghood, and how illegitimacy affected the performance of sibling duty and mutual affection. This paper will investigate how illegitimate birth status affected individuals' material and emotional relationships with siblings, suggesting that socio-economic class prompted variations in treatment. It will conclude with some thoughts on how this might influence historians' thinking about illegitimacy and kinship more widely, particularly on the intersection between affection and obligation in familial relationships.

The memoirs of the Somerset excise officer John Cannon, who was born in 1684, were written to commit his life and that of his relatives and friends to posterity.⁸ When describing his illegitimate half-sister Edith, the product of his father's adultery with a maidservant, he admitted their siblinghood openly, writing that they 'both acknowledged each other as brother & sister, their children respectively calling uncle & aunt'.⁹ He described her adherence to communal values with pride; she was 'frugal' and 'lived above the reach or assistance of any; and truly speaking full worthy the parent from whom she was thought to have drawn part of her breath', adding that she was never 'a disgrace to the legitimate children'.¹⁰ This included Edith as kin by acknowledging her influence on family reputation, but it also marked her out as different. Cannon implied that her worthiness was unexpected, reflecting a common fear that illegitimate children were a drain on communal resources.¹¹

Cannon also treated Edith very differently from his legitimate full siblings, a brother and sister, with whom he had a highly competitive, jealous relationship that originated in childhood. The full siblings fell out primarily over parental favouritism and inheritance,

⁸ Cannon's attitudes to women, sex and courtship, particularly relating to the paternity of his own illegitimate child have been discussed in Tim Hitchcock, 'Sociability and Misogyny in the Life of John Cannon, 1684-1743' in Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen (eds), *English Masculinities, 1660-1800* (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 25-43 and Emma Griffin, 'Sex, Illegitimacy and Social Change in Industrialising Britain' *Social History* 38.2 (2013), pp. 144-7. However, to my knowledge historians have not analysed his relationship with his half-sister.

⁹ John Cannon, *The Chronicles of John Cannon, Excise Officer and Writing Master*, ed. John Money (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 16-18.

¹⁰ Cannon, *Chronicles*, p. 18.

¹¹ Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 44; Gerd Stratmann, 'Nobody's Child, Everybody's Child: Discourses of Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 18.2 (2011), p. 112; Alan Macfarlane, 'Illegitimacy and Illegitimates in English History', in Peter Laslett, Karla Oosterveen and Richard Smith, *Bastardy and its Comparative History: Studies in the History of Illegitimacy and Marital Nonconformism in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, North America, Jamaica and Japan*, (London: E. Arnold, 1980), p. 75.

culminating in Cannon's criticism of their 'haughty, proud & insulting ways', or what Cannon saw as lack of respect for himself as the eldest.¹² He was frequently moved to outbursts of almost comic bitterness against his legitimate siblings, but had nothing but praise for Edith, writing that she 'ever very much affected our author & his children'.¹³ However, Cannon only recorded one instance when he or his immediate family visited Edith, and indeed she is only mentioned twice throughout the six-hundred-page memoir. In October 1739 his unmarried, teenage daughter Susanna and her friend visited Edith, 'who highly respected me and my family [and] who nobly entertained them during their stay with her'.¹⁴ Cannon was pleased by Edith's respectful behaviour, which he felt was lacking from his legitimate siblings. Susanna would ordinarily have been subordinate to her older married aunt, but Edith's illegitimacy relegated her to a lower social status and the position of supplicant. Edith was brought up separately, in her mother's village and her mother's family, completely cut off from paternal inheritance and local influence. She was acknowledged as a sibling, but this physical separation prevented close affective integration, as well as the anger and resentment that plagued the legitimate siblings. Cannon's attentions towards Edith were proportional to the almost non-existent advantage he could gain from the connection; her illegitimacy made her neither an asset, nor a threat to his own position.

This sense that an illegitimate sibling could be acknowledged but yet remain fundamentally subordinate to the rest of the sibling group can also be seen in the late eighteenth century at a slightly higher social level. The naval architect Samuel Bentham (1757-1831), brother of the philosopher Jeremy Bentham, had five legitimate children and at least three illegitimate daughters, Elizabeth Gordon and the full siblings Sophia and Alicia Burton, who were born in the 1790s.¹⁵ In this case, Elizabeth lived with the legitimate Benthams for at least some of her childhood, and so in theory would have benefited from the emotional closeness of shared upbringing, unlike Edith and John Cannon. According to her half-brother George, she was 'a favorite in our family', who 'had been brought up as one of us'.¹⁶ Nonetheless, her difference was marked out in

¹² Cannon, *Chronicles*, p. 199. Similar disagreements can be found on pp. 356, 372, 439.

¹³ Cannon, *Chronicles*, p. 18.

¹⁴ Cannon, *Chronicles*, p. 425. Cannon records Susanna's birth on 2 July 1722, making her seventeen in 1739, Cannon, *Chronicles*, p. 169.

¹⁵ For more information on Samuel Bentham's family, see Catherine Pease-Watkin, 'Jeremy and Samuel Bentham – The Private and the Public', *Journal of Bentham Studies* 5 (2002), pp. 1-27. Pease-Watkin sees Elizabeth Gordon's childhood as 'happy', in contrast to my assertions, Pease-Watkin, 'Jeremy and Samuel Bentham', p. 18.

¹⁶ George Bentham, *Autobiography 1800-1834*, ed. M. Filipiuk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 262, cited in Pease-Watkin, 'Jeremy and Samuel Bentham', p. 18.

other ways. When their uncle Jeremy brought all the children identical presents, he wrote that 'The announcement of Gordon's cost her a night's sleep: but report says that her joy was a little damped by the apprehension lest her's should be taken from her; which, of course, it will not be.'¹⁷ This suggests that Elizabeth was unused to being treated the same as her siblings, and Jeremy's reference to her as 'Gordon' not only emphasises her exclusion from the family nominally, but also indicated a subordinate position by referring to her as one would a companion or upper servant. The differences between the children only increased as they grew up. On a family trip to Russia she was left there as a companion to a rich family whilst her legitimate siblings returned home to school.¹⁸ A letter from Elizabeth to her brother George in 1813 indicated her uneasy position. She complained that she had not received 'a single line from you' in years, stating 'Sometimes I am enclined to think you have totally forgotten me...but if I were to forget my dear benefactors, I would be the most ungrateful creature upon earth'. She ended her letter, 'Pray present my respects to Mrs Bentham and kiss the children [her siblings] a thousand times for me'.¹⁹ She perceived her primary obligation as gratitude, more akin to a relationship between a poor dependent and her charitable benefactors. This could include a degree of shared identity and affection, but was profoundly unequal, with no right to shared emotional and material resources. Elizabeth did however have more social leverage with the legitimate family than her half-siblings the Burtons, whom the Benthams maintained financially but who had very little contact with the rest of the family.

In some circumstances, however, illegitimate children could form normative, emotionally rewarding relationships with their half-siblings. Henry Herbert, Lord Pembroke, had at least eight children, six of whom were illegitimate. But, only the eldest illegitimate child, Augustus, who was born in 1762, was brought up in the family household with the legitimate siblings George, Lord Herbert and his sister Charlotte. Normative sibling behaviour such as reciprocal practical and emotional help between George and Augustus was expected and encouraged by relatives and friends.²⁰ When Augustus lost his expensive clothes on naval service in America, George's mentor Major

¹⁷ *Rights, Representation and Reform - Nonsense upon Stilts and other Writings on the French Revolution*, ed. P. Schofield, C. Pease-Watkin and C. Blamires (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 323, cited in Pease-Watkin, 'Jeremy and Samuel Bentham', p. 18.

¹⁸ Bentham, *Autobiography*, p. 94, cited in Pease-Watkin, 'Jeremy and Samuel Bentham', p. 18.

¹⁹ The Linnean Society of London: letter in the George Bentham collection, cited in Pease-Watkin, 'Jeremy and Samuel Bentham', p. 19.

²⁰ Harris, *Siblinghood*, pp. 68, 74, 90; Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700* (London: Longman, 1984), p. 50.

Floyd wrote to George, that 'L[or]d P...desires...you will write Aug[ustus]: a jotation about loosing his cloaths so awkwardly... Aug[ustus]: should have it recommended to him, from those he is likely to mind [i.e. his older brother], not to let any thing of the kind happen again'.²¹ The brothers also provided mutually beneficial emotional support. As adults, they defended each other against their father's increasingly volatile behaviour.²² In one instance, responding to Lord Pembroke's criticism of Augustus' supposed lack of ambition, George replied, 'the only thing to be done is to leave him alone, & then rejoice at his being a thorough worthy & pleasant being, which he most undoubtedly is.'²³ Augustus was also integral in supporting George when his wife Elizabeth died suddenly in March 1793. Within five days of Elizabeth's death, Augustus had returned from his naval posting to stay with George and his children. His letters to family friends on George's behalf were full of fraternal concern:

'Lord Herbert...hopes you will excuse his not writing himself...He is now with the children here...& it is to be hoped his mind will be more at ease than when I first met him when he was much affected. I am obliged to leave him tomorrow, my Ship being...ready for sea. I had only leave for a few days to come & see him'.²⁴

He asked a friend who had known them since childhood to come and stay with George, as 'I am obliged to leave this immediately & quitting Ld H: without any person being with him is a matter of distress.'²⁵ Significantly, their father did not come to George in this crisis, and so Augustus took on the role of family protector and organiser while George was grieving. The obligations of the relationship also lasted down the generations, conforming to the sibling ideal; after Augustus' death at sea in 1797, George

²¹ Wiltshire and Swindon Heritage Centre (hereafter WSHC): Pembroke MSS, 2057/F4/28, Major John Floyd to George, Lord Herbert, 20 January 1780. Similar advice was also given five months later, WSHC: Pembroke MSS, 2057/F4/28, Major Floyd to George, 20 June 1780. There are two published collections of the Pembroke correspondence, *The Pembroke Papers, 1734-1780: Letters and Diaries of Henry, Tenth Earl of Pembroke and his Circle*, ed. Sidney, Lord Herbert (London, 1942) and *The Pembroke Papers (1780-1794)*, ed. Sidney, Lord Herbert (London, 1950). Surprisingly there has been very little scholarly attention on the family, with the exception of Sheila R. Thomas, 'Captain Augustus Montgomery, RN (1762-1797): Wiltshire's forgotten aristocratic bastard', *Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Magazine* 101 (2008), pp. 213-25 and a brief description of Henry, 10th Earl of Pembroke's libertinism in Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 173.

²² This was also common to full siblings, Harris, *Siblinghood*, p. 42.

²³ WSHC: Pembroke MSS, 2057/F4/30, George, Lord Herbert to Henry Herbert, Lord Pembroke, 3 April 1787.

²⁴ WSHC: Pembroke MSS, 2057/F4/32, Augustus Montgomery to Reverend William Coxe, 30 March 1793.

²⁵ WSHC: Pembroke MSS, 2057/F4/32, Augustus Montgomery to Reverend William Coxe, 30 March 1793.

found his children suitable careers and marriages, and left them a considerable amount of money in his will.²⁶

It becomes clear, however, that George's relationship with Augustus was fundamentally based on shared upbringing and personal connection, when it is compared to that with their illegitimate sister Caroline. Caroline was brought up abroad and George was only informed of her existence when he was twenty-one, so they were unable to form a close emotional relationship. George did act on her behalf as head of the family; he arranged her marriage settlement, stood as godfather to her first child and dutifully paid the allowance given to her by their father.²⁷²⁸ However, despite Lord Pembroke's repeated requests to George to arrange meetings between Augustus and Caroline, the two brothers showed no interest in cultivating a relationship.²⁹ As George wrote to his father in 1787, 'I do not know why you wish me so particularly to take Caroline in my way, as you do not mention any particular motive for so doing'.³⁰ This was not simple gender bias, as George had doted on his full sister Charlotte, and Harris and Davidoff have found that gender bias operated strongest in encouraging greater affection in sister-brother relationships, due to the 'natural' instincts of the brother to care for his subordinate sister.³¹ Like the Benthams, their relationship was more one of patron and client, or more distant kin, rather than siblings.³² Interestingly, distance was still maintained even when the sibling group was small and consequently less competitive. George had no other surviving legitimate siblings and as heir to a rent roll of £35,000 a year, had abundant material resources to share.

²⁶ Harris, *Siblinghood*, pp. 123-5, 157-8. George left his nephew George Montgomery £9000 and his niece Elizabeth Montgomery £5000 plus her marriage settlement, The National Archives (hereafter TNA): PROB 11/1733/88, Will of the Right Honourable George Augustus Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, 28 April 1826.

²⁷ WSHC: Pembroke MSS, 2057/F4/30, George, Lord Herbert to Henry Herbert, Lord Pembroke, 23 October 1785; Henry Herbert, Lord Pembroke to George, Lord Herbert, 16 February 1785; Henry Herbert, Lord Pembroke to George, Lord Herbert, 20 November 1785.

²⁸ WSHC: Pembroke MSS, 2057/F4/30, George, Lord Herbert to Henry Herbert, Lord Pembroke, 12 August 1787.

²⁹ WSHC: Pembroke MSS, 2057/F4/30, Henry Herbert, Lord Pembroke to George, Lord Herbert, 23 March 1787.

³⁰ WSHC: Pembroke MSS, 2057/F4/30, George, Lord Herbert to Henry Herbert, Lord Pembroke, 12 August 1787.

³¹ Harris, *Siblinghood*, p. 56; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), p. 115; Davidoff, 'Kinship as a Categorical Concept', pp. 414-5.

³² Harris states that the ideal sibling relationship was explicitly not akin to patron-client, Harris, *Siblinghood*, p. 57.

Illegitimacy could also profoundly affect the self-identity of an illegitimate child by creating a sense of difference from siblings. James Dawson Burn was born in 1800 and wrote an autobiography about his life as a vagrant travelling around Northern England. He was the only illegitimate child in his family and consequently had no full siblings, but had multiple legitimate half-siblings from his parents' marriages to other partners. Burn was brought up with his mother's children, and so was closer to them emotionally and in age. When he was separated from them and sent to live with his biological father in Ireland, he wrote, 'I lost three brothers as dear to me as if we had all owed our being to one father.' In contrast, 'My new-found brother and sisters were strangers to me, and from the peculiar circumstances of our left-handed [i.e. illegitimate] relationship, and the unlooked-for nature of my introduction, it was very likely we should remain strangers to each other, at least in feeling.'³³ Both of these statements suggest Burn was acutely aware of the difference his illegitimacy made and of the legitimate ideal; he loved his maternal brothers 'as if' they all shared paternity, implying this emotion was unexpected. Furthermore, poor connection with his paternal half-siblings was greatly exacerbated by his illegitimacy, as he implied that a long lost full sibling could have been adopted in time. There was no suggestion of any innate feeling or natural affinity with these half-siblings, contrary to the cultural ideal.³⁴

His awareness of the cultural tropes of siblinghood did however influence his behaviour as an elder brother; he was the only male illegitimate child in this sample who was also the oldest. Burn was closest to his maternal brother Robert, next youngest to him in age. Towards Robert, Burn took on the archetypal responsibilities of the elder brother as protector and advisor; he took him to look for work after their mother remarried and moved away, and found him an apprenticeship as soon as he reached a settled position himself.³⁵ Burn stated, 'This relieved my mind a great deal, as I considered myself responsible...for his well-being'.³⁶ When Robert died, Burn wrote that his death 'cast a gloom over my hope for the time being', but stated that Robert ruined his 'bright future' by being 'In every particular...a *fac simile* of his father; he was a creature of impulse.'³⁷ This indicates that even in emotionally close relationships, illegitimate individuals were

³³ James Dawson Burn, *The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy*, ed. David Vincent (London: Europa, 1978), p. 71.

³⁴ Harris, *Siblinghood*, pp. 57-8.

³⁵ Burn, *Autobiography*, p. 106. In this he conformed to the role of 'second patriarch', Tul Israngura, 'Who was then the "second patriarch"? Gendering the eldest brother in Georgian England', paper delivered at the Life Cycles Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research (2 February 2016).

³⁶ Burn, *Autobiography*, p. 134.

³⁷ Burn, *Autobiography*, p. 148.

always aware of their difference; Burn felt that he did not share Robert's paternally inherited flaws, and indeed saw his own illegitimacy as giving him superior drive to succeed. Although as a vagrant, access to material resources could hardly have been more scarce and competitive, Burn focused on a shared emotional past, loyalty and feelings of affinity when evaluating his sibling relationships.

These case studies indicate that in the majority of cases, illegitimacy did have some negative effect on sibling relationships. In most instances, illegitimate siblings were seen as separate from the full sibling group, and relegated to a subsidiary position more akin to that of a poor cousin or unrelated charitable dependent. Kinship was acknowledged, suggesting that shame was not a significant factor, but equal claim to siblinghood was not. Their reduced social and economic power, protected by neither legal rights nor social custom, limited their leverage in sibling relationships, but conversely also exempted them from some of the more ferocious familial disputes. Close, emotionally and materially rewarding relationships could be formed, but they were fundamentally voluntary and uncompelled by any sense of duty or obligation. John Cannon continued to socialise and care for his full siblings, regardless of how much he disliked them personally, due to their permanent ties of shared familial reputation and material inheritance. This was not the case for illegitimate children, whose acceptance was heavily dependent on shared upbringing, close emotional attachment and personal amity. This accounts for the selective integration of some illegitimate children over others, and indicates that their position was fundamentally insecure, existing outside the bounds of normative cultural and social prescriptions. In some cases, mutual affection could allow illegitimate children to escape the mark of dependence and become both the recipients and bestowers of familial support, particularly during crises. As David Cressy argues '[w]hat mattered was not how far apart you lived or how often you saw each other, but what the relationship was worth when it came to the crunch'.³⁸ The examples of Burn and the Pembrokes indicate that illegitimate siblings could be included in mutually beneficial sibling support networks, echoing the normative cultural ideal of sibling love and duty. In these cases, mutual affection overrode the instinct to prioritise the legitimate family, and encouraged the pooling of emotional and material resources.

³⁸ David Cressy, 'Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England', *Past & Present* 113 (1986), p. 49.

How do we explain these variations, other than suggesting that some individuals just got on better than others? I have found significant continuity over time, so I do not think that this is part of a simple linear chronological progression towards greater acceptance of illegitimacy. Shared upbringing was helpful, but not a foolproof method of encouraging integration; Elizabeth Gordon lived with her Bentham siblings as a child but was then diverted down the path of employment rather than genteel education. Birth circumstances were also not as important as you might think; both Edith Cannon and Augustus Pembroke resulted from adultery, but their position within the family was arguably better than that of Elizabeth Gordon, born before her father's marriage. Socio-economic class was a significant influence. For the labouring poor, poverty and high geographical mobility could enforce separation between siblings, but also encourage mutual dependence and support. For the upwardly mobile middling sorts for whom kin relationships were a primary means of self-aggrandisement, illegitimate children could be acknowledged, but the relationship was highly unequal. John Cannon, for instance, acknowledged his illegitimate half-sister but saw her as inferior because she provided no material asset to the family. Among the elite, resources could be plentifully shared between siblings, which would perhaps also encourage shared upbringing in a large household.

What these brief examples tell us, is not only that the fields of illegitimacy and siblinghood deserve more attention, but also that historians should be encouraged to look beyond the normative. Awareness of how individuals and society dealt with unorthodox relationships sheds further light on how families operated in everyday life. For the history of illegitimacy, it indicates that viewing the child in isolation, or even primarily in terms of the parent-child relationship, does not accurately portray how this birth category affected the lives of these individuals. My further research into other relationships, such as stepparents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, indicates that the attitudes of wider family were integral to the social integration, emotional wellbeing and material welfare of illegitimate children.

Although my findings are speculative, I have found strong evidence that familial relationships were inherently flexible, and could expand or contract within the permeable bounds of cultural ideals and social prescriptions to include unusual relationships. Emotion was integral in a kinship system that was fundamentally voluntary, and less bound by prescriptions of expectation and obligation than historians have hitherto suggested. Fulfilling and important relationships could exist, where

expectation and obligation were weak. When George Herbert's wife died, he threw himself into his army duties. A letter he wrote to his mother from the battlefield indicated the people whom he felt were most important in his life. 'I wish very much to return to England to see my children, to see you, to see Augustus', his brother, not through shared name, parentage or legal status, but through affection.³⁹

³⁹ WSHC: Pembroke MSS, 2057/F4/31, George, Lord Herbert to Elizabeth, Lady Pembroke, 27 August 1793.