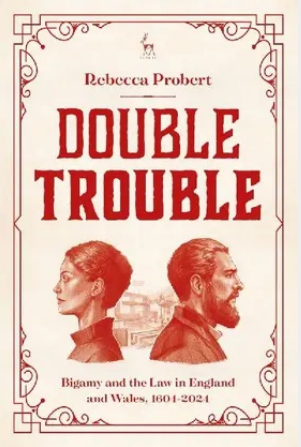
Probert

Double Trouble

Bigamy and the Law in England and Wales, 1604-2024



This book provides the first in-depth study of the crime of bigamy from the 17th century to the present day. Between 1604 and 2024, around 30,000 individuals were prosecuted for bigamy in England and Wales. A few were able to establish a defence to the charge, but most were convicted. How they were punished varied hugely across the centuries - from execution, branding, whipping, transportation, and imprisonment through to fines and community service. Double Trouble details the legal framework that underpinned such prosecutions. As a companion volume to Double Lives: Stories of Bigamy in England and Wales, 1604-2024, it sets the offence in the context of the changing laws on marriage and divorce, and examines the consequences of bigamy for those involved, including the remedies that were available to the often-deceived second spouse. Drawing on a wide array of sources from the 17th century to the present day, including formal law reports, legal treatises, newspapers, censuses, parish registers, divorce petitions and Parliamentary debates, this book shows how bigamy should be taken seriously as an offence that all too often involved deception, abandonment and heartbreak.

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