

I DON'T

Marriage plunges to lowest level since 1895



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MORE couples than ever are turning their back on marriage and opting to live together.

The number of weddings is at its lowest for over a century, latest figures reveal. But it is not because people don't want to – just they can't afford it, it seems.

A total of 232,990 couples tied the knot in 2008, down from 235,370 in 2007 and the lowest total since 1895.

In addition the marriage rate, or number of marriages per head of population, fell to its lowest since records began in 1862, says the Office for National Statistics.

Since 1981 alone the number of marriages in England and Wales has fallen by a third.

But Dr Samantha Callan, chairman of the Centre for Social Justice think-tank, which has campaigned for tax breaks on marriage, believes people still want to tie the knot. She

said: "The British Household panel study found that 75% of those under the age of 35 expected to marry, 80% of those living together want to marry and close to 90% of young people want to marry.

"The barriers increase the poorer you are. It increasingly depends not on love and commitment, but on wealth. This is because of the iniquitous benefits system, which actually encourages people to live apart."

Resolution, a group of family lawyers, is concerned that cohabiting

couples do not realise they do not have the same financial protection as married couples.

It is calling for the legal benefits of marriage to be extended.

Vice-chairman David Allison said: "A smaller percentage of people got married in 2008 than in any year since records began and at the same time the number of unwed couples living together is up.

"Yet the majority don't understand that living together does not give them financial protection should the relationship end, which leaves countless people vulnerable to hardship."

A Church of England spokesman said: "Couples now see marriage as the crown of their relationship, something to wait for, rather than a gateway to adulthood as it was.

"We have found that marriage is regarded as a serious commitment and something people aspire to, even those already living together.

He added: "Many churches are celebrating marriage on Sunday at special services for Valentine's Day."

Number of marriages in England and Wales

