**Elizabethan Wedding Customs - Arranged Marriages and Contracts**

In Elizabethan England, women were often considered the literal property of their fathers. Among the “upper orders,” young people often had little, if any voice, in decisions about whom they would marry. Marriages were frequently based on the wealth or prestige they could bring, and some children were “promised” or engaged as soon as they were born. Young people in the lower classes had a good deal more freedom in questions of marriage. With parents’ permission boys could marry legally at 14 and girls at 12, although few boys married younger than 21. The play establishes that Juliet is almost 14 (1.3.17-18). Romeo’s age is not given.

<http://www.william-shakespeare.info/elizabethan-wedding-customs.htm>

It is generally considered foolish to marry for love, although love may occur in marriage.

Your parents and friends are better equipped than you are to look out for your best interests, being mature and experienced in the world. Let them negotiate and recommend and you’re much more likely to be happy in marriage.

Just because a marriage is arranged doesn’t mean you’ve never met the other person. Except among the lofty nobility, most people arrange their children’s marriages with the children of neighbors and friends.

The lower on the social scale you are, the more likely you are to have a choice in the matter.

<http://elizabethan.org/compendium/10.html>

**Betrothal and Wedding**

With parental permission, boys are legal to marry at 14, girls at 12, though it is not recommended so early. One comes of age at 21.

Sir Thomas More recommended that girls not marry before 18 and boys not before 22.

In non-noble families, the most common age for marriage is 25-26 for men, about 23 for women. This is because it’s best to wait until you can afford a home and children. Also, most apprenticeships don’t end until the mid 20s.

Noble families may arrange marriage much earlier. Robert Dudley’s sister Katherine, who became the countess of Huntingdon, did go to the altar at age 7, but that was extraordinary.

When the participants are very young, it is principally to secure a dynastic alliance. They generally do not live together as man and wife (by any definition). Often, the bride may go to live with the groom’s family to be brought up in domestic management by her mother-in-law.

<http://elizabethan.org/compendium/9.html>

Elizabethan Family Life

M**arriage**

The people of Elizabethan times believed that families were to become the role models of the society. Families in England were regarded important in its role to society. It was a time of family rules based from Bible sections indicating the responsibility of the parents to raise their children in a proper manner. Love was not considered a reason to marry, but did recognize that love may come during married life. Arranged marriages were mostly between neighbors and friends except for noble classes. Lower social classes were freer to make their own choice in marriage matters.

Wives were regarded as “property” of their husbands and the women were expected to get married and be dependent on the male population all of their life. Men were expected to ask a woman her hand in marriage and marriage was a requirement to be able to take legal command of the household, to be able to work in a public office and to get involved in any position with civic duties. Children were also acknowledged as “property” of their parents, and were commanded to respect them. Family ties were very close knit and well respected and it was regarded that house rules were followed with proper obedience.

The Elizabethans had a high regard for family in the community. They followed a deep respect for the importance of hierarchy. Their customary rulings for the behavior of children were taken from Bible passages, which explained the duty of parents in properly raising their children and likewise explaining the responsibility of children to respect and obey their elders. The life expectancy reached until 42 years old and the richer classes lived years longer than that.

<http://www.thelostcolony.org/education/Students/History/Elizabethan_England.htm>