

# Breach of Promise to Marry

A History of how Jilted Brides Settled Scores

Denise Bates

Published January 2014

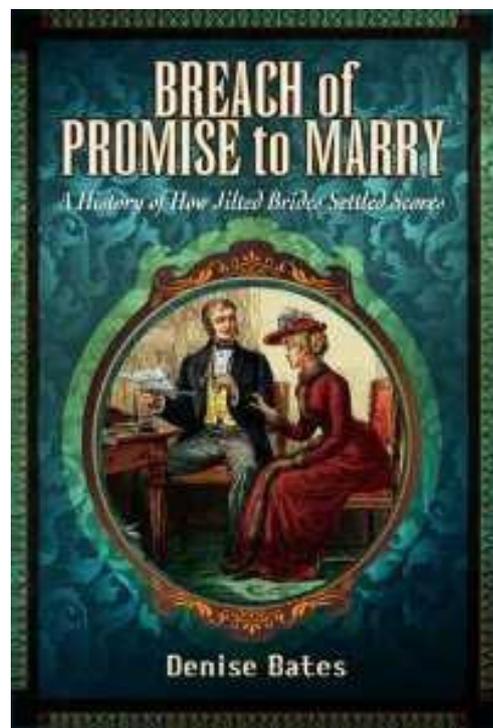
---

Discover how the real Miss Havishams took revenge on faithless fiancés

---

Breach of promise was an unusual law, enabling a jilted woman or man to claim damages from the person who had spurned them. It developed in the late-eighteenth century, attained widespread popularity in the nineteenth and fell into disrepute in the twentieth, before being abolished in 1970.

- The threat of a ruinous claim hung over any courting man who changed his mind. Jurors were biased towards beautiful women, so virtuous maidens, unmarried mothers, embittered spinsters and career fraudsters often enjoyed the upper hand over love 'em and leave 'em seducers, naïve young men, ageing Lotharios and titled aristocrats.
- Who were the real Miss Havishams? Actresses, dressmakers, prostitutes and servants queued up alongside gentlemen's daughters to take a man to court. Learn why Catherine Kempshall shot the man who denied their engagement and why an outraged jury awarded Gladys Knowles record damages of £10,000.
- From Jane Austen onwards a breach of promise claim was too scandalous to mention in a novel. Discover what breach of promise would imply about a heroine who took a claim into the courtroom.
- Find out why Victorian no-win-no-fee lawyers were so keen to help women bring a claim for breach of promise.
- Discover the lies a warring couple might tell a jury, how much a claim was worth to a woman and why women who worked for a living received a third less in damages than those who chose to remain at home.



Written in an accessible, non-academic style, *Breach of Promise to Marry* will appeal to anyone who enjoys discovering the hidden side of history. The author has delved into newspaper archives and literature to expose the fascinating world of failed engagements. Her conclusions are based on rigorous analysis of her sources.

*Breach of Promise to Marry* is published by Pen & Sword, priced £12.99 (ISBN 9781783030361) ([www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/Breach-of-Promise-to-Marry/p/6119](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/Breach-of-Promise-to-Marry/p/6119))



## About the author

Denise Bates is a graduate historian and writer, specialising in the nineteenth century. She is the author of *Pit Lasses*, published by Pen & Sword in 2012 and has contributed features to a number of magazines, including *BBC History* and the *Times Educational Supplement*.

Denise Bates is available for interview, talks or to write features.  
[www.denisebates.co.uk](http://www.denisebates.co.uk) or email [postbox@denisebates.co.uk](mailto:postbox@denisebates.co.uk)