

**THE ENGLISH ANGLICAN PRACTICE OF
PEW-RENTING, 1800-1960**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study indicates that several common assumptions about Anglican pew-renting are unrealistic. Although many critics writing in the nineteenth century, and some historians since, believe that rented sittings in Anglican churches were filled by the very rich and the upper-middle class, the evidence strongly indicates that the primary renters were from the middle-middle and lower-middle classes, particularly small business owners. Also contrary to popular belief, pew-letting continued in many churches well into the twentieth century, in some instances into the 1950s and 1960s, and one Anglican church in the British Isles has continued to rent sittings into the twenty-first century. This is qualified, though, by the finding that those churches that rented sittings persisted in the practice for longer than was expected, but the number of new churches which instituted seat-letting systems dwindled, particularly in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Pew-renting is also seen to have been most often practiced in large urban churches of low-church orientation. The findings further suggest that most churches abolished pew-rents in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, not for philosophical or charitable reasons, but because profits diminished to the point at which the cost and trouble of administering a system of pew-rents could not economically justify the revenue produced. Finally, this study has uncovered some evidence both of private pew-renting in addition to proprietary chapels, and of informal pew-renting in the form of tips paid to pew-openers and other officials for preferred seating for a single church service. Examples of dishonest behaviour by church officials are also given.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations indicate the research centres noted:

BLARS: Bedfordshire & Luton Archives & Record Service
BLSAC: Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre
BLSA: Bromley Local Studies & Archives
BRO: Berkshire Record Office
BRRO: Bristol Record Office
CCA: Canterbury Cathedral Archives
CCALSS: Cheshire and Chester Archives and Local Studies Service
CERC: Church of England Record Centre
CKS: Centre for Kentish Studies
CLSAC: Camden Local Studies & Archives Centre
CRO: Cornwall Record Office
CROC: Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle
CROK: Cumbria Record Office, Kendal
CROW: Cumbria Record Office & Local Studies Library, Whitehaven
CWAC: City of Westminster Archive Centre
DALHC: Dudley Archives & Local History Centre
DHC: Dorset History Centre
DRO: Devon Record Office
DuRO: Durham Record Office
EKAC: East Kent Archives Centre
ERYARS: East Riding of Yorkshire Archives & Record Service
ESRO: East Sussex Record Office
GA: Gloucestershire Archives
HFA: Hammersmith & Fulham Archives & Local History Centre
LA: Lincolnshire Archives
LAD: Lambeth Archives Department
LaRO: Lancashire Record Office
LLSA: Lewisham Local Studies and Archives
LMA: London Metropolitan Archives
LPL: Lambeth Palace Library
MALs: Manchester Archives and Local Studies
MALSC: Medway Area Local Studies Centre
NAK: National Archives, Kew
NDRO: North Devon Record Office
NCS: Northumberland Collections Service
NRO: Norfolk Record Office
NA: Nottinghamshire Archives
ORO: Oxfordshire Record Office
PMR: Portsmouth Museums and Records Service
PWDRO: Plymouth and West Devon Record Office
SRO: Somerset Archive and Record Office
SSTAS: Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service
SROBSE: Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds branch
TA: Teesside Archives
WA: Wigan Archives Service
WSRO: West Sussex Record Office
WYASK: West Yorkshire Archive Service, Kirklees
WYASW: West Yorkshire Archive Service, Wakefield

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INTRODUCTION

Pew-renting entails a payment for the use of a sitting in church over a period of time, which can last from a single Sunday to a lifetime, although the latter is perhaps more accurately described as a lease. The use might be exclusive to the renter, or might be conditional on each Sunday that the renter appear before a certain time, such as the reading of the first lesson, upon which the sitting might be filled by another congregant. The practice of pew-renting blossomed under the Church Building Acts, the first of which was passed in 1818, which officially made pew-renting a legitimate part of fund-raising for new churches in the widespread church-building of the nineteenth century. And within two decades of the 1818 Act, a vigorous protest sprang up against pew-renting, based mainly on the contention that the poor, lacking the money for luxuries such as pews, were demeaned by their relegation to ‘free seats’, and might take umbrage and refuse to attend church. This impression persisted well into the twentieth century, and remains logical among some historians.

In 2006 I completed the first detailed study of Anglican pew-renting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a 20,000-word University of Wales, Lampeter, MTh dissertation, entitled “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’: The Practice of Pew-renting in Kentish Anglican Churches’. This was limited to an overview of Anglican pew-renting in Kent, as well as sundry other information gleaned from secondary sources. The present study builds on my earlier work, while greatly extending the geographical scope and asking many new questions, including an in-depth study on primary sources in Bristol – which permits study of the extent and mechanics of pew-renting in churches of different demographic areas in the same urban area – and with new ideas and greater support for initial conclusions. The key new concepts concern the greater propensity for pew-rents to be charged in churches with low-church rather than high-church orientation, the times at which pew-renting began to go out of fashion, and the greater approval of pew-renting among clergymen with low- and broad-church sympathies; that the social class of pew-renters, and the demographic areas of

the churches which charged them, were likely to be lower down the social scale than has previously been supposed; and the reasons that pew-rents were begun and ended, which was largely financial in nature.

The Need for the Present Study

The real value and importance of Church history consists in its bearing upon the actual state of things in the present day. We find ourselves in the midst of a certain system, amidst institutions, creeds, customs, forms, opinions and beliefs; and to be enabled to comprehend what we see around us, or to enter its spirit, we are compelled to inquire how this state of things has arisen.¹

The study of how institutions have historically financed themselves is also important, enabling the student to ‘apply the lessons of past disaster in evaluating our present financial structure’.² Studies of how the church financed itself are accordingly necessary for a proper understanding of the church itself; their importance is magnified by the widespread interest and media coverage of abuses in churches’ fund-raising and misuse of money given.

As a form of church financing, pew-renting has been overlooked. In 1987 Callum Brown noted that ‘comparatively meagre attention has been paid to how’ the system of pew-renting ‘worked in practice and to what its effects were on congregational life’.³ Indeed, since the nineteenth century no book has been written mainly on pew-renting, and few studies have been done since Brown’s analysis. The few treatments in existence have to some extent mentioned the impact of pew-renting on congregants and their interaction with each other and with their churches. But none have addressed the subject over a long time period or a wide geographic area. Only a few years ago Snell & Ell noted the dearth of research on this topic, writing that ‘the extent of pew-rent payment in different periods has yet to be addressed’.⁴

¹ Review of Carwithen, J.B.S., *The History of the Church of England*, in *English Review*, v. 12 (1849), pp. 418-431, p. 418.

² Rockwell, A.E., ‘Review of Panic on Wall Street: A History of America’s Financial Disasters’, *Journal of Finance*, v. 24 (1969), p. 773.

³ Brown, C.G., ‘The Costs of Pew-renting: Church Management, Church-going and Social Class in Nineteenth-century Glasgow’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, v. 38, n. 3 (July 1987), pp. 347-361, p. 347.

⁴ Snell, K.D.M. & Ell, P.S., *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 337

In 1957, for example, Edward Wickham's book on both Anglican and Dissenting institutions in Sheffield was published.⁵ Its thesis is that, contrary to popular belief that disaffection occurred later, the working classes began to become disenchanted with Anglicanism from the rise of the industrial towns in the eighteenth century. Wickham postulated that by the turn of the nineteenth century the working classes were largely alienated from the Anglican Church, and the increased religious practice later in the century was largely limited to the leisured and middle classes. Wickham's material on pew-rents is largely facts and figures, including the variety of rents charged among different churches and chapels, the shortage of church accommodation, the ratio of free seats to rented ones and the effect of population growth particularly as urbanisation progressed in the nineteenth century, the numbers of seats set aside for the poor, and the extent of objections to the practice as a whole. But Wickham did not attempt much analysis regarding the *decline* of pew-rents.

A few years later K.S. Inglis wrote on the same general subject,⁶ pointing out the dearth of studies taking into account worshippers' social environment.⁷ Inglis also believed that the working English were estranged from the religious establishment earlier than had generally been thought,⁸ and sought to extend Wickham's work past the confines of Sheffield and document the efforts made by English religious leaders in the second half of the century to win back the lower classes.⁹ He accordingly detailed the inadequate number of 'free' seats, *i.e.*, rent-free seats, in mid-Victorian churches, and the abolition of many pew-rents by the end of the century, but believed that despite this the poor generally did not return to church.¹⁰ Inglis further discussed the differences between Anglican and Dissenting approaches to pew-

⁵ Wickham, E.R., *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London: Lutterworth, 1957).

⁶ Inglis, K.S., *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

⁷ Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, p. 12; Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, p. 324.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 326-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-57

renting and Roman Catholics' distaste for the practice.¹¹ Limitations of Inglis's treatment are, first, that little attempt was made to find the source of pew-rents' demise, and second, that no consideration is given to any efforts the elite working class may have made to find within their budgets sufficient money to rent sittings.

Callum Brown's work in 1987 focused specifically on pew-rents in Glasgow. Although concentrating mainly on the phenomenon in Victorian churches, his article also went back to some forty years earlier to describe major changes in pew-renting in the eighteenth century, initially resulting from a shortage of church accommodation due to population growth.¹² The dearth of church seating was not confined to Glasgow, of course, and many of the details Brown mentioned are similar to the phenomena Wickham noted in Sheffield, including the usually inadequate number of free seats.¹³ Brown's treatment, however, dealt much more with the financial and economic aspects of pew-renting, which was much more centralised and systemised in Scotland than in England, generally but not always controlled by kirk sessions and town councils rather than churches and chapels themselves.¹⁴ Brown hypothesised that Glaswegian church authorities in the nineteenth century found themselves in financial difficulty due to the pressures of both industrialisation and the *laissez faire* attitude Brown found to be prevalent in Glasgow at the time.¹⁵ A particular strength of Brown's study is his unique description of the fluctuation of pew-rent prices to optimise revenue in changing economic circumstances.¹⁶ Also, within his economic analysis he noted the amount of space of each rented seat, which was increased in 1842 due to the complaints of cramped congregants, but only by half an inch per sitting, from 17 to 17½ inches and from

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-7, 106-8, 129-30.

¹² Brown, 'The Costs of Pew-Renting', pp. 351ff.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 349, 358.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 355-7.

17½ to 18 inches.¹⁷ Although Brown's study evidently was not intended to encompass the demise of pew-renting and cannot be said to be weak in that regard, this omission severely limits the value of the work for the historian.

Finally, in 1996 S.J.D. Green delved deeply into the decline of pew-rents in a study of churches and chapels in a city, Halifax; a town, Keighley; and a village, Denholme – all in the West Riding of Yorkshire – from late Victorian times to just after the end of the First World War.¹⁸ Green noted that in 1870 almost all churches and chapels in the three areas in question charged pew-rents, but that fifty years later almost all pew-rents in the area had been abolished.¹⁹ As did Brown and Wickham, Green cited statistics of the revenue brought in by pew-rents, although only in a few instances.²⁰ The main strength of Green's treatment of pew-renting is his conclusion that, far from resulting from a mid-Victorian barrage of complaints about its appropriateness, pew-renting virtually disappeared due mainly to widespread church-building, which led to over-accommodation. Other factors, including the business depression of the 1880s, also struck at the letting of sittings. Consequently, by the 1890s, pew-renting in the churches Green studied was no longer economically viable: 'The simple truth was that more and more churches were being built at a time when there was less and less hard evidence that there were congregations willing and able to bear the burden of their expense'.²¹ The main limitation of Green's work to the historian of pew-rents, though, is its narrow parameters; the book is 'self-consciously limited in geographical scope and chronological range'.²²

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 356-7.

¹⁸ Green, S.J.D., *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 147-50, 158, 162.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Other recent authors have included pew-rents in their studies, but most only mention them in passing and generally shed little light on the subject. John Tomlinson has recently provided some treatment, although his wider subject does not depend to any great degree on pew-renting.²³ Beryl Hurley has ably detailed pew-renting in Wiltshire churches but offers little scrutiny of the facts and figures presented.²⁴ A few other studies have provided some analysis; in a 1969 work W.E. Tate discussed the early history of pew-rents, including the differences between fees for male and female congregants.²⁵ G.I.T. Machin's 1977 book pointed out Victorian parliamentary motions and the debate on pew-renting.²⁶ In articles in 1995 and 1998, R. Stark, R. Finke and L.R. Iannaccone hypothesised that pew-renting was responsible for working-class alienation in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁷ The statistical evidence presented by Alasdair Crockett in 2000, however, casts doubt on this suggestion.²⁸ Albert Pomfret's 2002 doctoral thesis on English proprietary chapels often mentions pew-rents as an inherent part of the revenue of such enterprises,²⁹ but suffers from repetitiveness and a tendency to state the obvious. Also, none of the above sources do little more than mention the law relating to pew-rents.

²³ Tomlinson, J.W.B., 'From Parson to Professional: The Changing Ministry of the Anglican Clergy in Staffordshire, 1830-1960' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2008), p. 187.

²⁴ *Wiltshire Pew-Rents*, v. 1-5, Beryl Hurley, ed. (Devizes: Wiltshire Family History Society, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2004)

²⁵ Tate, W.E., *The Parish Chest: A Study of the Records of Parochial Administration in England* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 90-1.

²⁶ Machin, G.I.T., *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832 to 1868* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 265, 274, 340.

²⁷ Stark, R., Finke, R., & Iannaccone, L.R., 'Pluralism and Piety: England and Wales, 1851', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, v. 34 no. 4 (1995), pp. 431-444; Finke, R. & Stark, R., 'Religious Choice and Competition', *American Sociological Review*, v. 63 no. 5 (1998), pp. 761-6, p.764, cited in Crockett, A., *Variations in Churchgoing Rates in England in 1851: Supply-Side Deficiency or Demand-Led Decline?* University of Oxford Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History, No. 36 (Oxford: Nuffield College, 2000), p. 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁹ Pomfret, A., 'An Ethical Evaluation of the Historical Significance of Proprietary Chapels' (unpublished PhD thesis, Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 2002), pp. 3, 14-5, 30-1, 35-6, 38-9, 60, 64, 89, 99, 104, 114, 118.

Due to all this, a more thorough treatment of pew-renting appears in order. Such a treatment would encompass a much wider geographical area than those studied by Wickham, Brown and Green, and would include the law of pew-rents, particularly the effect of the 1818 and subsequent Church Building Acts. Further, the social environment of those involved in pew-renting should be investigated, and as emphasised by Wickham, Inglis and Brown, the study should include those who actually rented pews and the cost as a percentage of their income, as well as those who administered the rental system, set the prices and collected the money. Finally, Green's conclusions on the demise of pew-renting should be tested over a wider geographic area than has previously been attempted.

Primary Sources on Pew-renting

Although both primary and secondary sources must be used to understand various facets of the debate, primary ones are generally more valuable since they offer an 'eyewitness' view rather than a later interpretation. Primary evidence dealing specifically with pew-rents can mainly be found in public archives, libraries, and cathedral archives. Fortunately, the holdings of Britain's archives are largely catalogued and online search tools are frequently available.

Particular types of primary sources have both special values and weaknesses. By far the most fruitful sources of information on pew-rents are records made by the churches themselves. Most references are to be found in the special ledgers and account books designated for recording payments of pew-rents, especially where they list renters' names and addresses, and occasionally the final destination of the sums received. Less often these details are available in churchwardens' accounts, vestry minutes, scales and bills, receipts and other documents. Wherever found, though, such materials provide a 'human element', displaying the mechanics of pew-letting, as well as the practice's effect on parishioners, incumbents, churchwardens and others. They also display the reverse: the impact such people had on the

rationale, profitability, termination, and the like, of pew-renting. One evident drawback, though, is their neatness and legibility, indicating they may have been copied from the originals, not necessarily fully accurately. Some documents are clearly copied from originals, such as an agreement from about 1870 among owners and occupiers of pews of St Anne, Haverthwaite Parish, Cumbria, to accept a proposal of open seats – the document is entirely written by the same hand, including the signatures in a column headed ‘Signature of Owner’.³⁰ A pew-rent book from 1852 to 1855 of St Laurence, Reading, shows what many of its kind may have resembled before being transcribed into churchwardens’ accounts and other records – many entries are scratched out and new information written in, sometimes twice or even three times, due to renters giving up pews or moving to previously empty sittings.³¹

In addition to church records, legislative debates and legal decisions can be fruitful sources. Statutes are not particularly useful, since before the first Church Building Act in 1818 the renting of pews was only legal where specific acts of Parliament authorised it.³² Nevertheless, pew-renting continued illegally and courts often indulged both churches and tenants while officially frowning on the practice,³³ depriving statutory provisions of their intended effect. The details of the cases given in legal opinions may of course offer important information, as may transcripts of legislative hearings, but the questions asked in the latter may have been known to witnesses beforehand, allowing them to tailor and rehearse responses for their own purposes.

Internet sites *may* also be reliable, particularly if the information is taken directly from reliable sources, but must be used with great care as many are never screened by experts.³⁴

³⁰ CROK, WPR 90/37.

³¹ BRO, D/EX 1427/3.

³² *Walter v. Gunner*, 1 Hagg. C. R., 3 Hag. Consist. (1798), cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 57.

³³ Heales, A., *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II (London: Butterworths, 1872), p. 57.

³⁴ *Making History: a Guide to Historical Research through the National History Day Program*, Vandenberg-Daves, J., ed. (College Park, MD: National History Day, 2006), p. 118.

Some sites are naturally less useful since their information has been taken from newspapers or second- or third-hand recollections, and therefore has possibly been distorted in transit either from the original source or from other internet sites; factual errors ‘frequently spread quickly to other internet sources’.³⁵ Internet material taken from secondary sources must also be viewed with some suspicion due to the possible motive of the writer. Other sites, though, particularly historical material on churches’ own websites, are evidently written by local historians who have taken the trouble to do research on the churches to which they belong – such information is more dependable than that taken from sites with a more general approach. One internet site particularly used here is anglicanhistory.org, which is evidently reliable to the extent that the sources on which it is based are dependable – the site is an ‘archive of out-of-print Anglican texts and related modern documents’.³⁶ Another webpage frequently cited below, [nwkhfs.org.uk](http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk) – the site of the Northwest Kent Family History Society, is also reliable since its information on Kentish churches is verifiable elsewhere, and because the site won the 2006 Website Award competition given by the Federation of Family History Societies.³⁷ In addition, kentchurches.info is the brainchild of John E. Vigar, MA, FSA Scot., FRSA, the author of eleven books on the local history of Kent and Sussex, mainly covering churches.³⁸ That site is accordingly trustworthy. Otherwise, information taken from internet sites and used here has been viewed with a measure of suspicion and verified where possible by other sources, or else discarded. It was used in this research more as an aid to locate reliable information than as a source of reliable material in itself.

Finally, articles, books and pamphlets describing various facets of pew-renting are widely available. These include mostly Victorian writings which describe churches and their

³⁵ McPherson, J.B., *Journalism at the End of the American Century, 1965-Present* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), p. 204.

³⁶ <http://anglicanhistory.org/about.html>

³⁷ <http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/website.htm>

³⁸ http://www.johnevigar.com/?page_id=6

services and include details of pew-rents, and others that attack the practice from various angles, in addition to works of fiction in which pew-renting is ostensibly described. These must also be used with some caution, since they often appeal to emotion rather than logic and may exaggerate abuses or omit relevant facts. On the other hand, contemporaries' personal thoughts on church finance, particularly pew-renting, may be a crucial part of the subject and the authors can well be more objective than more conventional sources; while such material must initially be viewed with a suspicious eye, it may be very valuable if sufficient indications of reliability exist. Newspaper articles may be partisan and can suffer from the same half-truths borne by emotion, although their reports can be considered slightly more reliable as reflecting events as they likely happened. Such sources can indicate, as well, the arguments used for and against pew-renting and how their authors viewed the practice. Legal cases and parliamentary enquiries are also relevant for this purpose, but the motives of their authors or disputing parties, and therefore their descriptions of pew-renting and the behaviour surrounding it, may be self-serving and suspect. One other primary source used elsewhere – recollection by living people – are usable, but few have been located on the subject at hand.

Primary sources can be particularly bewildering, although this does not affect their reliability – they are merely more difficult to interpret. But primary evidence of pew-renting is often ambiguous. In particular, records stating numbers of sittings (rented or not) in particular churches must be used with caution; in the returns from the 1851 Religious Census, some parish officials listed the total *official* number of their sittings, while others limited their total sittings to the number of people who could *comfortably* be seated. The two were not always identical, as some clergy noted.³⁹ But such entries can be used as a rough guide.

The fragmentation of many church documents also causes difficulties. This may result from any of several causes, most often from records referred to elsewhere but are no

³⁹ *Religious Worship in Kent: The Census of 1851*, Roake, M., ed. (Maidstone: Kent Archaeological Society, 1999) p. 65.

longer extant. For example, the written material from 1823 to 1863 at St Nicholas, Rochester, is clearly incomplete regarding pew-rents: the church's 1851 Religious Census return noted that pew-rents were charged at that time, but despite an unusual amount of detail in the churchwardens' accounts from that year until 1861 (the end of that volume), no pew-rents are mentioned;⁴⁰ however, a Register of Payment of Pew Rents kept for several years beginning in 1862-3 clearly shows the practice existed there.⁴¹ The most logical conclusion is that the church kept an earlier pew-rent register, now lost. Since the Census returns asked church officials to state their sources of revenue, the possibility that St Nicholas erroneously reported that pew-letting occurred there seems remote.

Other incompleteness results from authors' failure to include details the researcher may now consider important. Churchwardens' accounts from all regions, for example, often list only *totals* gleaned from pew-rents, omitting probative details such as individual prices of sittings, bad debts from non-paying tenants, whether prices listed were for a quarter, half, or entire year, whether the fees listed are for entire pews or for each sitting, and so on.⁴² Since churches charged different amounts for sittings, to measure rising and falling revenue each church's receipts can reasonably be compared only against its own totals from other years. Even then the data must be used with caution, since in any church sittings may have been added to those available for rent, or removed from that status, without existing documentation. At times incompleteness is apparently contradictory; for example, the records of St Stephen, Tonbridge, from 1894 report that 'free sittings' netted the church £14.⁴³ And the process by which amounts to be charged for pew-rents were actually decided in particular churches may have rarely been committed to writing, since few surviving records mention the

⁴⁰ MALSC P306/5/2.

⁴¹ MALSC P306/5/3; Bennett, J.C., "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly': The Practice of Pew-renting at Kentish Anglican Churches" (unpublished MTh dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2006), pp. 3, 30.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴³ CKS P371D/5/1.

procedure, and then only in passing. Still other instances of incompleteness were intentional, or at least caused by careless record-keeping – a memorandum at the beginning of the St Ewen's, Bristol, Vestry Book from 1811 to 1889 notes that

Much Inconvenience trouble & expence having arisen from the want of Reference to the Proceedings of former Vestrys in this Parish in the granting of Leases &c &c. which should always be recorded or if so recorded the leaves must have been torn out which cannot be readily ascertained – to prevent a Recurrence undersigned has numbered the folios of this Book which would exhibit evidence in whose Year any such act might take place &c it is to be hoped induces future Vestrys to Minute their proceedings.

W Holmes⁴⁴

A determination of the number of churches charging pew-rents also presents difficulties, particularly where the churches' own records are the only ones available. Since pew-rents were officially illegal in the vast majority of churches before the first Church Building Act of 1818 and were subject to much criticism in the middle and late Victorian eras, a public admission by a church official that funds were raised from this source may well have seemed indiscreet.⁴⁵ In the return from Holy Trinity, Brompton, 'pew-rents' was left blank while all other 'endowment' spaces were either filled with sums or listed as 'nil',⁴⁶ although Holy Trinity certainly charged pew-rents later.

The Present Study

Due to the paucity of research on the subject, the time appears right for a detailed study of pew-renting. The subject is important for the greater understanding of the history of the Anglican church and its parishes' methods of finance. As Callum Brown noted, the letting of pews affected congregational life in general. To truly comprehend the history of the church and its congregants, and the relations of those congregants who could not afford the luxury of renting sittings and those who could and did, greater knowledge of the workings and reasons for pew-renting – from the perspective of both the churches and the renters – is

⁴⁴ BRRO P/StE/V/3.

⁴⁵ Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 3

⁴⁶ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 103.

important. Whether seat-letting in Anglican churches was honestly done, also, is important, since instances of unscrupulousness apparent today were almost certainly apparent at the time.

Hypotheses

The main hypothesis of this study is that, far from being the milieu of the upper- and upper-middle classes, a belief that was common in Victorian times, rented pews were generally taken by the middle-middle and lower-middle classes – particularly tradesmen, artisans and owners of other small, labour-intensive businesses. The upper-middle class and the labour elite were also among those renting pews, although to a lesser extent.

Historians generally view pew-renting as a Victorian and Edwardian phenomenon.⁴⁷ A lesser hypothesis is that, on the contrary, the popularity of pew-renting did not abate until well into the twentieth century. Another lesser hypothesis is that few churches were found to have abandoned pew-renting before financial circumstances made it impractical. A storm of disapproval of the practice in Victorian times, particularly late in the nineteenth century, had little direct effect on churches' decisions to *continue* charging rents, but may have impeded churches from *instituting* the practice. Even in the twentieth century churches were sometimes less than honest about their letting pews; the evidence suggests that at times the practice was hidden from the gaze of outsiders or, more often, that the total revenue was claimed to be more or less than it actually was, where deception was advantageous.

Limits

Here the subject of pew-renting will subsume not only the details of sittings churches rented to congregants but also of the letting of pews owned by private individuals. It also includes money given to churches for other matters, such as building galleries or extensions, for which the donor received sittings either free or discounted in price – several instances

⁴⁷ See e.g. Chadwick, O., *The Victorian Church*, Part II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 215, stating that in the 1890s less protest was made against pew-rents, 'partly because the contest was won'.

were found of congregants who subscribed to particular causes in return for this benefit. This study also includes scattered practices of leasing such things as cushions alongside the renting of pews, as well as ‘kneelings’. It does not, however, include payments made to attend sermons or other religious lectures outside churches; although earlier in history such lectures were occasionally given by beneficed clergy to augment their incomes,⁴⁸ the practice is only marginally related to the history of churches themselves. It also does not address the right to use pews in the local parish church when this right came with a message, a practice ubiquitous in England for much of history, although pews could only be attached to particular residences, not lands.⁴⁹ In the church in which Charlotte Bronte was buried, ‘brass plates were put up in the pews stating that they were attached to such and such a farm’.⁵⁰ The homesteads’ owners might use such pews themselves or rent them to other congregants. Little evidence of pews as freeholds of houses exists after 1800, although at St Andrew, Clifton, Bristol, in 1898, 24 pews belonged to residences, including the ‘Post Office & several shops’, and a house to which six such pews were attached is listed as ‘unknown’.⁵¹ Often a small extra payment – perhaps only a peppercorn – was made for the pews, which technically entails private leasing of church seats, but requires no overt action by either party regarding paying for the pews themselves and is therefore only superficially pew-letting.

Starting and Ending Points

The period 1800 to 1960 has been chosen for the chronological limits of this study due to events surrounding the Anglican church and its congregants in that time – this is the period between two major changes in English church history. The turn of the nineteenth century began a new era in which the church ceased to be ‘the uncontested church of the English’:

⁴⁸ Cross, C., ‘The Incomes of Provincial Urban Clergy, 1520-1645’, in O’Day, R. and Heal, F., *Princes and Paupers in the English Church, 1500-1800* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1981), pp. 68-75, p.65.

⁴⁹ *Stocks v. Booth* (1786), 1 T.R. 428.

⁵⁰ HL Deb 16 March 1886 v. 303 c. 939.

⁵¹ BRRO P/StA/ChW/10/3.

the decade of the 1790s was a watershed in the fortunes of the Church of England. It was in this decade that the case for an Anglican monopoly of state power and popular allegiance was fatally undermined.⁵²

Writing in 1916, J.C. Cox concluded that pew-renting ‘became a characteristic feature of new churches and chapels of ease erected by the Establishment from the seventeenth century’.⁵³

But references to pew-renting before 1800 are comparatively rare. Churchwardens’ accounts generally reflect only receipts from assessments and rent of lands, and vestry minutes contain only sporadic mentions of pews, possibly due to a lack of fixed seating in many churches. Although the practice certainly existed,⁵⁴ one suspects that before the period under study here, parishes which *had* fixed seating generally had insufficient congregants to make pew-letting viable, *i.e.*, that anyone who turned up could have a decent seat,⁵⁵ and that the village gentry had their own pews by right not rent. A 1834 survey taken at Cranbrook Church is evidence of this – parishioners filled in forms of all those ‘accustomed to sit’ in particular pews, showing that by no means all pews were filled.⁵⁶ Pew *ownership*, rather than rental, appears to have been more common before the nineteenth century.

The church also experienced a serious mutation in the 1960s, in which British Christianity declined and society became much more secularised.⁵⁷ Although the conclusion of a *sudden* rise in secularisation beginning about 1960, as hypothesized by Callum Brown,⁵⁸ is challenged by many who feel secularisation began decades earlier, certainly the 1960s were marked by much secularization. The date 1960 was therefore chosen as the ending point.

⁵² Hempton, D., *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious Revolution to the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 23.

⁵³ Cox, J.C., *Bench-ends in English Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1916), p. 44.

⁵⁴ Dillow, K.B., ‘The Social and Ecclesiastical Significance of Church Seating Arrangements and Pew Disputes, 1500-1740’ (unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 1990), p. 98.

⁵⁵ Obelkevich, J., *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825-1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 108.

⁵⁶ CKS P100/7/1; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, pp. 11, 48.

⁵⁷ Wolffe, J., *Religion in History: Conflict, Conversion and Coexistence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 164.

⁵⁸ Brown, C.G., *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge 2001), p. 7.

But the Church Building Act allowed sittings to be rented without specific parliamentary authorisation, and many new churches took advantage of this by renting out seats from their inception, resulting in a ‘golden age’ of pew renting from about 1850 to about 1914. In 1886 a Select Committee of the House of Lords concluded via a survey that only 331 of a total of 8,034 old parish churches (which evidently meant pre-1800), or just over four percent, contained rented or rentable seats or raised a voluntary rate for sittings, while 1,410 of a total of 3,121 new parish and district churches – over 45 per cent – had such rented, rentable, or voluntarily rated sittings.⁵⁹ Some obtained private Parliamentary approval to let sittings even after 1818, among them St Margaret, Lee,⁶⁰ and St James, Brighton.⁶¹ Pew-renting as a practice became even more common after about 1840, when tithes were largely outdated and church rate was becoming more difficult to raise and collect. In some parishes such as St. George’s, Hanover Square, and St. Mark’s, North Audley Street, rates were unnecessary; pew rents were sufficient to meet expenses.⁶²

Location

Although material from all over England is included here, the analysis focuses on two locations: the old County of Kent, and on Bristol under the 1951 boundaries of the city – no other date for Bristol can be used with much accuracy since the expansions were asymmetrical and evidently only loosely related to population growth in previously unincorporated areas. Kent was chosen due to its mixtures of rural churches and town ones, and coastal areas and inland regions. Bristol was selected since it had a truly urban character in the nineteenth century as well as the twentieth but, unlike London, was not so massive as to make analysis difficult. The fact, also, that Kent has two dioceses, entails a greater variation

⁵⁹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill* (London: Henry Hansard & Son, 1886), p. 3.

⁶⁰ LLSA A78/18M/B1/4.

⁶¹ *Hebbert v. Purchas*, L.R. 4 P.C. 301 (1872).

⁶² Chadwick, O., *The Victorian Church*, Part I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 82.

of visitation returns. And concentrating on researching specific parts of the general subject from the available evidence regarding one county with such diverse characteristics as Kent and one city and its subdivisions such as Bristol allows comparisons between the different types of churches and areas of varying population. The evidence from Kent and Bristol can, at some time in the future, be tested via the same type of evidence from other parts of the country so that conclusions can be drawn of how typical Kent is in this regard to other counties and how similar or dissimilar Bristol is in this matter to other cities.

The differences between Anglicanism in Kent and Bristol over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were significant, and an exploration of pew-renting in the area may shed light on the other issues faced by historians of the Church of England. To begin with a description of Kent as used in this thesis is in order. Here the boundaries of Kent shall be taken to be those of the ‘ancient county of Kent’, i.e., the pre-1889 county borders. In that year a small portion of Kent was subsumed into the new County of London, including Lewisham, Woolwich, and part of Greenwich. A small area of north-west Kent, comprising the districts of Bexley and Bromley, also arguably became part of London on 1 April 1965.⁶³ Since pew-renting churches were largely found to have begun the practice before 1889, in this study Kent is taken to be as under the pre-1889 boundaries.

Outside the ancient county’s suburbs of the metropolis, Kent contains a large number of medium-sized towns ‘with no dominant urban area’.⁶⁴ The population of the ancient county was 308,667 in 1801, 615,766 in 1851, and 1,348,841 in 1901.⁶⁵ No reliable statistic has been found of the population of the ancient county in 1951. But between 1831 and 1911 that population grew by 216 per cent,⁶⁶ to 1,511,806 as counted by the 1911 census,⁶⁷ of

⁶³ <http://www.fhsc.org.uk/genuki/reg/lnd.htm#wool>; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 2.

⁶⁴ <http://www.kmsp.org.uk/chapter08.html>

⁶⁵ *Victoria County History of Kent*, v. 3, p. 358, at <http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/REsearch/03/03/05/358.htm>

⁶⁶ Armstrong, A., *The Economy of Kent, 1640-1914* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1995), p. 32.

⁶⁷ *Victoria County History of Kent*, v. 3, p. 358, at <http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/REsearch/03/03/05/358.htm>

which 650,204 – 43 percent – can be said to have been ‘urban’ since they lived in the county’s ‘principal towns’.⁶⁸ In the twentieth century the Kentish population increased significantly only in the ‘dormitory’ suburbs of London.⁶⁹

Generally the ‘lowland areas’ of the south and east of England in Victorian times were not only more densely populated than were the West County, Wales and the North, but had a heavy Anglican bias, with smaller, more endowed parishes, better organisation, and less of the ‘enfeebling effects of pluralism and absenteeism’.⁷⁰ About 35 per cent of the sittings in Victorian Kent were in Nonconformist chapels, while almost two-thirds were in Anglican churches.⁷¹ Not all of Kent may be so described; at least as the Victorian era dawned, in the Weald, as in other parts of England, special social and economic conditions had deprived parishes of ‘the strongly conformist religious habits’ of the nearby countryside.⁷² And at mid-century the number of people per Anglican church in the central Weald – and also in the Isle of Thanet – was relatively high, although in parts of the Weald the Church was generally weak.⁷³ Overall in the mid-Victorian period, Anglicanism in Kent was strong.⁷⁴ Differences other than strictly religious ones were also apparent; in the middle of the nineteenth century rural Kent was dominated by the gentry.⁷⁵ Anglican dominance continued in Kent in the

⁶⁸ Cresswell, A., ‘The Population of the Principal Towns in Kent, 1911-1991’, in *Kent in the Twentieth Century*, Yates, N., ed. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2001), p. 369, listing the principal towns as Ashford, Beckenham, Bexley, Broadstairs, Bromley, Canterbury, Chatham, Chislehurst & Sidcup, Crayford, Dartford, Deal & Walmer, Dover, Erith, Folkestone, Gillingham, Gravesend, Herne Bay, Maidstone, Margate, Milton & Sittingbourne, Northfleet, Penge, Ramsgate, Rochester, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells, and Whitstable.

⁶⁹ Rawcliffe, M., ‘Population’, in *Kent in the Twentieth Century*, Yates, N., ed. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2001), pp. 1-26, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Gilbert, D., ‘The Land and the Church’, in *The Victorian Countyside*, v. 1, Mingay, G.E., ed. (New York: Routledge, 1981), pp. 43-57, p. 44.

⁷¹ Everitt, A. M., *The Pattern of Rural Dissent: The Nineteenth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972), p. 46.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁷³ Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 61, 66.

⁷⁴ Paz, D.G., *Popular anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 47.

⁷⁵ Lansberry, F., ‘“Tempered Despotism”? The Government of the County’, in *Government and Politics in Kent, 1640-1914*, Lansberry, H.C.F., ed. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2001), pp. 33-62, p. 60.

twentieth century, apart from Bromley, whose populations of Roman Catholics and Baptists were higher than average; in 1989, 45 per cent of Kentish church-goers attended Anglican churches, although the percentage regularly attending any church in the county, along with the rest of England, sharply declined.⁷⁶ This, logically but not necessarily, have meant that Kent had a greater percentage of its population who were willing to pay pew-rents.

The population of Bristol and its environs more than doubled in the first half of the nineteenth century, from about 72,000 in 1801 to 166,000 in 1851.⁷⁷ Any population statistics after that date are less relevant since, unlike Kent, the total numbers of residents mainly grew not by increasing density, via immigration or rising birth rates – instead it increased largely, but not exclusively, by annexing suburbs and by immigration *to* those suburbs.⁷⁸ The 1851 Religious Census showed that Bristol was a ‘comparatively devout city’.⁷⁹ Victorian Bristol had large Anglican churches with much seating.⁸⁰ But the City and County of Bristol has ‘Nonconformist, mercantile roots’,⁸¹ and in the nineteenth century the Baptists and Wesleyan Methodists were strong, and Jewish congregations were also concentrated there.⁸² While a suggestion that Methodism did well where the Church of England did not is oversimplified,⁸³ the conclusion that Nonconformism was more successful where Anglicanism was not, seems generally true. The period 1831 to 1897 was a time not only of prosperity but of ‘robust development of Christianity’ in Bristol, with ‘all the varied phases of Nonconformity growing

⁷⁶ Gill, R., ‘Religion’, in *Kent in the Twentieth Century*, Yates, N., ed. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2001), pp. 321, 325.

⁷⁷ Penny, J., *Is the Economic History of the Bristol Region between 1780 and 1850 a Story of Relative Decline?* at <http://fishponds.org.uk.brisecon.html>

⁷⁸ Whitwill, M., ‘Discussion’, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, v. 63 (1900), p. 592.

⁷⁹ Gorsky, M., *Patterns of Philanthropy: Charity and Society in Nineteenth-century Bristol* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1999), p. 32.

⁸⁰ Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 65.

⁸¹ Lambert, D., ‘The Prospect of Trade: The Merchant Gardeners of Bristol in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century’, in *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art, 1550-1850*, Conan, M., ed. (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), pp. 123-146, p. 144.

⁸² Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 16, 108, 125-6, 149.

⁸³ Knight, F., *The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 25.

strong’.⁸⁴ As did some other English cities the turn of the twentieth century, Bristol ‘seemed to thrive and revel in its freedom from sacerdotal influence’.⁸⁵

The socioeconomic history of Bristol’s *parishes* is difficult to determine with much objectivity; to some degree conclusions rely on the subjective impressions formed by others. Richard Goodridge, whose thesis encompassed 1830-1880, found the population of St Jude, Bristol, to be ‘to a great extent of the lowest order of Victorian proletariat’, while Clifton ‘became the fashionable suburb.’⁸⁶ Helen Meller, writing regarding 1870 to 1914, also noted that ‘Clifton, Cotham and Redland were the exclusive areas.’⁸⁷ Goodridge also noted that forty-five per cent of males aged twenty and older and living in the Out Parish of St Philip and St Jacob were tradesmen or handicraft workers, and a further forty-one per cent were non-agricultural labourers,⁸⁸ to which Joseph Leech, on his ‘rural rides’ of the churches of Bristol and its environs in 1843, partially concurred, describing the congregation at St Philip and St Jacob as ‘mainly composed of substantial tradesmen and numbers of the poor of the parish’.⁸⁹ Goodridge found among the parishioners of Holy Trinity mainly ‘skilled people like clerks and craftsmen’ and that a ‘more permanent type of residence’ occurred there.⁹⁰ At Henbury in 1844 Leech found ‘overpowering gentility’.⁹¹ Holy Trinity, Hotwells, in the 1840s was said to be ‘principally composed of persons of that complexion in the Church commonly called “Evangelical”’.⁹²

⁸⁴ McCarthy, M.J.F., *Church and State in England and Wales, 1829-1906* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Company, 1906), p. 101.

⁸⁵ McCarthy, *Church and State in England and Wales*, p. 137.

⁸⁶ Goodridge, R.M., ‘Religion and the City with Reference to Bristol and Marseilles, 1830-1880: A Study in the Comparative Sociology of Religion’ (unpublished MPhil thesis, University of London, 1969), pp. 106, 151, 176.

⁸⁷ Meller, H., *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 81.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁸⁹ Leech, J., *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*, A. Sutton, ed. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Press, 1982), p. 46

⁹⁰ Goodridge, R.M., ‘Religion and the City with Reference to Bristol and Marseilles, 1830-1880’, p. 161.

⁹¹ Leech, J., *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*, p. 175.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

In all, a general rule of thumb can be used – that the northern and western areas of Bristol were more prosperous and the eastern and southern ones less so. In the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, Bristol was divided into four parliamentary constituencies – East, North, West, and South. The *Times* described Bristol West in 1892 as ‘the best residential part of the borough’.⁹³ Bristol East was ‘an overwhelmingly industrial constituency, containing some of the smokiest and poorest parts of the city’.⁹⁴ Bristol North, while ‘mixed in character,’ was in 1910 described by the *Bristol Times and Mirror* as having a rural population in Stapleton, predominantly artisan classes in Eastville and Fishponds, mainly shopkeepers in St Paul’s, and ‘a big residential area’ in Montpelier.⁹⁵ Bristol South contained the city’s business district and many middle-class suburban residences, but also the poverty-stricken St Philip’s Marsh and the industrial area of Bedminster.⁹⁶

Definitions

When the word ‘pew’ came to indicate mainly a structure for *church* seating is unclear, but it appears that by the mid-fifteenth century the word was so used – in 1458 John Young bequeathed ten marks to the parish church at Herne ‘to make seats called puyinge’.⁹⁷ Its origins may be even older: in 1870 an English court surmised that ‘pew’ came from the Dutch ‘puye’⁹⁸ or from the Old French word ‘puie’,⁹⁹ meaning a balcony, often from which speeches were made.¹⁰⁰ But in any event the term ‘pew’ is ambiguous – in the past the sort of

⁹³ Pelling, H., *Social Geography of British Elections* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1967), p. 145.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 146

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Cox, *Bench-ends in English Churches*, p. 4

⁹⁸ *Brumfitt v. Roberts*, L.R. 5 C.P. 224, 232 (1870).

⁹⁹ <http://www.ambafrance-us.org/kids/lf/base.asp?nl>

¹⁰⁰ ‘Open Seats in Churches,’ *The Christian Remembrancer*, v. 24 (1852), pp. 80-136, p. 88; *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed., at <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/pew>

pew used today was occasionally referred to formally as a bench,¹⁰¹ but the word ‘pew’ has meant a bench-type of seating since at least 1360, when the ‘Vision of Piers Plowman’ referred to a ‘puw’ with that connotation.¹⁰² But ‘pew’ can also mean joined benches with seats on three or even four sides. A single rented church sitting has sometimes been called a ‘pewage’, and in Scotland a ‘bottom-room’.¹⁰³ The records of St Mary, Scarborough, in 1634 distinguish pews from other types of seats intended for more than one person, speaking of pews being ‘next to the long seats’.¹⁰⁴ But other churches’ documents often do not clarify the sense in which the term is intended.

By the nineteenth century the meaning of pew as a church *bench* was clear; the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists this usage as having arisen as early as 1631, although the word was still applied to enclosed pews as late as 1904.¹⁰⁵ Yet the Canterbury diocese visitation returns from 1872 and 1876, for example, ask ‘Are any Pews in your Church let for money?’,¹⁰⁶ which leaves open the possibility that some sittings were rented in churches that only had pews in the sense of benches, which those responding did not consider to be pews. For the 1880 and later visitation returns, ‘pews’ in this question was replaced by ‘sittings’.¹⁰⁷

Consequently, the word ‘pew’ used here will indicate all three types of church seating unless otherwise stated. The sense in which an author used ‘free seats’ may not be obvious – the term may indicate either seats that are unallocated, *or* sittings allocated but without rent attached. This difficulty was noted by the contemporaries of many primary sources; as a critic of pew-rents wrote in the early 1870s:

¹⁰¹ Hardy, W.J., ‘Remarks on the History of Seat-Reservation in Churches’, *Archæologia*, v. 53 (1892), pp. 95-106, p. 95.

¹⁰² Cox, *Bench-ends in English Churches*, p. 8.

¹⁰³ Kacirk, J., *Forgotten English* (New York: Quill/William Morrow, 1997), p. 171.

¹⁰⁴ ERYARS PE165/241.

¹⁰⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), v. XI, p. 647.

¹⁰⁶ LPL VG3/4 & VG3/5.

¹⁰⁷ LPL VG3/6.

A church must be either “free” (that is, perfectly free) or not free; and to call a church “free, but appropriated,” and to consider a church free because the seats are only bought, usurped, allotted, or otherwise privately claimed, but not *rented*, is simply to confuse all argument, and render reasoning impossible, upon the subject.¹⁰⁸

To avoid this difficulty, when referring to pews for which no rent was charged, ‘rent-free’ or similar adjectives shall here be used, and when referring to seats which were not allocated to particular congregants, ‘unallocated’ or ‘unassigned’ will be applied. The word ‘church’ indicates an Anglican church unless designated as one of another denomination, and will include not only churches but rooms licenced for Anglican services. The term ‘parishioner’ will be used here to denote not only one who attends a particular church or chapel but also one who lives within the parish served by that church. Where available records do not indicate whether or not the one attending church was a parishioner, the word ‘congregant’ shall be used.

¹⁰⁸ Herford, E., *Pew Rents Fatal to the National Church* (Nottingham: National Association for Freedom of Worship, 1871), p. 7; Bennett, “Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”, p. 2.

CHAPTER ONE

PROLOGUE

This chapter details the evolution of church seating and its provision, allocation and renting, from seats' first appearance in churches to 1800 – the start of the period under study.

One's physical placement in a public area and the propriety of the place one takes or is assigned varies not only by the desirability of the position itself but by the particular type of location. Seating choices and plans on public transport, for example, differ widely. The least restrictive plan is used by buses, on which each passenger pays the same, at least in each age-group, and sits in whichever open place is most desirable. On trains customers may pay more for first class than for standard passage, depending on whether they have the money for the more preferable and wish to spend it, but within those designated areas the seating is similar to that of a bus. An airplane is the most restrictive – usually seats are assigned in advance in any of several classes with different prices, and after making an initial choice, again based on wealth, status and desire, one is at the mercy of the airline's selection of a particular seat.¹ At various times, churches have used systems similar to each of these.

The Development of Church Seating

Arrangements of church places for participants have varied by time and place. Anglo-Saxon illuminations show congregants seated on 'low, rude, three-legged stools, placed dispersedly all over the church'.² The few benches and stalls in existence in the thirteenth century, such as at Dunsfold in Surrey, gradually became more common in the fifteenth century, first along church walls and set apart for women or the elderly, feeble or poor.³

¹ Bennett, J.C., "'Take thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly": The Practice of Pew-renting in Kentish Anglican Churches' (unpublished MTh dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2006), p. 1.

² 'Pews,' *Notes & Queries*, 3rd Series, v. IV (10 December 1864), p. 474.

³ Marsh, C., 'Sacred Space in England, 1560-1640: The View from the Pew', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, v. 53, no. 2 (April 2002), pp. 286-311; Heales, A., *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book 1 (London: Butterworths, 1872), p. 149; French, K.L., *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 107.

According to tradition this resulted in the saying ‘the weakest go to the wall.’⁴ Such structures were often made of stone, and were therefore permanent or semi-permanent, and could still be seen in ‘numerous parish churches’ in 1865.⁵ Most Eastern Orthodox churches today continue to use these seating arrangements.⁶ Priests and aristocrats were sometimes allotted wooden chairs in the chancel.⁷

Although by 1493 no private church seats were allowed, pews were then common in more urban and affluent areas, although less so in poorer parishes.⁸ At Bodmin in 1491, benches were ordered simultaneously with the buying of the pulpit.⁹ Locking pews are mentioned as early as 1467.¹⁰ Sometimes the gentry wanted to build their own, distinctive seating, and many churches allowed them to erect elaborate structures for this purpose while consigning common folk to sitting on the floor, or on whatever they might carry in on which to seat themselves. However, several sixteenth-century churchwardens’ accounts refer to pews ‘obviously *not* for individuals of dignity’ which had existed for sufficient time to need mending – St Mary, Sandwich, paid 9d. to repair its pews in 1513,¹¹ as did St Dunstan, Canterbury in 1572.¹² About 1540 the population of St Peter, Thanet, overflowed their church’s existing seating, prompting a parishioner’s wish to erect a private gallery.¹³

⁴ HL Deb 08 April 1981 v. 419 c. 605.

⁵ Badnall, W.B., *The Law of Pews and Sittings in Churches* (London: J.H. & J. Parker, 1865), p. 10.

⁶ <http://www.orthodox.net/articles/heavenonearth.html>

⁷ Flather, A., *The Politics of Place: A Study of Church Seating in Essex, c. 1580-1640* (Leicester: Friends of the Department of English Local History, 1999), p. 10.

⁸ Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book I, p. 157; Flather, *The Politics of Place*, pp. 3-4, 6, 12.

⁹ Whiting, R., *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 237.

¹⁰ Hardy, W.J., ‘Remarks on the History of Seat-Reservation in Churches’, *Archæologia*, v. 53 (1892), pp. 95-106, p. 98.

¹¹ CCA U3/173/28/28 (emphasis added).

¹² ‘Accounts of the Churchwardens of St. Dunstan’s, Canterbury, in *Archæologia Cantiana: Being Transactions of The Kent Archæological Society*, v. XVII (London: Kent Archæological Society, 1887), pp. 77-139, p. 130.

¹³ CCA U3/120/3/23.

Yet long after the appearance of pews, some churches still expected congregants who wanted seating to bring their own stools or mats. Those who built high, box pews were a minority; most congregants even before 1625 sat on open seats or benches, and the records of Archbishop Warham's visitations in Kent in 1511-12 note that in one area of the chapel at Minster in Sheppey 'the people may make setts and pewys where they may more quietly serve God, and that it may lesse cumber the rowme'.¹⁴ In 1621 stools were still used for seating at St Margaret, Wychling, Kent,¹⁵ suggesting the church was then not yet fully pewed and may have had no fixed seating. The churchwardens' accounts of 1695, however, mention a pew door.¹⁶ The Headcorn, Kent, parish church was 'not more than 2/3' pewed even in 1851.¹⁷

Churches with insufficient space may have been particularly eager to install formal seating throughout, if only to try to regulate the amount of floor space each congregant might use. But at least after about 1500, the appearance of seating was unrelated to population levels. In 1494 Robert Hunt of Reculver, Kent, left in his will a gift of twenty shillings to help fund the pewing of two local churches, even though almost a century later Reculver had only 165 communicants,¹⁸ when the penalty for recusancy was £20 per month.¹⁹ Also a reference from Tonbridge indicates that parish's church was not completely, and perhaps not even mainly, pewed until 1763,²⁰ even though Tonbridge's population grew considerably in Georgian times.²¹ Yet St Mary, Burham, paid for 'new pews in the church' in 1676,²² and

¹⁴ Marsh, 'Sacred Space in England', p. 291; *Kentish Visitations of Archbishop William Warham and His Deputies, 1511-1512*, Detsicas, A.P., ed. (Maidstone: Kent Archaeological Society, 1984), p. 256; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", pp. 6, 8.

¹⁵ CCA U3/196/1/1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Religious Worship in Kent: The Census of 1851*, Roake, M., ed. (Maidstone: Kent Archaeological Society, 1999), p. 185.

¹⁸ E-mail from Christopher Hall, Canterbury Library, 25 June 2008, citing Hasted, E., *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent* (Wakefield: Kent County Library, 1972; originally published 1792).

¹⁹ Hyamson, A.M., *A History of the Jews in England* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1908), p. 162.

²⁰ CKS P371/5/1/2.

²¹ <http://www.local.co.uk/Tonbridge/Towers>

thus may have had other fixed seating earlier, although Burham's population was much less than that of Tonbridge – over 150 years later only 380 lived in the parish.²³

From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries seating provided by churches for their congregants thus grew haphazardly.²⁴ Although churches seem to have been fully pewed by about 1800, some were clearly not. At St Mary the Virgin, Ashford, a 1744 plan to provide new seating shows pews in the nave, although not in the galleries or aisles, including the aisle marked 'school'.²⁵ More than a century later, though, the church's vicar and churchwardens requested the ratepayers' presence to 'consider the propriety of Seating the South Transept of the Church, and to adopt means of paying for the same', indicating that even in the mid-nineteenth century the church was not completely pewed and that a need existed for further seating.²⁶ In the documentation of the Archbishop of Canterbury's visitation in the opening years of the nineteenth century, the articles asked, 'Have any pews, galleries, or monuments been erected, in your chancel, church, or chapel?'²⁷ This may of course refer to pews in the narrower sense of the word. On the other hand pews in the broader sense may well have been the first seating in many churches, particularly since by Victorian times the word 'pew' was commonly understood to refer to a bench²⁸ or a larger, possibly enclosed structure in church.

The other articles in the visitation pamphlet are hardly window-dressing:

'Have you any assemblies for religious worship in your parish, besides your church or chapel? ... Have their preachers subscribed to the XXXIX *articles of religion* (except those who are exempted by the Act) and have taken the oaths, and make their publick thanksgiving to God in church? When they come to do so, are they decent? and do they make their offerings according to custom?'²⁹

²² MALSC P52/5/1.

²³ http://www.mining-memorabilia.co.uk/A_Mystery_Lime_Works_Token_From_Burham.htm; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 6.

²⁴ Flather, *The Politics of Place*, p. 17.

²⁵ CCA Dcb/E/F/12/12.

²⁶ CKS P10/8/A2.

²⁷ *Articles of Visitation and Enquiry exhibited to the Church-wardens and Side-men of every Parish Within the Province of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, In the Year 180-* (London: Eyre and Straham, His Majesty's Printers, ?1810), p. 4; CCA/U3/6/5i.

²⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., v. XI (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 647.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6 (emphasis in original).

And according to a member of Parliament in 1860, pews with high walls still prevailed:

The common law declared that the parish churches were to be opened freely to all; but they were now encumbered with high pews for the rich, while the poor were thrust into holes and corners where they could neither see nor hear. When a poor man was asked why he did not go to church, he replied that there was no place for him; that the rich surrounded themselves with barriers, as if they wished to keep him aloof; and the consequence was that we were now obliged to have special services for the poor.³⁰

On the other hand, the days of such ostentatious pews were numbered. Some owners and renters of private pews were extremely reluctant to give up their seats when asked to do so to make room for benches, with what they felt was proper justification – much eighteenth-century legislation was enacted for the specific purpose of protecting the individual's property for being taken to further a community interest.³¹ Langford finds credible the conclusion that the eighteenth century saw 'the gradual subjugation of the Church and its endowments to the propertied mentality of the period'.³² But most enclosed pews went by the wayside before the late nineteenth century; by 1859 few architects 'would venture' to put doors in pews – by then 'it was no longer fashionable to allow privilege in a Christian Church'.³³ In 1872 one member of the Commons noted that 'many churches had of late years been re-appropriated after the old pews had been taken away'.³⁴ But a few churches retained large, enclosed pews until later; Christ Church, Tunbridge Wells, removed its enclosed pews in 1877,³⁵ and St Margaret, High Halstow, Kent, only cut its old 'horse-box' pews to the height of the others in 1907.³⁶

Finally, at various places and times in history galleries have been deemed the worst seats in a church and have been designated as rent-free. At other times the reverse was true;³⁷ some churches had private galleries, and in others, such as St John, Chichester, in 1813, the

³⁰ HC Deb 28 March 1860 v. 157 c. 1435.

³¹ Langford, P., *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 146.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³³ Brown, R.L., *Pews, Benches and Seats: Being a History of the Church Pew in Wales* (Welshpool: Gwasg Eglwys Y Trallwng, 1998), p. 1-2.

³⁴ HC Deb 28 June 1871 vol 207 c. 702.

³⁵ CKS P371H/28/22.

³⁶ CKS P168/6/6 & P168/28/2.

³⁷ Earle, P., *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 218.

front gallery pews were ‘the most handsomely fitted up’ of all.³⁸ This was perhaps an extension of the theatre-type seating plan, in which seats in the boxes and circle were considered the best, ostensibly resulting from the rich wanting neither to be ‘overlooked by the poorer sort’ nor tolerating to avoid having things dropped on them from their inferiors in the galleries.³⁹ At St James, Piccadilly, in the 1780s and 1790s sittings in the galleries were largely full, rented by titled people, while most pews on the ground floor cost much less and were either unrented or taken by lesser folk. At St John, Liverpool, in the 1850s, the ground floor’s seats were rent-free and possibly unappropriated, while the gallery pews were filled by the ‘opulent’, who paid to rent them.⁴⁰ And at Bradford in 1858 all the pews in the galleries were held by faculty.⁴¹ The titled congregants at that time often rented gallery pews for their servants as well, although at much lower prices than those for themselves.⁴² This was also true of the same general era at St Laurence, Reading, in which many cheaper gallery pews are listed as rented by a congregant ‘for his Servants’ or ‘for her Servants’.⁴³

In some places at the same time, though, galleries were mainly built or maintained to accommodate the poor, and sittings in them became largely rent-free,⁴⁴ such as St Thomas, Garstang, Lancashire, in 1833.⁴⁵ By 1905 titled people at St James, Piccadilly, more often rented pews in the aisles, although a few had gallery pews.⁴⁶

³⁸ WSRO Par 39/47.

³⁹ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 218.

⁴⁰ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into The Deficiency of Means of Spiritual Instruction and Places of Divine Worship in the Metropolis, and in other Populous Districts in England and Wales, especially in the Mining and Manufacturing Districts; and to Consider the Fittest Means of Meeting the Difficulties of the Case; and to Report Thereon to the House; Together With the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: House of Commons, 1858), p. 456.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

⁴² CWAC 494/151 & 494/161.

⁴³ BRO D/EX 1427/2.

⁴⁴ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 218, fn. 154.

⁴⁵ From a summary of Porteus, W.B., *Notes of the History of St. Thomas' Church Garstang* (Canon R.G. Greenall, 1993), at <http://home.clara.net/jftay/his.htm>

⁴⁶ CWAC 494/286.

Seat Allocation: Sittings Exempt from Assignment

Sittings for which no one had legal rights to exclude others were the prerogative of the parishioners at large – under the common law any resident of the parish had a right to a seat in its parish church and to generally expect authorities to enlarge churches whose seating was inadequate.⁴⁷ But a right to a sitting did not mean the right to a *good* sitting, and at various times many churches assigned particular congregants to particular seats to the exclusion of others who wished to occupy those places. Originally bishops were given the right to order seating, but rarely personally used this power, preferring to delegate it to churchwardens, whom – at least as late as the late sixteenth century – they closely supervised.⁴⁸ In the first few decades after the Reformation some parishes held meetings to assign seats instead of leaving the task to churchwardens' whims.⁴⁹ But later on churchwardens or other designees of the bishop almost invariably assumed this responsibility. The churchwardens' authority in matters of pew-renting sometimes fell under the auspices of the vestry, as at Holy Trinity, Coventry, in 1652.⁵⁰ In the early eighteenth century at St John, Chester, the bishop gave special 'commissioners' the right to 'assign and dispose of the seats in the Body of said Church to such Parishioners as they in their judgment should think meet and convenient', and to 'remove from the said Seats such psons as they should judge more unworthy thereof with respect and consideration had to the Estates Quallities [sic] of the said several Parishioners'.⁵¹ In other eras pew-renting grew into pew-ownership via congregants' the purchase of

⁴⁷ Flather, *The Politics of Place*, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁸ Billing, S., *The Laws Relating to Pews in Churches, District Churches, Chapels and Proprietary Chapels: The Rights Incidental Thereto, and the Remedy* (London: W. Benning, 1845), pp. 36-37; Ware, S.L., *The Elizabethan Parish in its Ecclesiastical and Financial Aspects* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1908), p. 22.

⁴⁹ Maltby, J., *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 197.

⁵⁰ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=16038#n90>

⁵¹ CCALSS P51/7/1.

faculties.⁵² In ecclesiastical usage a faculty is a dispensation, licence, or authorisation,⁵³ and faculties for pews were originally confirmed via the showing of a grant by the bishop, or ‘on the presumption that’ the congregant’s or his ancestors’ ‘tenure originally commenced by virtue of such a grant’.⁵⁴ A prescription, however, entails a right to use property without the owner’s consent due to ‘continuous use without permission of the property owner for a period of years required by the law’.⁵⁵

Throughout much of history, also, some congregants had the legal right of excluding others from seats in church. This was rooted in longstanding practice – even by the late thirteenth century churches had long obeyed the general principle that the greatest local family had special rights in the church. When formal church seating appeared, therefore, a viable argument could be presented that the greatest property owner in the parish and his family had a right to private seats in the choicest part of the church.⁵⁶ Where seats were provided or allowed in the late thirteenth century, this right was continued – in 1287 Bishop Quivil of Exeter stated, ‘we have heard that, on account of seats in churches, the parishioners are often vexed, two or more persons claiming one seat’; he therefore imposed in his diocese the seating system of a modern bus, but with the qualification that nobles, even those residing outside a parish, should be allocated sittings.⁵⁷ As they arrived, lesser mortals were allowed to sit in the most desirable place not yet taken,⁵⁸ or else stood or knelt where they could.⁵⁹ But most of the privileged continued to claim the best seats.

⁵² Tate, W.E., *The Parish Chest: A Study of the Records of Parochial Administration in England* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 91.

⁵³ *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 2006, at <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/faculty>

⁵⁴ Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book I, pp. x-xi; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 13.

⁵⁵ <http://dictionary.law.com/default.asp?typed=prescription&type=1>

⁵⁶ Cox, J.C., *Bench-ends in English Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1916), p. 16.

⁵⁷ Pounds, N.J.G., *The Culture of the English People: Iron Age to the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 280; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Hardy, ‘Remarks on the History of Seat-Reservation in Churches’, p. 96.

In this church officials often acquiesced. Some congregants were able to buy spaces on their church's floor, in which they built pews according to their own tastes, while others expected to have their own pews reserved for their use alone. Many families chose a 'square pew or enclosure wherein the family could sit in state and privacy for the ordinary services of the Reformed Church'.⁶⁰ Smaller spaces could also be used; in 1621, Thomas Wiman paid 6s. 8d. to erect a stool in St Margaret, Wychling, Kent, 'for the use of his wife' or, rather tactlessly, 'that woman that shall succeed her'.⁶¹ Having a large space for oneself and one's family in church was likely to have been necessary to accommodate the elaborate dress sported by the privileged: at the theatre, and almost certainly at church also, sixteenth-century women provoked laughter by their elaborate dress. Samuel Rowlands described them in 1600 as appearing with:

A Buske, a Mask, a Fanne, a monstrous Ruffe,
A Boulster for the Buttockes and such stuffe.⁶²

In any event, long-term use of a place in church could grow into a legal right via a faculty or a prescription, which trumped any attempt to allocate the places for others.

As was ruled in 1836 in the case of *Blake v. Usborne*, a prescription for a seat in church was permissible if based on 'immemorial usage', without known origin, of that seat. A prescription could also be attached to a person or family resident in the parish or to a house within the parish, and could be bequeathed to heirs.⁶³ Where a house was shared by several congregants or family, a prescription might also arise for one or the other to have *priority* in

⁵⁹ Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, pp. vi-vii; Kennett, W., *Parish Antiquities Attempted in the History of Ambrosden, Burcester, and Other Adjacent Parts in the Counties of Oxford and Bucks* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1818 – originally published 1695), p. 596.

⁶⁰ Cox *Bench-ends in English Churches*, p. 28.

⁶¹ CCA, U3/196/1/1.

⁶² Rowlands, S. & Scott, W., *The Letting of Humours Blood in the Head-vaine, &c* (Edinburgh: J. Ballantyne, 1814; first published 1600), p. 41.

⁶³ *Blake v. Usborne*, 3. Hagg. (1836), cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 92; Marsh, 'Sacred Space in England', p. 300; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 13.

the attached pew, as well as the general right to use the pew.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, in the period under study, the great majority of churches were not crowded with prescriptions. Most parishes in 1800 had at least *some* seats held by prescription, but the churchwardens were still able to allot the majority of seats.⁶⁵

Once a sale, faculty or prescription was recognised for a certain place in a church, any seats there were unavailable for allocation to another congregant. But where a faculty or prescription for a pew was declared *abandoned*, ownership reverted to the bishop and churchwardens.⁶⁶ The earliest known faculty was recognised at Worcester in about 1580.⁶⁷ In the early 1700s faculties for seats ‘were issued rather freely – probably to anyone who took the trouble to build a pew’.⁶⁸ A faculty could be for a pew to be attached to a dwelling, in perpetuity, or could allow a specific congregant a sitting until he or she died or left the parish.⁶⁹ Generally churchwardens were required to observe such legal and equitable titles, despite their dubious legal enforceability, and to refuse to recognize new prescriptions.⁷⁰ Bishops had no authority to grant faculties to non-parishioners,⁷¹ and in 1704 a court ruled that a ‘custom’ to sell pews was legally insufficient to convey title.⁷² Nevertheless many new titles were formed and recognised regardless of their uncertain legal status; ‘during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the number of prescriptive titles increased so that

⁶⁴ Fowler, J.C., *Church Pews, Their Origin and Legal Incidents, with Some Observations on the Propriety of Abolishing Them* (London: Rivington, 1844), p. 50.

⁶⁵ Marsh, ‘Sacred Space in England’, p. 300.

⁶⁶ Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 69.

⁶⁷ Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book I, p. 104.

⁶⁸ Rodes, R.E., Jr., *Law and Modernization in the Church of England: Charles II to the Welfare State* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. 67.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67-68.

⁷⁰ *Pym v. Gorwyn, Moor, K.B. Repr.* (1613), cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 93; Hill, C., *Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 181..

⁷¹ Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 73.

⁷² *Hole v. Burnet*, Consist. 1740, cited 1 Hagg. C. R. p. 318, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 57.

churchwardens had fewer seats at their disposal, unless they built new ones'. Prescriptions could cause dissention – in 1750, 37 parishioners at the Parish Church of Deal protested the grant of a faculty to a Mrs Ann Pye for a pew, resolving that the Church 'ought not to be appropriated to particular families because the seats at this time are not sufficient to hold one forth [sic] part of the parishioners'. The practice appears to have grown less common over time. In the Kentish returns of the 1851 religious census some churches reported faculty and prescription pews, including Murston, Bexley, and Sutton-at-Hone, but others – including St Lawrence, Bapchild and All Saints, Murston – noted that their churches had no such pews.⁷³

By 1832 prescriptions caused difficulties, since houses to which pews were attached by prescription were unoccupied and often uninhabitable, and the sittings, appropriated to residents who did not exist, were consequently unable to be filled during services,⁷⁴ unless the first lesson rule, described below, was in effect. In at least one instance – St Thomas, Ardwick, Lancashire – in 1851 the churchwardens requested that those who owned or had rights to pews and who were not using them simply relinquish them to be rented to enlarge the incumbent's stipend.⁷⁵ Sometimes no *formal* annexation of the rights of such pews was made; by 1943 at St Andrew, Ashton-on-Ribble, no claim had been made for many years on pews originally attached to houses, so the church had simply been renting the sittings and keeping the money.⁷⁶

Where pew-rent was paid, the legal effect of a faculty may have been legally defeated by the payment, as was true of prescriptions, but at least one congregant paid pew-rent while protesting that *his* doing so did not affect an ancient faculty.⁷⁷

⁷³ CCA U3/95/8/A1; Marsh, 'Sacred Space in England', p. 300; *Religious Worship in Kent*, pp. 53, 63, 290; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", pp. 11, 13-14.

⁷⁴ *Report on Eccl. Courts*, 1832, p.131, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 83.

⁷⁵ MALS M273/2.

⁷⁶ LaRO PR3279/4/6.

⁷⁷ LA JARVIS V/A/11/19.

Seat Allocation: Sitzings That *Could* be Allocated

For most congregants, the allocation of seats probably occurred informally via their own behaviour – since people are creatures of habit, they repeatedly sat in places in which they felt comfortable, and just as likely, ‘their neighbours would, from friendly feelings or peaceable motives, be disinclined to interfere’.⁷⁸ This civility continued to occur in churches without formal allocated seating, and of course still occurs today. In 1872 the London Free and Open Church Association postulated that a small number of seats first were reserved for parishioners of the highest standing; those of slightly lower status ‘coveted and obtained the same privileges’, and so on⁷⁹ –

By degrees it came about that the smaller squirearchy, the professional man, the yeoman farmer, the successful teacher, and above all, the wife and family of the married priest, desired to imitate the great man of the parish; and hence somewhat small boxes or squared pews grew up in the rear of the big manorial pew.⁸⁰

At some churches the authorities accelerated these arrangements. In 1457 at St Mary Woolchurch, London, churchwardens were required to segregate places for the rich from those for the poor, and about 1600, acting on instructions from the bishops, churchwardens began to direct the laity to seat themselves according to their rank in society, a practice that endured at least until 1872.⁸¹ Maltby concludes that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even when no assignment was made based on social status, ‘contemporaries perceived it as a mirror of their community’.⁸²

But whether the congregants arranged themselves or the order of seating was imposed on them, the process of informal allocation was nowhere near so orderly and mannerly as the

⁷⁸ Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book I, pp. 95-96.

⁷⁹ London, J., “*The Parochial System*,” and *Free and Unappropriated Churches* (London: James Parker & Co., 1872), p. 15; Bennett, “Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”, p. 7.

⁸⁰ Cox, *Bench-ends in English Churches*, p. 28.

⁸¹ Kümin, B., *The Shaping of a Community: The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish c. 1400- c. 1560*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), p. 233; Flather, *The Politics of Place*, p. 23; Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book I, pp. 109, 111; Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament*, p. 178; Bennett, “Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”, p. 7.

⁸² Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England*, p. 198.

London Free and Open Church Association suggested. When affluent congregants' right to particular seats was beyond question, they sometimes allowed their social inferiors to sit in the better pews, but 'friendly feelings or peaceable motives' of course do not always occur, and rights to particular seats are not always beyond question;

A seat in church was both a source and a symbol of social and political status in a society where ritual, dress and gesture defined and defended rank and reputation. Conflicts over seats were 'symbolic struggles for social precedence'.⁸³

Not surprisingly, therefore, pew disputes were common even before most churches had pews⁸⁴ – Chaucer hinted at such a conflict⁸⁵ – and were said to be increasing in frequency slightly before the turn of the nineteenth century.⁸⁶ Since quarrels were likely to occur when two people tried to occupy the same seat, divine service could be interrupted by loud arguments and possibly physical violence.⁸⁷ Newcomers may not have observed informal seating patterns, and resentment felt by congregants who deemed themselves socially higher than those occupying better, closer seats was all but inevitable. This was particularly so before the Reformation, when congregants placed much importance on

how close or how far from the host one sat. This in turn determined in what order one received the pax bread or kissed the pax...In a world where proximity to the sacred was important, a churchwarden could wield some influence over a parishioner's religious experience.⁸⁸

Intrusions by those considered to be social inferiors could be deeply felt, and continued long after the Reformation. In 1638 a perceived violation of his church pew led the Earl of

⁸³ Marsh, C., "Common Prayer" in England 1560-1640: The View from the Pew', *Past & Present*, v. 171 (2001), pp. 66-94, p. 81; Flather, *The Politics of Place*, p. 7; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 8-9.

⁸⁴ Alldridge, N., 'Loyalty and Identity in Chester Parishes 1540-1640', in *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350-1750*, Wright, S.J., ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1988), pp. 85-124, p. 94.

⁸⁵ Chaucer, G., *Canterbury Tales*, B. 3091, quoted in Elliott-Binns, L.E., *Medieval Cornwall* (London: Methuen & Co., 1955), p. 266:

And if that any neighebore of myne
Wol not in churche to my wyf enclyne,
Or be so hardy to hire to trespase.

⁸⁶ Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*, p. 22.

⁸⁷ Gowing, L., *Common Bodies: Women, Power and Touch in Seventeenth Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 56.

⁸⁸ French, *The People of the Parish*, p. 84.

Huntingdon to state that, ‘I was never so confronted nor such an indignity offered to be put on me’.⁸⁹ When a church was rebuilt and its seating plan changed, claims that specific congregants should get the best pew assignments were sometimes too complicated for the churchwardens to settle. At Aikton Parish, Wigton, Cumberland, in 1791, special arbitrators were appointed for this purpose.⁹⁰ And at St George, Kendal, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the archdeacon were authorised to assign the new sittings, and disgruntled seat-holders had to resort to an appeal to the bishop.⁹¹ Since mid-Victorian times, though, some churches have seated congregants on movable chairs in an attempt to allow each family to sit together.⁹² Movable chairs have been claimed to reduce pew disputes, since congregants may push them into any empty space.⁹³

Some occupants who owned or were allocated pews made themselves extremely comfortable in them and would have especially resented intrusions – any high-walled box pew could allow its occupants to nap without being seen by other congregants.⁹⁴ In 1896 the *Daily News* described a ‘village church, lately in possession of a squire’s pew, carpeted, with fireplace chairs and tables, a snuggerly wherein the great man snored unobserved’.⁹⁵

At St Mary, Faversham, in the eighteenth century the pews *themselves* were subject to the principle that those of higher social standing were to be given privileges in church – the pews placed in the areas in which the higher social classes were likely to sit were made of more expensive material than those in less favourable places. In 1756 an agreement with a carpenter prescribed that in the *body* of the church, new pews were:

⁸⁹ Flather, *The Politics of Place*, p. 53.

⁹⁰ CROC PR25/24.

⁹¹ CROC WPR31/2/3.

⁹² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords*, pp. 316-317, 379-380.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 316, 322.

⁹⁴ Wall, J.C., *An Old English Parish* (London: Talbot, 1907), p. 19.

⁹⁵ Kacirk, J., *Forgotten English* (New York: Quill/William Morrow, 1997), p. 171.

to be made and with fronts of Wainscott and Raised Panels and the Skirting to be made of good clean English oak or hard wainscot and the doors hung at Eight Shillings and Sixpence the Square Yard / the Parishioners of the said Parish finding and providing the Hinges for hanging the said Doors...

For the *aisles*, though, the pews were:

to be made and fronted with Good Clean Christiena Deal Plain Panell with Quarter Round with Scirtings of Good Yellow Deal and the Doors hung at Five Shillings the square yard / the said Parishioners finding and providing Hinges for Hanging the said Pews as above...⁹⁶

For those churches in which arguments over seats caused disruption, official seat allocation was useful in the same manner of a modern traffic light – governmental authorities anticipate that conflicts of precedence will occur and may result in car crashes, and so endeavour to solve them in advance. Perhaps for this reason more than any other, churches took it upon themselves to assign places. By mid-Victorian times slightly more than half of the sittings in English and Welsh churches and chapels were allocated to particular congregants.⁹⁷ Particularly in the eighteenth century, seat allocation was generally accepted without complaint.⁹⁸ When seating conflicts could not be resolved internally, the church courts had jurisdiction over them,⁹⁹ and churchwardens regularly presented people for sitting in spaces they were not assigned.¹⁰⁰ The power to allocate seats included the right to compel *any* parishioner to use only so much space as necessary so that all could be accommodated. Individual rights were less important, at least in seat allocation, than parish authority.

Nevertheless, allocation meant relegating those of lower standing to the worst seats, in the back of the nave or in galleries, whichever was deemed ‘their place’.¹⁰¹ In rural parishes, landholding – a closely related matter – often determined seat allocation.¹⁰² Later, though,

⁹⁶ CCA U3/146/5/1B.

⁹⁷ Hoppen, K.T., *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 454.

⁹⁸ Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*, p. 23.

⁹⁹ Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁰ Flather, *The Politics of Place*, p. 26.

¹⁰¹ Marsh, C., ‘Order and Place in England, 1580-1640: The View from the Pew’, *Journal of British Studies*, v. 44 (January 2005), pp. 3-26, pp. 3, 6.

¹⁰² Machin, G.I.T., *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832 to 1868* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 167.

under the 1825 decision of *Fuller v. Lane*, parishioners had ‘a claim to be seated according to their rank and station’. Even so, this view was evidently idealised, particularly when written in the mid-nineteenth century: ‘the distinctive socioeconomic and cultural pressures of the late sixteenth and seventeenth and centuries especially complicated and confused customary hierarchies as wealth became increasingly at odds with social status’.¹⁰³ Even in 1886, Archbishop Thomson of York wished to allocate seats according to parishioners’ social rank. ‘Class solidarity was of supreme importance’ and friendships with servants were unthinkable;¹⁰⁴ many employers appreciated judges such as those chronicled by Henry Fielding, who ‘would commit a servant to Bridewell, at any time when a master or mistress desir’d it’.¹⁰⁵ Servants were assigned pews separate from those of their employers well into the Victorian era, often in remote galleries or even isolated by screens.¹⁰⁶ At the turn of the nineteenth century at St Mary, Beverley, the servants’ pews – designated by the occupants’ employers’ names, e.g. ‘Mr. Dobson's Servants’, were more likely not only to be more toward the back of each loft but also laterally further away from the pulpit.¹⁰⁷ In the nineteenth century society grew more and more prone to divide itself into higher and lower socio-economic groups, with some who for parts of their lives did not belong to any household. The ‘masters and mistresses of the middling sort no longer wanted their apprentices and unmarried employees to live with them and to eat with them’,¹⁰⁸ and by extension did not want to sit particularly near them in church.

Seating by social ranking is thought to have persisted into the twentieth century. In Edwardian times an Essex farm boy noticed that in his parish’s church the poor sat at the

¹⁰³ Flather, *The Politics of Place*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁴ Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*, p. 505.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

¹⁰⁶ *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working Toil from the 1820s to the 1920s*, Burnett, J., ed. (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 174.

¹⁰⁷ ERYARS DDBC/14/24 & DDBC/14/25.

¹⁰⁸ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 16.

back, shopkeepers and others of slightly better status were in the middle, and ‘posh people’ occupied the front seats.¹⁰⁹ This formula must have been complicated, however, by difficulties in determining the exact hierarchy of social ranks. It would have been especially difficult in urban areas, where much specialisation of labour existed, and would become even more vexatious as the Industrial Revolution dawned. In Kentish London in Victorian times, as elsewhere, an ‘interminable division’ of the labour workforce existed.¹¹⁰ Social ranking by income level, commerce versus landowning, and non-manual work over manual labour, were very important,¹¹¹ and differing opinions of where one belonged in church as well as in society at large could easily lead to rancour. Galleries posed another difficulty, since they formed another section of pews apart from the rows in the nave, and where large enough they entailed another grid of front, middle and back rows. They became popular in the early eighteenth century as a means of providing more seating without structural alteration.

Segregation of sittings by *gender* also caused complications. Initially, male and female congregants were evidently allowed to sit together; ‘The Vision of Piers Plowman’ of 1360 discusses a man who states that he is used to sitting in church pews with wives and widows.¹¹² But in the fifteenth century the church was the usual place for ‘assignations for love’, to the despair of the clergy who wanted solemn observance of divine service.¹¹³ At about that time, and probably for that reason, congregants were often segregated by gender on the reasoning that allowing males and females to sit close to each other might distract them from the purpose of the service. In some places gender separation was short-lived and had

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, P., *The Edwardians: The Re-Making of British Society*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 284-5, cited in Cannadine, D., *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 120; Bennett, “Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”, p. 7.

¹¹⁰ Crossick, G., *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London 1840-1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 63.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹¹² Cox, *Bench-ends in English Churches*, p. 8.

¹¹³ Hindley, G., *England in the Age of Caxton* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1979), p. 119.

begun to disappear before the Reformation,¹¹⁴ but the 1549 Prayer Book required separation by sex,¹¹⁵ and in many churches such segregation persisted.¹¹⁶ In 1620 a congregant of St Alphege, Cripplegate Within, was required to explain his behaviour after sitting in the same pew as his wife, which was deemed ‘highly indecent’.¹¹⁷ And although the records of Cirencester Church show husbands and wives sitting together in rented pews in 1780 and later,¹¹⁸ as late as 1855 the parish church of Goodnestone, Kent, divided seating for unmarried servants by gender,¹¹⁹ and some older congregants at the same time chose to sit apart from their spouses.¹²⁰ The *Church Review* in 1877 stated that in ‘many an old parish church in the country there yet lingers the tradition of the separation of the sexes’. And in the twentieth century gender segregation was still a sufficiently dire memory – or possibility – for William Barlow, the Dean of Peterborough Cathedral, to say in 1903 that ‘I trust it will be understood that there will be no separation of the sexes, men on one side, & women on the other.’¹²¹

In some churches earlier in history, pews were not only segregated by gender but by marital status as well. At St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, married women and their daughters were seated apart from spinsters, and at Grantham parish church a gallery was built solely for bachelors.¹²² Whether rent was demanded or not, allocation by social status *and* gender – and sometimes marital status – naturally required two or more sets of seat assignments. Various exceptions were made in various churches. Even in the early twentieth century school children or working-class children were likely to be seated together at the rear of the church.

¹¹⁴ CERC ECE/7/1/21796.

¹¹⁵ Cox, *Bench-ends in English Churches*, p. 17.

¹¹⁶ <http://www.southsomersetmuseums.org.uk/benchends/introduction.htm>

¹¹⁷ Cox, *Bench-ends in English Churches*, p. 17.

¹¹⁸ GA, P86/1 CW 4/8

¹¹⁹ CCA U3/232/6/B/8.

¹²⁰ ‘Open Seats in Churches’, *The Christian Remembrancer*, v. 24 (1852), pp. 80-136, pp. 103-4.

¹²¹ LMA P77/CTC/46/2.

¹²² Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, pp. 216-7.

Allocation was made even more difficult by several other factors, among them the size of a particular family wanting to attend church. After gender-based segregation largely went out of style, this problem became more acute. In 1863 the Archbishop of Canterbury, in writing to the churchwardens of St Mary, Minster-in-Thamet, stressed that churchwardens

may place or displace at pleasure, taking care not to exercise such power capriciously; In the execution of their duty they should in our opinion deal with Seats and not with Pews, with this exception that, where the members of a Family are sufficiently numerous to occupy a whole Pew, it should be assigned to them, in order that they may worship together...¹²³

Henrietta Thornhill recorded in her diary in May 1876 that ‘Mabel had to sit in [another] pew as ours were full.’¹²⁴ Families with many children or other relatives in the same household were likely to have been separated to some degree when renting seats in church, and in many churches could not, of course, have been accommodated in the same pew, or even in the same general area of the church when available sittings were in short supply. Some might have to be placed in any pew with open sittings. In other churches there seemed no thought behind the allocation. According to a church seating plan in Widecombe, Devon, in the nineteenth century, for example, residents of ‘some of the principal and most ancient properties in that parish’ occupied pews in:

some very odd locations, some tucked into corners of the transepts, in positions which are actually hidden from the view of the chancel and the altar, and it appears upon consideration of the whole that the allocations seem to have been made by a process of random selection.¹²⁵

Similar anomalies evidently occurred in 1860 at St Mary the Virgin, Walkhampton, Devon.¹²⁶

Transience in primary residences – in areas not associated with holidays – common among the leisured class, also caused difficulties for the assignment of sittings. Such temporary migration occurred even before the Reformation and the development of effective modes of family transport; in late medieval times many of the wealthy ‘had more than one

¹²³ CCA U3/164/8/2.

¹²⁴ LAD IV/81/13.

¹²⁵ <http://www.dartmoorpress.clara.net/WalknChurch.html>

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

home and were at best part-time members of a parish'.¹²⁷ Particularly after 1689, MPs and peers might spend only minimal time in their county seats, residing in Westminster for most of the year and taking some of their holidays in Bath or other popular destinations,¹²⁸ leaving the sittings assigned to them in their country parishes empty. At least two families in Lincolnshire rented pews in other areas, one in Dover and the other in Berkeley Chapel, a proprietary establishment in London.¹²⁹ A sojourn to a country estate might be a heralded occasion at which blue-bloods hosted celebrations for locals, but the time spent there might be comparatively short. When Lord and Lady Hertford arranged a visit to their rural residence in Ragley, Warwickshire, for nineteen days in the summer of 1770, Lady Mary Coke pointedly observed that 'I don't think they will have time to be tired of the country.'¹³⁰ Some of the privileged also bought great houses only to sell them again a short time later, often for demographic reasons.¹³¹ William Cowper wrote that

Estates are landscapes, gaz'd upon a while,
Then advertiz'd, and auctioneer'd away.¹³²

Frequent changes in residence would surely cause confusion for churchwardens, especially when the buyers had 'new money' and were of a lower social class than their predecessors.

Other distinctions were made as well. In making seating decisions, churchwardens occasionally took into account the amount of church rate congregants paid, as well as their social standing.¹³³ At the parish church of St James and St John, Clerkenwell, in 1858 church officials evidently would, 'as a matter of kindness' see that an infirm person was satisfactorily

¹²⁷ French, *The People of the Parish*, p. 92.

¹²⁸ Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*, pp. 194, 367, 378.

¹²⁹ LA JARVIS 5P/11/17 & NEL IX/24/62.

¹³⁰ Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*, p. 381.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹³² Cowper: *Poetical Works*, 4th ed., Milford, H.S., ed. (London: Dent, 1967), quoted in Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*, p. 38.

¹³³ Dillow, K.B., *The Social and Ecclesiastical Significance of Church Seating Arrangements and Pew Disputes, 1500-1740* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 1990), p. 98.

seated.¹³⁴ Also the churchwardens often gave themselves the nicer pews,¹³⁵ which would have been more likely to cause dissension when they were of lower social status than those in less desirable seats.¹³⁶ And most were of lower social status, as is detailed in a later chapter.

Based on this, the most that can be said is that *in general* congregants of higher social status were seated *toward* the pulpit and those of lesser status *toward* the font.

The Development of Pew-renting

The earliest known fee charged for a church seat in England occurred at All Saints, Bristol, in 1406.¹³⁷ The St Laurence, Reading, churchwardens' accounts for 1441-2 record 'Et de iiij d. de dono ux'is John Tamer jr j setell', and later 'a groat was paid by three other wives, and 6d. in a single case'.¹³⁸ These payments do not appear to have been repetitive, which would indicate rental, so whether these were for rent of the actual seat or for the floor on which a privately-owned seat rested is not entirely clear, but the prices do indicate rental of *something*, rather than purchase. A few other examples exist from the mid- and late-fifteenth century, but only in the 1490s does the first definite instance of seat-renting appear in the churchwardens' accounts of St Edmund, Salisbury, where several men paid sums ranging from 4d. to 1s. for 'Hyrynge of Setys' for themselves and their wives, and two other women paid for their own seats. Pew-renting also may have occurred at St Stephen, Walbrook, London in 1504, at which monetary payments called 'sittings and taxings' were made for clerks' salaries.¹³⁹ Chadwick reports that an act during the reign of Henry VIII in 1533 gave

¹³⁴ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 541.

¹³⁵ Marsh, 'Order and Place in England', pp. 11, 13; Marsh, 'Sacred Space in England', p. 308; Flather, *The Politics of Place*, p. 14; *Armstrong's Norfolk Diary*, pp. 41-42.

¹³⁶ Hart, A, *The Man in the Pew, 1558-1660* (London: John Baker, 1966), p. 60; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 12.

¹³⁷ Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community*, p. 233; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 16.

¹³⁸ Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts from the Fourteenth Century to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, p. 187; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 16.

¹³⁹ Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community*, p. 233; Flather, *The Politics of Place*, p. 12; *Churchwardens' Accounts of S. Edmund's & St Thomas, Sarum, 1443-1702, With Other Documents*, Swayne, H.J.F., ed. (Salisbury:

formal sanction to the practice of pew-renting,¹⁴⁰ but no evidence of such a sanction was found in this study.

At St Mary, Eccles, Manchester, in 1595, the best seats, *i.e.*, those in ‘the one settle next adjoining beneath the pew where the curate doth say service, upon the South side, and the other next adjoining beneath the pulpit, on the North side’, were to be given to the ‘wives whose husbands have been used to pay 11d. or above to a Church Ley’, and others were seated in the order of their husbands’ or fathers’ payments.¹⁴¹ And in a number of churches the incumbent had enjoyed ‘from time immemorial’ the right to let the pews in the chancel, as at St Leonard, Streatham.¹⁴² This could cause difficulties when the practice was profitable and the incumbent had donated the proceeds to church expenses; churchwardens could find their budgets wanting if a subsequent incumbent insisted on keeping the money.

But before the Church Building Acts beginning in 1818, pew-renting often resembled pew *ownership* – leases for lives, such as occurred at Warminster in 1759.¹⁴³ Sometimes smaller sums than usual rents were to be paid annually,¹⁴⁴ and fines for renewal of these leases of pews for lives had long been charged,¹⁴⁵ as occurred in leases of houses and lands. These appear to have been much more common than the annual or semi-annual rental periods usual in Victorian times. At some churches in the fifteenth century,

parishioners were accustomed to purchase what can only be called a kind of leasehold on their pews, and when a member of the gentry built a large box-pew for himself and his family he commonly purchased the necessary floor space.¹⁴⁶

Bennett Brothers, 1896), p. 37; Pendrill, C., *Old Parish Life in London* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 125; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 16.

¹⁴⁰ McMaster, J., *A Short History of the Royal Parish of St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, W.C.* (London: G. Holder, 1916), p. 141; Chadwick, O., *The Reformation* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964).

¹⁴¹ *The Ancient Parish Church of Eccles: Its Antiquity, Alterations, and Improvements* (Eccles: Shuttleworth, 1864), pp. 27, 29.

¹⁴² LMA P95/LEN/225.

¹⁴³ *Halliday v. Phillips and Others*, L.R. 23 Q.B.D. 48, 49 (1889).

¹⁴⁴ See *e.g.* NDRO 799A/Pl 172 – in 1819 the annual ‘conventional’ rent for each sitting leased at Bideford Parish, Devon, was one shilling, in addition to the initial lease price.

¹⁴⁵ SRO D\Pl\wiv./4/1/1.

¹⁴⁶ Pounds, *The Culture of the English People*, p. 281.

Churches still leasing pews for lives in the nineteenth century seem concentrated in the southwest of England, particularly Somersetshire and Dorsetshire. Those leases which existed in the nineteenth century, such as one drawn up at St John, Torquay, in 1823,¹⁴⁷ largely resembled rents by requiring annual payments and potential repossession by the churchwardens in the case of default. From 1804 to 1852, the church of Minehead Parish, Somerset, was paid various sums for this privilege.¹⁴⁸ Such practices were especially pronounced further back in history. Leases of sittings ‘for lives’ could be extended by making the life in question that of someone younger than the lessee. Wimborne Minster Parish, Dorset, in 1827 set out formal and complicated terms for renewing leases for lives on the death of the original lessee, including allowing the original lessee three calendar months to renew the lease in case the ‘other life than his own’ should ‘die in his lifetime’. The leases at Wimborne Minister church could also be bequeathed to other family members, and the churchwardens could, if need be, choose another family member in whom to vest sittings.¹⁴⁹

Although a few pre-1800 examples exist of churches realising significant profit by *annually* letting seats, other than proprietary chapels, what pew-renting was done many decades before the nineteenth century appears to have been a much more limited affair involving little business acumen. Leases for lives naturally removed much profit-oriented bargaining, since the prices were fixed for long periods – during which supply and demand might change drastically. The numbers of sittings let in each church were generally few – most pews were not subject to rent. All concerned may have agreed that only the one or two ‘squire’s pews’ or other special seating areas for the richest in the church were worthy of rent, particularly if in or near the chancel or segregated from the rest. At St Mary, Faversham, at least from 1732 to 1754 the total rent for a particular private gallery was five shillings a year,

¹⁴⁷ DRO 1161A/PW94.

¹⁴⁸ SRO D\P\m.st.m/4/2/1.

¹⁴⁹ DHC PE/WM:CW 11/5.

but evidently no other pews were rented – the five shillings is usually included in the churchwardens' accounts, along with the much greater sum for church rate, in a list of only three or four sources of income.¹⁵⁰ Neither sales nor presumably rentals of pews before the nineteenth century appear to have netted much income; they were 'more a convenience offered to those who could pay rather than a serious attempt to increase revenue'.¹⁵¹ The prices of pew-rents in earlier times bear this out – at Ashburton, Devon, about 1500, 'the price of a pew varied from 4d. to 8d. a year',¹⁵² while even vagrants in Elizabethan times were able to spare 1d. to see one showing of a play in a London amphitheatre.¹⁵³ A fragment of a late sixteenth century account shows 'Item to the churchwardens for pews for the whole yr – [ten shillings]',¹⁵⁴ which is not particularly expensive, especially if several large pews were involved. A century later, in 1687, 7/6 was paid for a pew 'in ye Chappell at Oxendon'.¹⁵⁵

The few examples of serious profit-making are instructive, though. At Ellenbrough Chapel, Lancashire, in 1677, pew-rents were instituted specifically for a financial reason: the incumbent's annual income of £20 or less was so small that the bishop's representative requested three men, 'ffeofoes for the Endowment of the said Chappell', to 'take Care that such Persons who shall repaire to the Chappell of Ellenbrough and are not Annual Contributors...be charged and pay such Reasonable paym^ts for the use of their respective Seats as others who do enjoy Seates in the said Chappell'.¹⁵⁶ Also,

at St. Mary's, Reading, it was agreed in 1581 by the chief men of the parish, in order to augment the parish stock and to maintain the church, because 'the rentes ar very smale,' that those sitting in front seats in the church should pay 8d., those behind them 6d., the third row 4d., and so on.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ CCA U3/146/5/1A & U3/146/5/B/1.

¹⁵¹ French, *The People of the Parish*, p. 106.

¹⁵² Pounds, *The Culture of the English People*, p. 281.

¹⁵³ Gurr, A., *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.53.

¹⁵⁴ NAK SP 42/26 fo. 120.

¹⁵⁵ NAK E 192/14/11.

¹⁵⁶ LaRO DDKE/acc. 7840 HMC/353.

¹⁵⁷ Ware, *The Elizabethan Parish in its Ecclesiastical and Financial Aspects*, Part I, p. 286 (at <http://www.fullbooks.com/The-Elizabethan-Parish-in-its-Ecclesiastical1.html>)

At St Stephen, Hackington (near Canterbury), the churchwardens' accounts of 1592 include a list of pew-renters with the sums they paid and the grand total for that year and others in the 1590s.¹⁵⁸ But very few examples of similar attention to detail have survived.

Many, perhaps most, instances of serious profit-producing pew-renting before 1800 reflect private transactions between individuals. In Canterbury in the 1660s an official named Old Hopkins, a 'pew keeper' who had formerly been a nonconformist, kept congregants from sitting in their former pews 'in y^e body of y^e sermons house' unless 'they pay so much money as he pleases to demand of them'. Trying to reclaim one's sitting could lead to violence: 'if they press forward to gett into theire seats [Old Hopkins] has resisted them with blows'.¹⁵⁹ Hostelries might have pew space in their parish church or local chapel of ease which boarders could use as part of the benefits of renting rooms. Hugh Barker Bell of Aylesford in the mid-1750s owned pews he designated for the use of parishioners and travellers paying to stay at his White Hart Inn.¹⁶⁰ The inn's customers were therefore effectively renting the seats.

In at least one instance of serious pew-letting for profit, the parish claimed some of the proceeds. St George the Martyr, Queen's Square, Camden, was opened as a proprietary chapel in 1706. The parish wanted a share of the take, since the 'Subscribers & Proprietors' of its pews were assessed that year at 6d. in the pound, evidently per quarter,¹⁶¹ from which the rector was paid.¹⁶² A few years later the authorities bought some of the pews, proprietors owned pews there at least as late as 1730.¹⁶³

Other pew-renting was more charitably inclined. Sir John Cutter built a gallery at his own expense at St Margaret, Westminster, in 1685, for parishioners 'of quality' to rent at a

¹⁵⁸ CCA U3/39/28/13.

¹⁵⁹ CCA DCc-PET/234.

¹⁶⁰ Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*, p. 23.

¹⁶¹ LMA P82/GEO2/64.

¹⁶² LMA P82/GEO2/64; <http://www.a2a.org.uk/search/documentxs1.asp?com=1&i=3&nbKey=2&stylesheet=xsl\A2A\com.xsl&keyword=st%20george%20ADJ1%20martyr&properties=0601>

¹⁶³ LMA P82/GEO2/64.

‘reasonable’ sum. The rent charged seems high, particularly for the time – a Hugh Squior paid £6 per year for two of those pews for his wife. Fortunately, while Sir John was evidently concerned with the status of those who might otherwise sully his gallery by sitting in it, the revenue was to be ‘for the use and benefit of the poore people of the said parish’.¹⁶⁴

Seat allocation was of course inherent in pew-renting. In letting sittings, church authorities have virtually always rented particular pews to particular congregants, in the style of a modern airplane, rather than simply allowing renters to choose which seats to occupy as they arrive for services. Graduated prices based on the desirability of each pew were also almost universal. Few examples have been found of a ‘flat’ rate for every pew in a particular church, and those were generally before the period under study here, including St Ewen, Bristol, for one to two years in the fifteenth century,¹⁶⁵ and St Mary, Dover, which in the first half of the seventeenth century charged a uniform fee for each female congregant and a different fee for each male regardless of the desirability of the pew each occupied.¹⁶⁶

Predictably, the total receipts varied widely. In 1498 St Laurence, Reading, took in six shillings and sixpence in pew rents for seats for female congregants alone.¹⁶⁷ At St George, Deal, a chapel of ease for ‘the sea-going population’, in 1720 the ‘Rent of the Pewes in the body of the Chappell’ at St George netted £103 2s., while the gallery pews brought in a further £29 15s. The total rose steadily until 1730-1, when over £198 was received, then fell to an average of about £135 until mid-century.¹⁶⁸

Having allocated the pews – and often having set the rents – church authorities or their agents also collected the rent from the sittings, as they did from church land.¹⁶⁹ And

¹⁶⁴ NAK C 93/42/35.

¹⁶⁵ Pounds, *The Culture of the English People*, p. 281.

¹⁶⁶ Tate, *The Parish Chest*, p. 90.

¹⁶⁷ Cox, *Bench-ends in English Churches*, p. 24.

¹⁶⁸ EKAC De/QC2; Holyoake, G., *St Andrew’s Church, Deal: The Boatman’s Church* (Rainman, Kent: Meresborough Books, 1984), p. 2; Bennett, ““Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly””, p. 30.

¹⁶⁹ See e.g. BRRO P/StT/ChW/109.

where a profit *was* made, several entities claimed the proceeds. In the early sixteenth century the church courts asserted ownership of a portion of pew-rent revenues.¹⁷⁰ After the Reformation, though, the rents generally were placed in parish funds;¹⁷¹ in Gloucestershire in the 1540s, for example, the parishes' general expenses were met by the total of pew-rents and other forms of revenue.¹⁷² Predictably, a dispute then arose over *which* parish officials were entitled to the pew-rents. In early Victorian Liverpool, as was common in the Church of Scotland, the municipal corporation was a patron of certain churches and received part of the pew-rents.¹⁷³ But no other English instance of municipal involvement has been found.

The problem of which *church* official should then receive the rents was solved via an evolving custom dictating that pew-rents belonged to the incumbent as part of his income.

Seat-Renting in Other Denominations and Faiths

Various Dissenting denominations joined Anglican churches in renting out at least a portion of their pews during the period under study. British Catholics generally shunned pew-renting,¹⁷⁴ along with the Anglo-Catholics of the 1830s and later.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, some Victorian Catholic churches let their pews, although not many examples exist; one, Alnwick Roman Catholic Church, Northumberland, let sittings at rates from 2/3 to 5/- per year from 1884 to 1886.¹⁷⁶ In the Catholic Apostolic Church, which was a Victorian phenomenon, the scant evidence suggests that a maximum of ten per cent of the sittings could be rented in each

¹⁷⁰ Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament*, p. 168.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁷² Litzenger, C., *The English Reformation and the Laity: Gloucestershire, 1540-1580* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 50.

¹⁷³ *Attorney-General v. Aspinall*, S. C. 1 Jur. (O. S.), 812, 7 L. J. Ch. (N. S.), 51, 2 MY. & Cr. 613, 616 (1837).

¹⁷⁴ Paz, D.G., *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 278.

¹⁷⁵ Arseneau, M., 'Pews, Periodicals and Politics: The Rossetti Women as High-Church Controversialists', in *Outsiders Looking In: The Rossettis Then and Now*, Clifford, D. & Roussillon, L., eds. (London: Anthem Press, 2004), pp. 97-114, p. 98.

¹⁷⁶ NCS RCP/2/B/2/1.

church, and that the practice generally existed only in urban areas.¹⁷⁷ But other Nonconformists found pew-renting more desirable. One early Victorian hypothesised that, because chapels gave socially unimportant congregants much greater roles than they could have filled in Anglican churches, participants were more willing to spend hard-earned money to rent seats.¹⁷⁸ Perhaps because they could not rely on rates, Dissenting chapels frequently financed themselves by pew-rents. Despite the surveys' confusing language, the 1851 religious census reflects that sittings in Nonconformist chapels were rented at least as often those in Anglican churches, perhaps more so.¹⁷⁹ In Victorian times the German Protestant Reformed Church, Hooper Square, Whitechapel, founded in 1697, charged seat-rents typical of Anglican churches – £1 1s. and 10s. 6d.¹⁸⁰ And some Jewish congregations let sittings, such as a synagogue in Catford, Kent – under the institution's 1948 by-laws each applicant for membership paid a subscription which covered the rental of sittings and other benefits.¹⁸¹

In Summary

This chapter has noted the development of formal church seating up to 1800, including the structures provided for congregants by the churches. Such seating might be provided by parish churches serving smaller populations before those of greater numbers of people. Seat allocation appears to have been instituted contemporaneously with formal seating or shortly thereafter, and was generally done via congregants' social status and, slightly later, by gender and marital status. Pew-renting began in a few churches in the fifteenth century, but was rarely done in a businesslike fashion until the nineteenth century.

¹⁷⁷ Flegg, C.G., *Gathered Under Apostles: A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 44.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹⁷⁹ 'Sacred Mysteries', *Daily Telegraph*, p. 25, 5 May 2001.

¹⁸⁰ Dickens, C., *Dickens' Dictionary of London, 1888: An Unconventional Handbook* (Moretonhampstead, Devon : Old House Books, 1993; first published 1888), at <http://www.victorianlondon.org/dickens/dickens-g.htm>.

¹⁸¹ *Neville Estates v. Madden*, Ch. 832, 836 (1961).

CHAPTER TWO

THE ESSENTIAL LAW OF PEW-RENTING

This chapter notes the cases and statutes that were applied to pew-renting, and where it can be ascertained, the extent to which churches and congregants ignored the law when they felt some pecuniary advantage could be gained.

The nineteenth-century Church Building Acts frequently addressed and implemented pew-rents – to such an extent that the letting of sittings was called the ‘sheet-anchor’ of those Acts.¹ Pew-renting was also authorised by the Private Patronage Act and the New Parishes Acts, enacted in 1843, 1844, 1856 and 1869 and amended in 1884, which had ‘the same great object of putting the Church into a state of full efficiency’, including the maintenance of the incumbent.² But the law was clouded by a variety of acts of Parliament, injunctions of other legal authorities, and restrictions specific to each church. Joseph Ritson, High Bailiff of the Liberty of Savoy in the eighteenth century, remarked that in matters of church fees ‘every dirty little parish in the environs of London must have a law for itself’.³ And the *Church Review* in 1877 stated that the law was seldom obeyed even where it was known:

we are convinced of the truth of the charge that in nine cases out of every ten pew rents have no legal status or recognition, are but a development of that *via inertiae* which has had so baneful an effect upon the life and progress of our spiritual mother.⁴

The *Daily Express* echoed a similar sentiment in the same year:

The law of this matter is beyond doubt shamefully disregarded. Not only do churchwardens in hundreds of cases let pews without the shadow of a pretence of legal sanction, but it is to be feared that even when a scale has been assigned, the practice of encroaching upon the free seats is far too common...It is abundantly clear that the pew system, as restricted by the law, is by no means the absorbing and grasping thing which that same system is when left to the individual fancy of churchwardens.⁵

¹ Port, M.H., *600 New Churches: The Church Building Commission, 1818-1856* (Reading: Spire Books, 2006) (initially published in 1961 by S.P.C.K. Publishing), pp. 218, 220, 222.

² CERC ECE/7/1/21796; Stephen, J., *Mr. Serjeant Stephen's New Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 8th ed. (London: Butterworth's, 1880), p. 752.

³ Langford, P., *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 165.

⁴ CERC ECE/7/1/21796.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Confusing the issue further – then as now – were various legal opinions of the effect of laws, particularly where provisions enacted at different times appeared to conflict. At least one attorney of the Doctors’ Commons, whose letter on the subject is in the Church Building Commissioners’ files, opined that churches built or contributed to by the Commissioners under the authority of the New Parishes Act of 1843 could *not* charge pew-rents,⁶ which flew in the face of many instances in which pew-rents were thought to be legal under those Acts.

Accordingly, the law of every case was complex even where it was followed – and the resolution of problems even more difficult where the law was unknown, so predicting the outcome was difficult, especially where appeals to custom rather than to fixed law were made. Nevertheless, an account of general legal principles is possible.

The Law Applicable to All Anglican Institutions

Before the first Church Building Act in 1818 the renting of pews could only be done via a parliamentary act naming the church in question, and in 1886 the Chairman of the Free and Open Church Association estimated that no more than a hundred such churches existed.⁷ And the 1798 ruling of *Walter v. Gunner* noted that pew-renting was ‘a practice which has been constantly reprehended by the ecclesiastical courts as often as it had been set up’.⁸

The guiding legal precepts surrounding pew-renting included property and probate law. At base every parishioner had a common-law right to a seat in the parish church ‘without payment, either as a purchase, or as rent for the same’, and this right could not be defeated by a faculty held by a non-parishioner.⁹ Parishioners could not sub-let pews owned

⁶ CERC ECE/7/1/8122.

⁷ Dodd, J.T., ‘Parish Churches Bill’, in *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Wakefield*, Dunkley, C., ed. (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1886), p. 451.

⁸ Heales, A., *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II (London: Butterworths, 1872), p. 57; Bennett, J.C., ‘“Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”: The Practice of Pew-renting at Kentish Anglican Churches’ (unpublished MTh dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2006), p. 21.

⁹ Steer, J. & Clive, G., *Parish Law: Being a Digest of the Law Relating to Parishes*, 2nd ed. (London: Saunders & Benning, 1843), p. 25.

by churches, and the courts refused to honour such arrangements.¹⁰ A pew attached to a house by faculty or prescription also could not legally be let to anyone not living in the house.¹¹ Pew-renting in proprietary chapels, in which investors rented or bought seats to re-let to congregants, was permissible under more relaxed conditions than were placed on churches, since proprietary chapels were not subject to the common law.¹²

The nineteenth century saw far more governmental regulation of pew-renting than eighteenth-century clergymen or parishioners could have imagined. Beginning just before the death of George III, the Church Building Acts installed and affected pew-rents to such an extent that in an 1877 debate one Lord felt it necessary to say ‘that these old Church Building Acts were meant, not for creating pew-rents, but for providing churches for the people’.¹³ By 1900 the letting of pews could be authorised in specific churches under the Church Building Acts, or any of the New Parishes Acts or Private Patronage Acts or special private acts. The Church Building Commissioners, whose role was from 1857 taken over by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, could also authorise pew-rents in new churches, provided the Commissioners had made grants toward the building of those churches.¹⁴ Alternately a sitting might be rented under a ‘trust deed’ before the church in question was consecrated, which entailed that the title to it would be transferred to a trustee to protect a lender until the loan was paid back, although before 1831 the legality of this practice was doubtful.¹⁵

¹⁰ *Walter v. Gunner*, 1 Hagg. C. R., 3 Hag. Consist. (1798), cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 75; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 22.

¹¹ Fowler, J.C., *Church Pews, Their Origin and Legal Incidents, with Some Observations on the Propriety of Abolishing Them* (London: Rivington, 1844), p. 49.

¹² Billing, S., *The Laws Relating to Pews in Churches, District Churches, Chapels and Proprietary Chapels: The Rights Incidental Thereto, and the Remedy* (London: W. Benning, 1845), pp. 123, 130-1, 146, noting that *Moysey v. Hilcoat*, 2 Hagg. Eccl. Rep. (1828) stated that at some time before 1735 proprietors of such a chapel let the pews and paid salaries to the rector and clerk of the parish..

¹³ HL Deb 25 June 1877 v. 235 c. 189.

¹⁴ 58 Geo. III, c. 45, ss. 63-64.

¹⁵ Dodd, J.T., ‘Parish Churches Bill’, in *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Wakefield*, Dunkley, C., ed. (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1886), pp. 430-437, pp. 430, 433.

The first Church Building Act was passed in 1818, centralising control of pew-renting in each church newly erected under the Acts.¹⁶ The Act required that 20 percent of new seats were to be rent-free and marked with the words ‘Free Seats’.¹⁷ Pew-letting was envisioned as a temporary practice to be curtailed and eventually suppressed, at least at first.¹⁸ By the 1831 Act, though, this principle was largely subordinated to the revenue the system produced, since pew-rents by then were an essential part of many churches’ funds.¹⁹ Church Building Commissioners could only make grants for new churches in parishes having more than 4,000 residents, or more than 3,000 residents living more than a mile from the parish church, or seating for no more than 1,000 in the parish church.²⁰ The Commissioners were to fix the rents of sittings in each new church, although churchwardens could alter the rent schedule with the consent of the incumbent, patron and ordinary. The Commissioners evidently had no power to change the rents themselves after initially setting them. Churchwardens were to let the sittings and collect and disburse the receipts; at their option they could also sue for unpaid amounts and re-let pews for which rent was outstanding for three months, and were to provide rent-free pews for the minister’s family and servants.²¹

In 1739 the trustees of St Paul, Hammersmith, ordered that pew-rent revenue be initially paid to the treasurer, and although at least one onlooker expressed doubts as to action’s legality,²² the practice became standard, and the later Church Building Acts adopted this to varying degrees, most often with the lion’s share to be paid to the incumbent. The Act

¹⁶ Billing, *The Laws Relating to Pews in Churches*, p. 45.

¹⁷ 58 Geo. III c. 45, ss. 63, 75, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, pp. 141, 143.

¹⁸ Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 135.

¹⁹ Reed, J.S., *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), p. 137; Yates, N., Hume, R. & Hastings, P., *Religion and Society in Kent, 1640-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994), p. 81.

²⁰ Brown, S.J., *The National Churches of England, Scotland and Ireland 1801-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 70.

²¹ LMA, P81/TRI/49/2; 58 Geo. III, c. 45, ss. 75, 78-79, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, pp. 137-8, 143, 145-146; Bennett. ““Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly””, p. 23.

²² HFA DD/818/56.

of 1818 partially codified the principle, since the legislation ‘took for granted that perpetual curacies would be funded out of pew-rents’.²³ If a third service was to be held on Sundays, and a vicar or curate was delegated to officiate at that service, the bishop was to set rates for renting up to three-quarters of the pews in an amount ‘sufficient to afford a competent salary to such clergyman’.²⁴ Of course, the practical effect of the ruling is in as much doubt as the effect of any legal decree. Where the incumbent was still entitled to the proceeds in the twentieth century, a legal opinion stated that an outgoing incumbent, or his estate, was entitled to the rent due during his tenure whether or not it had been collected during that time. The incoming incumbent received only the money for rental periods after his investiture.²⁵

In 1819 another Church Building Act required that henceforth *half* of all sittings were to be rent-free.²⁶ This evidently applied to morning and afternoon services; at any evening service only a quarter had to be rent-free.²⁷ Churchwardens were now permitted on their own authority to revise the appropriate price of pews rented, but were *required* to do so when the bishop, patron and clergyman agreed to alter the rents. Substantially the same requirement was imposed on proprietary chapels in 1824.²⁸

The 1819 Act also seems to have presumed that pew-rents would be substantial, requiring their use in the following order: first, five percent for repair of the pews and for the stipends of the clergyman and clerk;²⁹ second, either for church building or upkeep or to make up some of the church rate, depending on what the commissioners thought best; third, to repay

²³ Jones, A., *A Thousand Years of the English Parish: Medieval Patterns & Modern Interpretations* (Gloucester: The Windrush Press, 2000), p. 263.

²⁴ 58 Geo. III c. 45, s. 64, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 143.

²⁵ BRRO P/StA/ChW/10/8.

²⁶ 59 Geo. III, c. 134, ss. 34, 40, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, pp. 141, 143; Bennett. “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 23.

²⁷ 59 Geo. III, c. 45, s. 65, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 141.

²⁸ 59 Geo. III, c. 134, s. 31, cited in Billing, *The Laws Relating to Pews in Churches*, p. 235; 5 Geo. IV, c. 103, s. 10, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 148; Bennett. “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 23.

²⁹ 59 Geo. III, c. 134, ss. 26, 27, renewed by 19 & 20 Vict. c. 104, s. 6, all cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, pp. 147-8.

loans incurred for the church or land, to purchase government securities or to pay part of a house for the clergyman; finally, if any money remained after all of the above, to increase the minister's stipend, erect more seating in the church, or to lower existing pew-rents, according to the bishop's wish.³⁰ Four decades later, the 1856 Act also apparently expected that pew-rent revenues would be generally sufficient to pay salaries – its language allowed Ecclesiastical Commissioners to create district chapelries without endowments, whose curates' incomes would be paid from pew-rents.³¹

The 1819 Act further required that pew-rents be payable in advance, and that rentable pews be offered to parishioners before non-parishioners.³² Arguably the Church Building Acts in this respect followed a practice that had existed earlier. In 1702, acting on protests that sittings had been rented to outsiders who were 'persons of Quality', the vestry of St James, Westminster, barred the churchwardens 'of the said Parish' from letting sittings to 'any Person not an inhabitant thereof' without the consent of at least six of the vestry.³³ The officials of St Mary Magdalene, Taunton, in 1792, were even more specific in resolving that 'the Sittings now occupied by persons not inhabiting the Parish shall be transferred to others who are Inhabitants'. The vestry also instructed that those who resided outside the parish for a full year be dispossessed of any sittings they held.³⁴ The records of St James, Piccadilly, from 1814 curiously include forms of mostly boilerplate, with the name of each renter to be filled in by hand, but the boilerplate language described each renter as 'an Inhabitant of the same Parish', which was in some cases partially or wholly untrue. The Lord Bishop of London, for one, was a St James' pew-renter so described, although his residence was of

³⁰ 59 Geo. III, c. 134, ss. 26, 27 and 3 & 4 Vict. c. 60, s. 5 (requiring the consent of the bishop as well), all cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, pp. 148-50; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 34.

³¹ Jones, *A Thousand Years of the English Parish*, p. 267.

³² 58 Geo. III, c. 45, ss. 32, 76, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 144; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 23.

³³ SROBSE HA 507/3/318.

³⁴ SRO D\P\tau/7/1/1.

course Fulham Palace and he conducted business in Aldergate Street, neither of which is anywhere near Piccadilly.³⁵

The 1823 Church Building Act widened the distinction between parishioners and outsiders in pew-renting matters. Notice of vacancies for each subsequent year was to be given in writing on the church doors for six weeks, and any rentable sittings remaining unlet in the first two weeks after a new year could be rented by those of adjacent parishes, but only for that year. Parishioners who wished to rent pews for the following year could oust the non-residents, and churchwardens were permitted to re-let pews of renters who failed to attend church at least once each year. Rents were to be paid semi-annually, in advance, and the sittings of a renter who failed to pay in advance for two consecutive six-month periods were to be deemed vacant and available for rent by others, under the terms of the 1819 Act.³⁶

The 1824 Act specifically addressed proprietary chapels, although only ones not yet in operation. It limited new proprietary chapels to areas in which proprietors could demonstrate a need for them – proposals were to include certification by ‘Twelve or more substantial Householdors’ that local church accommodation was insufficient. The measure also required new proprietary chapels to reserve one seat in ten for the poor.³⁷

The 1831 Act, though, was by far the most friendly to pew-renting. The percentage of rent-free sittings required in new churches was lowered to one-third. The new Act also imposed a direct effect on parish life: pew-renters were given the right to elect their own churchwarden. District churches built under that Act were to have one churchwarden elected by the pew-renters, and the other by the incumbent, while non-renters went without representation, although under subsequent statutes if a district became a parish that clause

³⁵ CWAC D1702a/11.

³⁶ 59 Geo. III, c. 134, s. 32, 34, 40, cited in Billing, *The Laws Relating to Pews in Churches*, p. 235-6, and Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, pp. 141, 143; 3 Geo. IV, c. 72, ss. 24, 25, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 156; Bennett. “Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”, p. 23.

³⁷ 5 Geo. IV, c. 103, s. 5, cited in Pomfret, A., ‘An Ethical Evaluation of the Historical Significance of Proprietary Chapels’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 2002), p. 76.

ceased to operate; and those subscribing toward new churches were to be allowed credit toward pew-rents for the amounts they had pledged.³⁸ This last provision was put into practice at St Margaret, Lee, when in 1838 ‘Sir Thomas Baring, Baronet, the Lord of the Manor of Lee’, was allocated eight sittings when he donated £400 ‘for building the new Church’.³⁹ Such an arrangement had been used in several churches at least a century before, such as St James, Louth, in 1720, which excused donors from paying pew-rents.⁴⁰ Also under the 1831 Act, district churches built by private subscription might charge pew-rents under scales to be set by the trustees of each particular church and the appropriate bishop.⁴¹ Seats could be rented out not only by churchwardens but by anyone so appointed by the trustees, or by those endowing new churches.⁴² Churchwardens were also allowed to sell pews for which rent went unpaid.⁴³ Pew-rent schedules had to be approved by the bishop, even the scales for proprietary chapels, to which the Church Building Acts were now to apply.⁴⁴

In 1835 the courts checked the rights of pew owners to let their seats to others, ruling that a parishioner who had left the parish and rented out his house there did not, in so doing, let an allotted pew – the new tenant had to ask the churchwardens to assign him a pew.⁴⁵

³⁸ *The Queen v. Perry*, 3 EL. & EL. 640, 652 (1861); 1 & 2 Will. IV, c. 38, s. 4, 16, 21-2 and 8 & 9 Vict. c. 50, s. 7, both cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 141, 144, 155; Bennett. “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 24.

³⁹ LLSA A78/18M/B1/4.

⁴⁰ <http://www.stjameschurchlouth.com/building/timetravel.html>

⁴¹ 1 & 2 Will. IV, c. 38, s. 4; Traill, J.C., *The New Parishes Acts, 1843, 1844 & 1856, with Notes and Observations Explanatory of their Provisions, and a Copious Index* (London: Maxwell, Sweet, and Stevens and Norton, 1857), p. 79.

⁴² 1 & 2 Will. IV, c. 38, ss. 4, 22, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, pp. 141, 145; Billing, *The Laws Relating to Pews in Churches*, pp. 123, 130, 146, notes that the common law did not apply to proprietary chapels.

⁴³ 1 & 2 Will. IV, c. 38, s. 16 and 8 & 9 Vict. c. 50, s. 7, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 155.

⁴⁴ 1 & 2 Will. IV, c. 38, ss. 4, 22, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, pp. 141, 145; Billing, *The Laws Relating to Pews in Churches*, pp. 123, 130, 146, notes that the common law did not apply to proprietary chapels.

⁴⁵ *Wylmer and Mott v. French*, 1 Add. Ecc. Rep. (1835), cited in Billing, *The Laws Relating to Pews in Churches*, pp. 14-15; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 22.

The 1818 Act had explicitly enacted the principle that ‘pews, sittings, or benches so appropriated for the use of the poor, no rent or assessment whatever shall at any time be charged or imposed’. But in 1838 this principle was abandoned – Parliament gave bishops the power to have even these supposedly rent-free seats let at low cost.⁴⁶ At least one church, Christ Church, Clifton, took advantage of this provision: in 1844 church officials sought and received the bishop’s permission to rent 219 of its ‘free’ 334 sittings, most at five shillings per year, but some at three or two shillings. These rents, although low in comparison with the usual sum charged, meant that only 115 seats out of a total of 1,000 were set aside for those who could not or would not pay.⁴⁷

In 1843, under the first of the New Parishes Acts – called Sir Robert Peel’s Act – the Commissioners were not authorised to fix pew-rents for future churches, but could allow pew-rents to continue in churches to which the Act applied.⁴⁸ Via the New Parishes Act of 1844 the Commissioners could institute pew-renting in any district church if other sources of revenue there proved insufficient.⁴⁹ In 1845 churchwardens were formally required to gather both current rents and amounts in arrears.⁵⁰ Some churchwardens were in no position to take a firm line on this, though. At Roehampton, Surrey, in about 1870 the churchwardens, both of them attorneys, were themselves said to be ‘habitually in arrear, to the extent of as many as three half-years, in the payment of their own Pew Rents’.⁵¹

Also in 1845 the rule giving pew-renters in some churches the right to elect their own churchwarden was to be applied ‘in all cases not otherwise provided for...[in] any new church

⁴⁶ 1 & 2 Vict, c. 107, s. 1, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 141; Bennett. “Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”, p. 24.

⁴⁷ BRRO P/CC/ChW/1/b.

⁴⁸ Traill, *The New Parishes Acts, 1843, 1844 & 1856*, p. 78.

⁴⁹ Stephen, J., *Mr. Serjeant Stephen’s New Commentaries on the Laws of England*, v. 2, 8th ed. (London: Butterworth’s, 1880), p. 712-3.

⁵⁰ 8 & 9 Vict., c. 70, s. 6, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 145.

⁵¹ LPL TAIT 172 f. 159.

(without a district) already built or hereafter to be built upon a site...'⁵² In 1851 a further Church Building Act enabled the commissioners to do away with pew-renting in churches which had sufficient endowment to do without them,⁵³ and in 1856 a New Parishes Act allowed the Commissioners to institute pew-renting if the churches in question were perceived to be insufficiently financed.

Other parliamentary Acts, particularly local ones, were less conducive to pew-renting. And in 1855 a stricter measure, known popularly as the Blandford Act,⁵⁴ required rent-free pews to be as 'well-placed and convenient' or as 'advantageously situated' as rented ones. The Blandford Act also raised the percentage of rent-free seats in new churches to one-half, as it had previously been, but only 'if sufficient funds cannot be procured from other sources'.⁵⁵ If the *Daily Express* was correct in 1877, though, only nine churches had been established under the Blandford Act in 21 years that had by then passed since its enactment.⁵⁶ But the principle of requiring half a new church's sittings to be rent-free was made permanent in 1860,⁵⁷ and was the subject of an 1886 resolution as well.⁵⁸ Also under the 1856 New Parishes Act, provided the churchwardens secured the bishop's approval, they could reduce the total sum to be taken from pew-rents where a church gained permanent endowment, either by reducing the rents themselves or the number of rentable seats, so long as any loan on the security of the pew-rents had been repaid.⁵⁹ And the Commissioners were then empowered to 'create unendowed district chapelries whose perpetual curates depended upon pew rents'.⁶⁰

⁵² Church Building Act, 1845, s. 7, cited in *Vicar of Richmond v. All Persons Having Interest*, P. 70 (1896).

⁵³ 14 & 15 Vict., c. 97, cited in Bowen, D., *The Idea of the Victorian Church: A Study of the Church of England 1833-1889* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968), p. 271.

⁵⁴ 19 & 20 Vict., c. 104.

⁵⁵ 19 & 20 Vict., c. 104, s. 6, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, pp. 141-2.

⁵⁶ CERC ECE/7/1/21796.

⁵⁷ 23 & 24 Vict. c. 142, s. 28, Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, pp. 141-2.

⁵⁸ CERC ECE/7/1/21796.

⁵⁹ 18 & 19 Vict., cap. 104, s. 7.

⁶⁰ Jones, *A Thousand Years of the English Parish*, p. 267.

Yet the Blandford Act had at least one unintended effect: in 1907 Earl Nelson told the Lords that the Act's provision requiring that half a church's sittings be rent-free 'very frequently' resulted in churches being 'actually divided down the middle, one side being entirely free, and the other pew rented'. This caused strategic difficulties when the rent-free seats were jam-packed and the rentable ones were largely empty:

The practical outcome of that was that the two arrangements did not very well agree, and a good many of these churches, I am happy to say, became entirely free churches; but in others there is a danger that the free seats may be encroached upon and be let as pews.⁶¹

When mandatory church rates ended in 1868 under the Church Rate Abolition Act, repairs were to come from each church's pew-rents or endowment funds.⁶² This meant that pew-letting would be even more indispensable in church finance, rather than temporary, as the 1818 Act had envisioned the practice. Moreover, an 1869 amendment to the New Parishes Act allowed church trustees, 'or the other persons' acting in the same capacity, to seize pews made subject to private control by parliamentary acts.⁶³ This naturally gave the churches even more sittings to rent. And if Earl Nelson's statistics as stated in the Lords in 1877 are reliable, 'while, under the old Church Building Acts, the number of free seats [*i.e.* rent-free seats] had been 61 per cent., under the Commissioners the number had been reduced to 44 per cent'.⁶⁴

By 1860, therefore, the practice of pew-renting was under much more central control, and much greater control, than the courts had imposed before the enactment of the Church Building Acts and New Parishes Acts, although a far greater percentage of Anglican sittings than before could now legally be rented. The Church Seats Act of 1872 required the Commissioners to arrange a proper stipend for the incumbents of churches that had done away with or restricted pew-renting – this had to be at least £100 if *all* sittings were to be

⁶¹ HL Deb 22 July 1907 v. 178 c. 1084.

⁶² 31 & 32 Vict., c. 109, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 153.

⁶³ 32 & 33 Vict., c. 94, New Parishes and Church Building Acts Amendment, 1869, at http://www.opsi.gov.uk/RevisedStatutes/Acts/ukpga/1869/cukpga_18690094_en_1

⁶⁴ HL Deb 25 June 1877 v. 235 c. 188.

declared free.⁶⁵ But bills to completely abolish pew-renting placed before Parliament from before 1870 until 1890 were unsuccessful, generally because churches lacking endowment supposedly would suffer financially, particularly if the offertory became the sole means of raising funds and the clergyman would thereby be ‘left dependent on the congregation’.⁶⁶ Since doing away with pew-letting would likely have been politically popular, one may speculate it was allowed to continue because the government also took in some revenue via the practice: any sums received by the incumbent were subject to the 1842 Income Tax Act,⁶⁷ and continued to be taxed in 1898.⁶⁸ The incumbent of St Andrew, Clifton, Bristol, was thus assessed £6 8s. 9d. for what was thought to be an income of £110 from sittings let there.⁶⁹

Only in the middle of the twentieth century was pew-renting truly abolished, but only in churches to be built *after* repeal. The Church Building Acts and New Parishes Acts were either repealed or modified by the New Parishes Measure 1943 and the Pastoral Measures 1968 to 1983,⁷⁰ but the former, enacted at the height of the Second World War, specifically allowed prior pew-rents to continue: ‘nothing in this repeal shall affect any *existing* right to charge or recover rents for sittings in any church or any scale fixing such rents.’⁷¹

The Extent to Which the Law was Followed

Where no one complains about its violation, the law may be rendered virtually powerless to enforce legislative intent. Getting pew-letting disputes to court was not always easy unless an opponent of the practice was not only determined to abolish it in a particular

⁶⁵ 35 & 36 Vict., c. 49; Whitehead, B., *Church Law: Being a Concise Dictionary of Statutes, Regulations, and Decided Cases Affecting the Clergy and Laity* (London: Stevens & Sons, 1892), pp. 203-4.

⁶⁶ HC Deb 28 June 1871 v. 207 c. 703-5; Inglis, K.S., *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 53; Bennett. “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 25.

⁶⁷ NAK IR 40/1279; 5 & 6 Vict., c. 35, s. 146; *In Re the School for the Indigent Blind at Liverpool*, 2 Ch. 669 (1898).

⁶⁸ CRO P152/2/48.

⁶⁹ BRRO P/StA/ChW/10/2.

⁷⁰ Doe, N., *The Legal Framework of the Church of England: A Critical Study in a Comparative Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 108, fn. 131.

⁷¹ New Parishes Measure 1943, Part III – Supplemental, s. 32(1)(c) (emphasis added).

church but also had sufficient money to finance protracted litigation.⁷² But simply occupying a rented sitting place without paying might not lead to dispossession. At the 1858 House of Lords Select Committee hearings, witnesses testified that at churches charging very low rents, non-payers generally were not prosecuted:

In some parishes the rent-charge is too minutely subdivided, and consists of several hundred trifling payments; and when the parties liable are indigent or ill-disposed, the clergyman is tempted to forego his right, rather than enforce it by legal process against large numbers of his parishioners.⁷³

And parishioners illegally renting pews could not legally be displaced even if they failed to pay, said another lawyer in 1851, since '*cæteris paribus* possession gives preference'.⁷⁴

Proper notice to the renter of a potential discontinuance of a rented sitting could be informally required. When in 1876 Arthur Charles Hervey, Bishop of Bath and Wells, was notified by a congregant that the latter had been dispossessed of his pew without notice, Hervey wrote to the churchwardens stating that such action was legally insupportable.⁷⁵ The vicar and churchwardens of Christ Church, Tynemouth, in 1792, after consulting a lawyer at the Doctors Commons who endorsed their plan as legally sound, proposed to end private pew-renting by notifying those letting sittings from former, but not current, parishioners not to pay rent.⁷⁶ But the Compulsory Church Rate Abolition Bill of 1868 deprived churchwardens from recovering money via legal process, instead vesting churches and churchyards after consecration in the incumbent.⁷⁷ If a dispute arose, any laws surrounding the practice – even the general law of contracts – might be relaxed by all concerned, if not completely ignored.

⁷² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into The Deficiency of Means of Spiritual Instruction and Places of Divine Worship in the Metropolis, and in other Populous Districts in England and Wales, especially in the Mining and Manufacturing Districts; and to Consider the Fittest Means of Meeting the Difficulties of the Case; and to Report Thereon to the House; Together With the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: House of Commons, 1858), p. 431.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 594.

⁷⁴ TA PR/M(H)/3/19.

⁷⁵ SRO D\P\pet.s/7/2/1.

⁷⁶ NCS EP/52/A/338.

⁷⁷ MALs M330/1/28/3.

In addition, due to the various laws' complicated requirements, disregard of the law may have been unintentional. The vicar of Bradford, who was also the rural dean, testified at the 1858 House of Lords' hearings that 'the Church Building Acts have so upset the common law that I cannot say that the right which they give to any person to have a pew by paying for it is not now law by statute.'⁷⁸ This occurred despite the legal maxim that an 'Affirmative Statute does not take away the Common Law.'⁷⁹ An 1872 visitation return from Penshurst, Kent, shows the incumbent's ignorance of the law: 'A proposal has been made to let some [sittings] instead of Church Rate – if it can be done?'⁸⁰ But one church which actively disregarded the law was St Mary, Hampstead, which in the eighteenth century mortgaged its offertory and pew-rents – 'subscribers were illegally allocated pews and, despite advice in 1777, an Act vesting pew-rents in the trustees, which legitimised these activities, was not obtained until 1827'.⁸¹ To be fair, in some cases – among them Willaston Parish, Cheshire⁸² – the churchwardens' disregard of the law of pew-renting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was inadvertent, since they may have been unaware of the circumstances under which pew-letting had been instituted in their churches' consecration deeds or in acts of Parliament regarding particular churches. Other churches' officials may, of course, have assumed that a parliamentary act had authorised the practice in their particular cases some time earlier even though no documentation existed. Chapels of ease, also, were generally not – or at least not perceived as – subject to common-law restrictions on pew-renting.

In many cases, of course, church officials fully obeyed the law, providing of course they perceived it correctly. In April 1832 the wardens of Southborough District Church

⁷⁸ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 433.

⁷⁹ SRO D\P\batw.m/8/4/6.

⁸⁰ LPL VG3/4c.

⁸¹ A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 9, Hampstead, Paddington, Elrington (1989), p. 145-152, at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22650#s10>, citing Park, J.J., *The Topography and Natural History of Hampstead, in the County of Middlesex* (London: Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1818), p. 217, and 7 & 8 Geo. IV, c. 91 (Local and Personal); NAK HO 129/8/1/1/3.

⁸² CCALSS P1807/14.

resolved to follow the Church Building Acts' provisions on pews and pew-rents, including the statute of 1831. The Trustees' Minutes indicate this intent was put into practice, since the pews of two non-paying pew-renters were deemed vacant, and one of the two pews was offered to a parishioner. Other Acts' injunctions were also followed.⁸³ On the other hand, Holy Trinity, Wordsley, Staffordshire, blatantly disregarded the law. In the mid-1840s church officials sought advice on whether the pew-rents there were legal. On the judgement of counsel that under the special circumstances of the church's consecration no such rents could legally be charged,⁸⁴ the rector initially sent back to the churchwardens the revenue he had received, intending that the pew-renters be reimbursed. After consultation, though, the churchwardens retained the money and asked the renters to continue to contribute the same funds 'voluntarily',⁸⁵ a concept which will be examined below. In addition, some officials tried to appropriate existing pew-rent revenue even though legally it properly belonged elsewhere. At Roehampton in Surrey, a proposal was made to the clergyman to use some of the pew-rents to pay the expenses, even though the clergyman himself was entitled to the entire sum, 'in other words, for shifting the burden of the Church Expenses from the shoulders of the Parishioners upon those of the Incumbent'. The latter refused.⁸⁶

Moreover, 'as so often happens', the law may not 'coincide with practice'.⁸⁷ Indications exist of ignorance of the finer points of the law regarding pew-rents, even among lawyers. In 1900, for example, a lawyer at the Royal Courts of Justice advised an incumbent that 'Pew rents are illegal in churches erected before 1818,' which overlooked the private acts in existence before the Church Building Acts authorising pew-letting in individual churches.⁸⁸

⁸³ CKS P371B/8/1.

⁸⁴ DALHC PR/KIN(W) II/6/2.

⁸⁵ DALHC PR/KIN(W) II/4/3.

⁸⁶ LPL TAIT 172 f. 159.

⁸⁷ Picard, L., *Victorian London: The Life of a City 1840-1870* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), p. 77.

⁸⁸ ERYARS PE153/259; *Walter v. Gunner*, 1 Hag. C. R., 3 Hag. Consist. (1798), cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 57.

Incumbents' ignorance is therefore not surprising. At Netherwasdale, Cumberland, a congregant in 1902 responded to a demand for pew-rent by writing to the vicar, saying, 'Now I shall be obliged if you will inform me whether there is any Canon or Terrier, or any Vestry Resolution or other legal Authority for such rents'. The vicar answered that 'I know nothing of the legal position of these rents, and my own opinion is that they are optional on the part of the parishioners', but that the payments were 'customary'.⁸⁹

On the other hand, some churches not only disregarded the general law of pew-renting but also the specific laws regarding the practice. The Church Building Acts' particular distinction between renting of pews to parishioners and to non-parishioners, for example, was ignored at Bradford parish church in the 1850s,⁹⁰ and almost certainly elsewhere.

In any event, where pew-renting was left unchallenged, any dubious rationale could suffice. St George, a chapel of ease in the parish of St Martin-in-the-Fields, let some of its pews despite the lack of any authority for it in the local act originally commissioning the church. Its incumbent testified in 1858 that when built as a Queen Anne's Church of 1711, St George simply followed the practice of St Martin-in-the-Fields.⁹¹ In general, though, where a chapel of ease charged pew-rents, the profits legally belonged to the churchwardens of the *parish* church, so when St Mary, Paddington, let sittings in the 1850s, the revenue was to be sent to St James, its mother church.⁹²

After the one-half rent-free rule was made permanent in 1860,⁹³ at least one church formally sought and received a small exemption from the bishop, whose authority to grant such dispensation is doubtful. In 1893 St Andrews, Upper Holloway, was a mission whose permanent premises were being built. Since the pews in the mission had been overflowing

⁸⁹ CROW D/Mg/212/15.

⁹⁰ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 433.

⁹¹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 239.

⁹² LMA P87/JS/132/02.

⁹³ 23 & 24 Vict., c. 142, s. 28, cited in Heales, *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II, p. 142.

with congregants, after a series of letters back and forth the bishop approved St Andrews' plan to put all the sittings in the nave up for rent, providing that all sittings in the aisles and transepts and those by the font be free and unappropriated.⁹⁴ But some churches wishing to rent more than half their sittings may have found other ways around the Act's requirements, or simply ignored them. In 1886 in the Commons, Viscount Lewisham asked the Secretary to the Board of Trade if it was true that the Commissioners evaded the law by using the remainder of the £1.5 million allotted in 1815 and 1824 for church-building

solely for the purpose of making 'nominal' grants, which are often not paid, to persons building churches under the Church Building Acts in order to bring churches so aided under the provisions of the pew renting sections of those Acts whereby as many as four-fifths of the seats may be let...

The Secretary claimed this was a rumour 'based on misapprehension'.⁹⁵ But in the previous year an attempt was made to limit creative interpretation of the law – the courts held that where the Commissioners designated seats as rent-free, the bishop had no jurisdiction to order that those be available for rent.⁹⁶ And a 1868 ruling held that newly-elected churchwardens were not liable for pew-rents to be paid to the vicar if the outgoing churchwardens had not passed the revenue on to them, as occurred at Kennington in the 1860s.⁹⁷

The elimination of compulsory church rate in 1868 had an indirect effect on pew-renting – as a result of that legislation a number of churches appear to have begun letting sittings on their own initiative. Several dioceses' visitation articles began asking generally about pew-renting only in 1872, just after the abolition of church rate, so measuring any difference before and after the new law is difficult. But some returns and other evidence explicitly show that churches which previously depended on rate had instituted pew-letting to make ends meet, despite its technical illegality. Some visitation returns from the 1870s and later, for example, tie seat allocation to the payment of 'voluntary church rate' or, more

⁹⁴ LMA P83/AND/2/40/1, P83/AND/2/40/2, P83/AND/2/40/10, & P83/AND/2/40/11.

⁹⁵ HC Deb 17 June 1886 v. 306 c. 1703-4.

⁹⁶ *Vicar and Churchwardens of St Saviour, Westgate-on-Sea v. Parishioners of the Same*, P. 217 (1898).

⁹⁷ *Lloyd v. Burrup*, L.R. 4 Ex. 63 (1868).

curiously, to payment ‘in lieu of rate’.⁹⁸ Pew-renting is sometimes excused in these returns via a resort to semantics – at Eastry, Kent, the 1876 visitation return answered a question of ‘Are any pews in your church now let for money? By what authority are they so let?’ with, ‘Not that I am aware of, but the ChWardens expect every person to whom they appropriate a seat to make some contribution to the Subscription List for Church expenses’.⁹⁹ In 1898 Thomas Tristram, ‘the leading ecclesiastical judge of the time’, noted that churchwardens, even if unable to rent out sittings, could legally assign the best ones to congregants who made financial contributions.¹⁰⁰ The 1902 visitation return from St Mary, Platt, Kent, replied to a question of renting sittings as, ‘None let’, but to the next question, ‘How are the appropriated sittings which are not let for money assigned?’ responded that payment actually underlay allocation: ‘To those who subscribe to the Church Expenses’.¹⁰¹ To the same question in the 1876 visitation returns of whether pew-renting was done, a church official at St Mary, Dover, answered ‘Yes: by no legal authority whatever’.¹⁰² Some visitation returns stated that the authority for letting their churches’ sittings came from agreements reached by the vestry, such as at Lenham, Kent in 1876,¹⁰³ or at Penshurst, Kent, ‘By General consent of the Parish’,¹⁰⁴ and elsewhere,¹⁰⁵ even though the law did not permit either vestries or general consent to implement the practice.

Calling pew-renting ‘voluntary’, in the same manner that some requested ‘voluntary church rate’ after compulsory rate ended, was at times used as a rationale for instituting or continuing the practice. After all, pew-rents were voluntary in the sense that no one was

⁹⁸ LPL VG3/4a, VG3/4c, VG3/5a & VG3/6b.

⁹⁹ LPL VG3/5a.

¹⁰⁰ Rhodes, R. E., Jr., *Law and Modernization in the Church of England: Charles II to the Welfare State* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. 229.

¹⁰¹ LPL VG3/11b.

¹⁰² LPL VG3/5a.

¹⁰³ LPL VG3/5b.

¹⁰⁴ LPL VG3/5c.

¹⁰⁵ LPL VG3/6a.

required to pay for a sitting. This was largely successful: churches calling their pew-rent systems ‘voluntary’ – which generally occurred later in the nineteenth century or early in the twentieth – often got away with the dubious practice even though they revealed their methods in visitation returns. The returns often reflect that church officials were apparently convinced that ‘voluntary’ letting of seats was not *strictly* pew-renting; in others incumbents were well aware their ‘voluntary’ systems were technically illegal. The 1872 return from Brasted, Kent, for example, noted the church had ‘about 150 appropriated seats for wh. the occupiers pay a voluntary subscr. towards Church Expenses in lieu of a Church rate, but no seats are really let in the strict sense of the word’.¹⁰⁶ In 1836 rate was abandoned at the Lambeth parish church, and instead, said the rector in 1858, a ‘voluntary rate upon each sitting’ was imposed. But the rector unintentionally affirmed that, for those wanting allocated seats, the payments were anything but voluntary:

I believe the churchwardens keep a list of applicants, and if there is any demur to paying they pass them over, and given them to those who are willing to pay; but no difficulty, I think, has arisen in the last ten years upon that point.¹⁰⁷

A return from Farningham Parish, Dartford, in the same year, similarly claimed that

There are no seats in the Church let in the strict sense of the word, but since the abolition of Church Rates, the occupiers of the appropriated sittings have agreed to pay the Ch:Wardens a definite annual sum (some more, some less) for general repairs of the Church & for lighting, warming, cleaning, & other incidental expenses for the due performance of divine service.¹⁰⁸

And in 1880 the visitation return from Detling, Kent, declared broadly that ‘voluntary’ pew-renting was not pew-renting: ‘Seats are assigned to particular families, & a voluntary Church Rate is paid by the occupiers. There is no system of pew letting’.¹⁰⁹ In contrast, at All Saints, Maidstone, the return for 1872 did not appeal to the ‘strict sense of the word’, but virtually admitted that the system used at the church was tantamount – if not identical – to pew-renting – ‘None are let, or can be let to provide clerical income, but the churchwardens raise for

¹⁰⁶ LPL VG3/4a.

¹⁰⁷ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 472.

¹⁰⁸ LPL VG3/4b.

¹⁰⁹ LPL VG3/6a.

incidental expenses about £240 by what is practically a charge on sittings'.¹¹⁰ In 1957 W.L. Dale, a 'distinguished ecclesiastical lawyer', wrote that no legal reason existed to stop those who had been assigned seats making 'voluntary' payments to churchwardens.¹¹¹ This seems optimistic; even a written agreement signed by pew-renters describing payments as voluntary did not make the practice legal when it otherwise was not; such an agreement, as occurred at St Hilda, Middlesbrough in 1848, was deemed unenforceable.¹¹²

In a number of churches the terminology changed while the practice continued just as before – the churchwardens' accounts of St George, Gravesend, list revenue from 'Pew Rents', but from the turn of the twentieth century onwards the same source is most often described as '*Voluntary Pew Rents*'.¹¹³ St Stephen, Tonbridge, at least in 1923 described income as coming from 'voluntary seat rents',¹¹⁴ and in 1878 the summary of the churchwardens' accounts published by Holy Trinity, Wordsley, Staffordshire, reflected that £140 4s. 6d. was received as 'Voluntary Subscriptions for Pews'.¹¹⁵ At Holy Trinity, South Heigham, Norfolk, in 1878, a discovery that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners had never fixed a scale of pew-rents for the church led to a lawyer's conclusion, accepted by the rector, that current pew-renting there was illegal. The churchwardens therefore asked the congregation to agree to 'Voluntary subscriptions...by those to whom Seats are allocated'.¹¹⁶

When pew-renting began at St Giles, Shipbourne, one parishioner wrote to the vestry rejecting the equivocation: 'I entirely object to the Pews being let, and that I shall not pay one farthing for mine. I don't believe they have power to let one.' Undeterred, the vestry voted

¹¹⁰ LPL VG3/4c.

¹¹¹ Dale, W.J., *The Law of the Parish Church* (London: Butterworths, 1957), p. 80, cited in Meacham, J.D., 'Reserved Seats: A Study of the Decline of a Convention in the Church of England' (unpublished MPhil thesis, Open University, 1990), p. 100.

¹¹² TA PR/M(H)/3/19.

¹¹³ MALSC 159/5/1 (emphasis added).

¹¹⁴ CKS P371D/5/1.

¹¹⁵ DALHC PR/KIN(W) II/4/2.

¹¹⁶ NRO PD 522/58.

unanimously in favour both of letting fifteen of the pews and sending ‘a deputation of the Parishioners’ to wait on the parishioner who had written the letter in opposition ‘to solicit his acquiescence in the proposal’.¹¹⁷ And in a series of letters to the churchwardens of St Andrew, Cullompton, Devon, a *congregant* studiously avoided the term ‘rent’ – for some years before 1906 a Mr A. Upcott and his wife had rented sittings from another individual, and on the proprietor’s demise proposed to the churchwardens that, should his family be allowed to occupy the same pews without payment he would remit for church expenses the same amount he had paid in rent. The churchwardens apparently accepted his offer, for the next year Mr Upcott sent them a guinea ‘for occupation of pew in Cullompton Church’. Mrs Upcott paid the guinea each year until at least 1912, using her husband’s term ‘occupation’ for each of the first two years, but eventually acknowledged in 1912 that she was paying for a ‘*rent* of pew in Cullompton Church’. A Miss Mortimore, in the same legal position, called her payment a ‘rent’ but her solicitor took pains to inform the churchwardens that Miss Mortimore ‘knows she is not compelled to pay but rather than have any dispute she will pay’.¹¹⁸

The ‘First Lesson Rule’

Where unassigned pews were scarce or nonexistent, congregants without seats might be allowed to occupy pews whose assignees had not arrived for services, and whose renters who arrived late were not allowed to attempt to oust the occupants. This practice will be referred to as the ‘first lesson rule’, even though the time at which others could fill assigned seats was not always the end of the first lesson. The concept formed a sort of temporary abandonment of rented pews, which could be construed as illegal unless made an explicit contractual term. In 1894 the vestry of at least one church, St Bartholomew, Montpelier, evidently felt the rule could be softened somewhat – in May of that year the vestry accepted a proposal not to show congregants into appropriated seats until the rent-free ones were full,

¹¹⁷ CKS P334/8/1.

¹¹⁸ DRO 1723M/B1 (emphasis added).

and a week later assented to another suggestion that ‘strangers &c’ were not ‘to be put in any appropriated seat (without the holder assents) until the commencement of the Venite at the Morning Service, & after the 1st Hymn at the Evening service’. This was, though, rescinded five years later and another proposal accepted that visitors be shown into appropriated seats even when space remained in the rent-free pews ‘after the singing of the first verse of the opening hymn unless someone be there to retain seats for others coming later’ and unless the renters had given instructions to the contrary.¹¹⁹

Contemporary opinions questioned the legality of these practices, particularly where unauthorised by contractual terms. In 1845 Billing noted a ‘usual’ declaratory notice ‘that seats will not be reserved after the first lesson’, but doubted its enforceability.¹²⁰ And at St James, Tunbridge Wells, in 1903 one member of the vestry cautioned that whether such a rule would be legal ‘depended on the terms of the contract with those who rented pews’ –

he suggested that at the next renewal of contracts notice should be definitely given that when the bell ceased tolling the pews would no longer be reserved & that strangers would be allowed to take possession of all pews unoccupied.¹²¹

But this moment of hesitation seems not to have existed universally. In most places little evidence has survived from other churches to suggest that the first lesson rule was something for which churches bargained or even discussed with pew-renters. Churches mainly seem to have simply put up notices or made announcements informing seatholders that their places would not be saved after a certain time – in effect unilaterally forfeiting congregants’ rights to seats despite the payment that had been made.

The tenor of an 1872 debate in the House of Commons also suggests the first lesson rule was a recent innovation in most churches using it; an M.P. stated that ‘it was not unlawful, though it was unusual, to put strangers into seats rented and usually occupied by

¹¹⁹ BRRO P/St.BM/V/1.

¹²⁰ Billing, *The Laws Relating to Pews in Churches*, pp. 154-5; see also Green, S.J.D., *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 151; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, 2006), pp. 14-15.

¹²¹ CKS P371G/8/A1.

parishioners'. And a clause of the bill then under discussion, which would have universally empowered churchwardens to fill rented sittings as soon as services began, was described by the same M.P. as 'meddlesome, needless, and insidious'. Others proposed amending the clause to make the churchwardens wait until five or ten minutes into the service before allowing 'strangers' to use rented pews, but another member:

wished to know what was to be done in churches where there were no churchwardens? It would not be seemly to keep persons waiting with their watches in their hands to see if the time allowed had elapsed.

Yet another M.P. thought it 'monstrous that Parliament should be called upon to legislate as to whether a man should enter his pew five or ten minutes after the commencement of the service'. In the end the clause was rejected.¹²²

In summary

The Church Building Acts and New Parishes Acts did much to regulate pew-renting, at least in theory. The law enacted to regulate the practice had been evaded previously, and churches continued to bend its limits. Before 1818 the law did not favour pew-renting, but permitted and regulated it to a much greater extent between that year and 1870. The law did not bar the starting of pew-renting at new churches until the Second World War. The abolition of church rate in the late 1860s removed funding that some churches had depended on, and the void was often filled by the letting of seats by churches which either bent the law or completely ignored it.

¹²² HC Deb 16 July 1872 v. 212 cc 1291-5.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RISE OF PEW-RENTS

This chapter notes the churches that charged pew-rents in the period 1800 to 1960 and details the process by which pew-renting churches first began the practice. Unfortunately, information on the latter is very limited.

Churches Charging Pew-rents *Ab Initio*

The potential of charging pew-rents to meet church expenses, the incumbent's stipend, pay off construction debts, or a host of other purposes, seems to have been merely one option of funding open to those arranging the building of each new church, but these ultimately bore the responsibility of deciding whether sittings would actually be charged at their church, subject to the approval of the ordinary and the Commissioners. The building committee of St Matthew, Kingsdown, Bristol, wishing to explore the possibility of this method of finance, in 1834 appointed a subcommittee of the churchwarden and six others 'to make the necessary enquiries respecting the letting of the Seats in the New Church & making the preliminary arrangements'. The subcommittee worked quickly, proposing a scale less than four months later, which was 'approved of with certain alterations'.¹ The trustees of the proposed St Pancras, Middlesex, after consulting with the bishop in 1846, calculated that renting the sittings at 25s. or £1 each, and assigning the revenue to themselves, would be the best way to pay annually the incumbent £350 and a clerk in orders £50, with lesser sums to the organist, vergers, beadle and others. The Commissioners sent the proposal back, though, because among other things a clerk not in orders should in their view be paid only £25 and because the trustees had not assigned themselves and the churchwardens rent-free pews. But the Commissioners eventually approved pew-renting at the church.² When the plans for renting

¹ BRRO P/StMK/V/2.

² CERC ECE/7/1/11572, pt. 1.

sittings in a church were in order and approved, the Commissioners issued a grant and, with the bishop's consent and seal, issued an order formally approving and instituting the plan. This occurred regarding St Silas, Pentonville, for example, in 1863.³

In general, this was common; pew-renting often began at an individual church at or just after the church was first opened. Tables 1 and 2, on pages 79-84, reflect that new Victorian churches in Kent and Bristol generally took in – or counted – pew-rent revenue within a year or two after services were begun, indicating that their planners anticipated from the start that expenses would be met by that method.

Churches Which Began to Charge Pew-rents Long after Opening

Where existing churches instituted systems of pew-renting, the reason was again almost always financial exigency. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners' minutes of 1865 reflect an inquiry by a church that had received a grant, asking whether its pews – all previously rent-free – could be rented henceforth. The Commissioners answered that the grant had been made on the presumption that a scale of rents would be fixed, and that the Commissioners could 'not take cognizance of the arrangement the church's officials had suggested'. Other churches instituted the practice by themselves without resorting to the Commissioners. At Nottingham in 1834, in anticipation of the abolition of church rate, 'a small Pew Rent on such private Pews as may be allowed to remain as such' was proposed in order to pay for church expenses.⁴ At mid-century, church rate was estimated to bring churches half a million pounds out of a total income of £6,750,000,⁵ but with the rise of dissent, increasing criticism was levelled at the charging of rate. Nonconformists became increasingly annoyed at having to pay for churches they did not attend and from which they felt alienated.⁶ And while the

³ CERC ECE/7/1/11615, pt. 1.

⁴ NA HO 44/49.

⁵ Allen, J., *Churches, State and the Kingdom of Christ* (London: W. & F.G. Cash, 1853), p. 263.

⁶ Arnold-Baker, C., *The Companion to British History*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 305.

revenue from rate declined and was finally extinguished, a series of fifteen Burial Acts passed by Parliament from 1852 to 1906 restricted fees from this source as well.⁷ This caused many clergy a great loss of income, particularly about 1860, although some provision in one of the Burial Acts of the time allowed them to claim compensation.⁸ Pew-renting accordingly became more attractive. The clearest examples of the practice prompted by usual expenses can be seen in churches' anticipated or actual deficits due to the potential abolition of church rate. Perhaps the best documented example though, is from Smeeth Parish, Kent, where in 1881 the churchwardens circulated a notice calling their scheme 'seat subscription', and stating that:

1.—Owing to the refusal of many to pay the Old Church Rate the Churchwardens are left in debt, and it is evident that the Church expenses cannot be provided for any longer. The collection of a Church Rate must, therefore, be given up.

2.—Instead, thereof, the Churchwardens will make a fresh allotment of all Sittings in Church to those who will subscribe a fair share towards the Church expenses, at a certain yearly rate for each sitting required.

3.—This amount is proposed to be – 5/-, 3/- or 1/- according to the position of the seat...⁹

At St Giles, Shipbourne, unlike Smeeth, the vestry took pains to disguise the incipient practice of pew-letting in lieu of rate when the latter was abolished. At an 1869 meeting, the chairman of the vestry suggested that a deficit in church funds be met by fixed charges for allocating some of the pews, but that those paying should not think of themselves as renting seats. The minutes reflect a wish that the parishioners

not regard the Pews as let, but rather be content to assess themselves for each sitting so occupied at the voluntary Rate of ten shillings a sitting in certain cases and at six shillings in others. Letting the pews by the Churchwardens would be objectionable, but appropriation would not be.¹⁰

⁷ http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/leisure/archives/holdings/a_c/burialboards.htm

⁸ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords*, pp. 115, 119, 123.

⁹ CKS P4B/8/2.

¹⁰ CKS P334/8/1

In 1936 the Parochial Church Council of St James, Gravesend, discussed ‘voluntary pew rents’, and the archdeacon, while believing ‘pew rents rather out of date in the House of God’, stated ‘they might be considered a freewill offering of a particular kind’.¹¹

In summary

This chapter has detailed the limited information that exists on the reasons churches began pew-rent systems, the churches in Kent and Bristol that actually let sittings and the years in which they did so. The justification was almost always financial, and as will be shown later, the reason pew-renting was later ended at churches was also financial.

¹¹ MALSC P159B/8/3.

**TABLE 1 – All Kentish Anglican Churches Found to have Rented
Sittings (or in 1886 to have Rentable Sittings), 1800-1960**

Church	Years Renting Sittings	Consecrated
Holy Trinity, Broadstairs	1851, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902-4	1330 ¹
Sts Peter & Paul, Bromley	1789-91, 1794, 1803-4, 1872, 1876	Pre-reformation ²
St Margaret, Rochester	1860-1, 1869, 1885, 1891, 1899-1902, 1913, 1917, 1919	Pre-reformation ³
St Peter, Broadstairs	1872	Pre-reformation ⁴
St Martin, Brasted	1872, 1893, 1898, 1919	Pre-reformation ⁵
St Alphege, Seasalter	1868	Pre-reformation ⁶
St Mary, Hadlow,	1872, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1898	Pre-reformation ⁷
St Michael & All Angels, Marden	pre-1877	Pre-reformation ⁸
St Giles, Shipbourne	1872, 1889	Pre-reformation ⁹
Keston Church, Beckenham	1872, 1898	Pre-reformation ¹⁰
St George, Gravesend	1879-85, 1887-9, 1891-1951	Pre-reformation ¹¹
St Mary, Lewisham	1879, 1881, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1915	Pre-reformation ¹²
St Peter & St Paul, Farningham	1872-91	Pre-reformation ¹³
Sts Peter & Paul, Borden, Sittingbourne	1872, 1876, 1880, 1885-6	Pre-reformation ¹⁴
St Mary, Stansted	1876	Pre-reformation ¹⁵
St Mary Magdalene with St Laurence, Davington	1872, 1876	Pre-reformation ¹⁶
St Peter & St Paul, Charing	1868, 1871-80, 1882-3, 1885-93, 1895-1904	Pre-reformation ¹⁷
St Mary, Ashford	1880, 1889, 1893, 1898	Pre-reformation ¹⁸
St Martin of Tours, Detling	1876, 1880	Pre-reformation ¹⁹
All Saints, Staplehurst	1876, 1880, 1885, 1893, 1898, 1902	Pre-reformation ²⁰
St Mary, Bexley	1874, 1876, 1902, 1935	Pre-reformation ²¹
St Katherine, Knockholt	1872, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1902	Pre-reformation ²²
St Mary the Virgin, Eastry	1876, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1902	Pre-reformation ²³
All Saints, Loose, Maidstone	1885, 1893	Pre-reformation ²⁴
St Nicholas, Strood	1902	Pre-reformation ²⁵
St Mary, Nonington	1885	Pre-reformation ²⁶
St Peter, Boughton Monchelsea	1868, 1871-2, 1875-86, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902	Pre-reformation ²⁷
St Peter, Bredhurst	pre-1865	Pre-reformation ²⁸
St John the Baptist, Margate	1811, 1872, 1876, 1885-6, 1889, 1893	Pre-reformation ²⁹
St Mary, Hayes	1851	Pre-reformation ³⁰
St Mary Magdalene, Dartford	1851, 1877-80	Pre-reformation ³¹
St Mary, Woolwich	1851, 1858, 1862	Pre-reformation ³²
St James, Dover	1851, 1858-9, 1864, 1866, 1869, 1876, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1907, 1912, 1927, 1930	Pre-reformation ³³
St Mary the Virgin, Dover	1851, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1907, 1912	Pre-reformation ³⁴
St Andrew, Buckland	1851	Pre-reformation ³⁵
St Giles the Abbot, Farnborough	1902	Pre-reformation ³⁶
St John the Evangelist, Ickham	1898	Pre-reformation ³⁷
St Mary, Eastling	1893, 1898	Pre-reformation ³⁸
St Mary, Lenham	1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902	Pre-reformation ³⁹
St Mary & St Sexburga, Minster in Sheppey	1876	Pre-reformation ⁴⁰
St Vincent, Littlebourne	1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1902	Pre-reformation ⁴¹
St Giles, Wormshill	1880	Pre-reformation ⁴²
All Saints, Maidstone	1872, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902	Pre-reformation ⁴³
St John the Baptist, Penshurst	1873-80, 1885-6, 1889	Pre-reformation ⁴⁴

St Nicholas, Sevenoaks	19 th century	Pre-reformation ⁴⁵
St Peter & St Paul, Tonbridge	1898	Pre-reformation ⁴⁶
Holy Trinity, Dartford	1880, 1896-7, 1899-1916	Pre-reformation ⁴⁷
All Saints, Birchington	1924	Pre-reformation ⁴⁸
St Mary, Smeeth	1882, 1884-6, 1889, 1892-3, 1896, 1898-1901	Pre-reformation ⁴⁹
St Mary, Stodmarsh	1893	Pre-reformation ⁵⁰
St Martin le Grand, Dover	1907, 1959-69	Pre-reformation ⁵¹
St Nicholas, Plumstead	1881, 1893, 1902, 1907	Pre-reformation ⁵²
St John the Baptist, Eltham	1907	Pre-reformation ⁵³
St Alphege, Greenwich	1881, 1885, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918, 1924	Pre-reformation ⁵⁴
St Leonard, Hythe	1907	Pre-reformation ⁵⁵
St Margaret, Addington, West Malling	1898	Pre-reformation ⁵⁶
St Mary, Fordwich, Canterbury	No date given	Pre-reformation ⁵⁷
St Mary, Leigh	No date given	Pre-reformation ⁵⁸
St Margaret, Lee	1851, 1858, 1862, 1868-1959	1579 ⁵⁹
St Nicholas, Rochester	1851, 1862-1915, 1919, 1921, 1923, 1938	1624 ⁶⁰
King Charles the Martyr, Tunbridge Wells	1885, 1889, 1893, 1901-9	1678 ⁶¹
Church of the Ascension, Blackheath	1862, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1907, 1915, 1918	1697 ⁶²
Morden College, Blackheath	1851	1700 ⁶³
St George the Martyr, Deal	1854, 1857-1928	1715 ⁶⁴
St Paul, Deptford	1858, 1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893	1730 ⁶⁵
St Mary, Ramsgate	1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902	1790 ⁶⁶
Old Episcopal Chapel, Sydenham	1851, 1858	1795 ⁶⁷
Foundling Hospital Chapel, Westerham	1795-1887	18 th century ⁶⁸
St Philip, Sydenham	1881, 1885-6, 1889	1809 ⁶⁹
Holy Trinity, Eltham	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1809 ⁷⁰
St Mary, Greenwich	1851, 1862, 1881, 1886, 1899, 1902, 1915, 1918	1823 ⁷¹
St John Mariners' Chapel, Dover	1851	1823 ⁷²
Holy Trinity, Maidstone	1851, 1867, 1872, 1874, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1895-8, 1902, 1907, 1912, 1915-7, 1928	1828 ⁷³
St George, Ramsgate	1828-63, 1872, 1877-86, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1907, 1912	1829 ⁷⁴
Holy Trinity, Tunbridge Wells	1829-32, 1834, 1839, 1855, 1872, 1876, 1885-6, 1888-9, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1913-16, 1918-21, 1923-4, 1926, 1929, 1931-2, 1937-62	1829 ⁷⁵
Holy Trinity, Margate	1829-49, 1851, 1872, 1880, 1883, 1885-6, 1889, 1907, 1912	1829 ⁷⁶
Holy Trinity, Cliftonville	1868, 1876, 1880	1829 ⁷⁷
St Michael & All Angels, Blackheath Park	1851, 1881, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1924	1830 ⁷⁸
St Mary, Riverhead	1876	1831 ⁷⁹
St Peter, Southborough	1830-58, 1872, 1876, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1913, 1919	1831 ⁸⁰
St Bartholomew, Sydenham	1833, 1844, 1858, 1862, 1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1831 ⁸¹
Southborough Chapel, Tonbridge	1830-1835	1831 ⁸²
St Peter, River	1889, 1893, 1898	1832 ⁸³
Holy Trinity, Woolwich	1833, 1852, 1862, 1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893,	1833 ⁸⁴

	1899, 1902, 1907	
St John, Denton	1834	1834 ⁸⁵
Holy Trinity, Dover	1836, 1851, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893-1900, 1907, 1912	1835 ⁸⁶
Christ Church, Tunbridge Wells	1841, 1851, 1876, 1879-80, 1886, 1889, 1893, 1902, 1944, 1957, 1963	1835 ⁸⁷
Christ Church, Bexleyheath	1866-1961	1836 ⁸⁸
Holy Trinity, Sheerness	1837, 1851, 1872, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1907, 1912, 1932-5	1836 ⁸⁹
Holy Trinity, Sissinghurst	1872, 1876, 1880, 1889, 1898, 1902	1837 ⁹⁰
St John, Sevenoaks	1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902	1838 ⁹¹
Holy Trinity, Cranbrook	1851, 1885-6	1838 ⁹²
St Peter, Maidstone	1851, 1872, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1905-7, 1912, 1925-6	1840 ⁹³
Holy Trinity, Lamorbey, Bexley	1851, 1872, 1876, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1898, 1902	1840 ⁹⁴
Christ Church, Herne Bay	1841-72, 1876, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902	1841 ⁹⁵
St Stephen, Tovil, Maidstone	1841, 1851, 1880, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1907, 1912, 1921-4	1841 ⁹⁶
Holy Trinity, East Peckham	1872, 1876, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1938	1842 ⁹⁷
Holy Trinity, Bromley Common	1872, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1913, 1919	1842 ⁹⁸
Christ Church, Luton, Chatham	1845-52, 1869, 1881-2	1842 ⁹⁹
St Mary, Platt, Sevenoaks	1880, 1889, 1902	1842 ¹⁰⁰
St John the Evangelist, Sidcup	1851, 1872, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1893, 1898, 1902	1843 ¹⁰¹
St John the Evangelist, Hildenborough	1872, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1898-1902	1843 ¹⁰²
Christ Church, Hougham-in-Dover	1851, 1869-1941	1844 ¹⁰³
Holy Trinity, Milton Place, Gravesend	1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902	1845 ¹⁰⁴
Holy Trinity, Milton Regis, Sittingbourne	1845-1898, 1902, 1907	1845 ¹⁰⁵
Holy Trinity, St Laurence, Ramsgate	1851, 1872, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1907, 1912, 1915-6	1845 ¹⁰⁶
St James, Hatcham	1858, 1862, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1918	1845 ¹⁰⁷
St Mary, Frittenden	1889	1846 ¹⁰⁸
Christ Church, Ramsgate	1847-1935	1847 ¹⁰⁹
St John, Woolwich	1847, 1858, 1862, 1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1912	1847 ¹¹⁰
St Margaret, Yalding	1851	1848 ¹¹¹
St Saviour, Walmer	1872, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1907, 1912, 1945	1848 ¹¹²
Holy Trinity, Blackheath Hill	1841, 1851, 1858, 1862, 1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915	1848 ¹¹³
Holy Trinity, Brompton	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902	1848 ¹¹⁴
St Paul, Sandgate	1872, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1907, 1910-18	1849 ¹¹⁵
St Andrew, Deal	1850-98, 1902-3, 1907, 1912, 1923-4	1850 ¹¹⁶
St Thomas, Woolwich	1851-1923	1850 ¹¹⁷
St Paul, Rusthall	1872, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1902, 1916-17	1850 ¹¹⁸
Christ Church, Forest Hill, Lewisham	1858, 1862, 1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915-6, 1918, 1920	1850 ¹¹⁹
Christ Church, Folkestone	1876, 1880, 1884-1929	1850 ¹²⁰

St Thomas, Charlton	1851, 1899, 1902	1850 ¹²¹
St Andrew, Paddock Wood	1872, 1876, 1885-6, 1880, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1913, 1919, 1923	1851 ¹²²
Christ Church, East Greenwich	1851, 1858, 1862, 1880-1, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1851 ¹²³
St Stephen, Tonbridge	1858-61, 1864-89, 1893-1921	1851 ¹²⁴
St John, Chatham	1851	1851 ¹²⁵
St James, Gravesend	1869, 1881, 1884-1907, 1911-21, 1925-6, 1928, 1937, 1941	1852 ¹²⁶
St John the Evangelist, Blackheath	1854, 1862, 1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1918	1853 ¹²⁷
St John, Deptford	1858, 1862, 1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1915, 1918	1855 ¹²⁸
St Mark, Rosherville, Northfleet	1869-89, 1904-32	1855 ¹²⁹
Christ Church, Lee	1855, 1858, 1862, 1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1916, 1918-9	1854 ¹³⁰
St Paul, Chatham	1869, 1885, 1889	1854 ¹³¹
Christ Church, Milton	1857, 1863-4, 1881-2, 1885, 1889-1932	1855 ¹³²
Christ Church, Shooter's Hill	1858, 1862, 1881, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1915, 1918	1856 ¹³³
St Mary, Greenhithe	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1910	1856 ¹³⁴
St John, Tunbridge Wells	1857-1893, 1902	1857 ¹³⁵
St Philip, Maidstone	1858-1935	1858 ¹³⁶
St Paul, Maidstone	1872, 1876-1937	1859 ¹³⁷
St Margaret, Plumstead	1881, 1885, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1918	1859 ¹³⁸
St Thomas, Southborough	1862-94, 1898, 1902, 1919	1860 ¹³⁹
All Saints, Belvedere	1872, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902	1861 ¹⁴⁰
St Paul, Swanley	1861-98, 1902	1861 ¹⁴¹
St James, Tunbridge Wells	1872, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902-3, 1905, 1938-1943, 1954	1862 ¹⁴²
St Mark, Gillingham	1861	1863 ¹⁴³
Holy Trinity, Lee	1881, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1907, 1915, 1918	1863 ¹⁴⁴
St Mary, Plaistow, Bromley	1858, 1871-2	1864 ¹⁴⁵
St Paul, Greenwich	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1864 ¹⁴⁶
St Michael, Sydenham	1868, 1881, 1885, 1893, 1899, 1907, 1915	1864 ¹⁴⁷
St Paul, Beckenham	1864-1939	1864 ¹⁴⁸
Christ Church, Deptford	1885, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902	1864 ¹⁴⁹
St Stephen, Lewisham	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1865 ¹⁵⁰
St George, Bickley	1866, 1872, 1876, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1891, 1893, 1902, 1913, 1919, 1923	1865 ¹⁵¹
St Peter, Greenwich	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1918	1866 ¹⁵²
Holy Trinity, Sydenham	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1918	1866 ¹⁵³
Holy Trinity, Sittingbourne	1872, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889	1866 ¹⁵⁴
St Peter, Brockley	1866, 1881, 1885-6, 1888-1948	1866 ¹⁵⁵
St Mark, Tunbridge Wells	1867-1945	1866 ¹⁵⁶
St Saviour, Brockley Hill	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1867 ¹⁵⁷
St Peter, Rochester	1881-2, 1885-6, 1902	1867 ¹⁵⁸
St James, Kidbrooke	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1867 ¹⁵⁹
All Saints, Blackheath	1862-1886, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1867 ¹⁶⁰
St Paul, Fairfield Grove, Charlton	1881, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915	1867 ¹⁶¹

Holy Trinity, Folkestone	1860s-1879, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1907, 1912, 1940s	1868 ¹⁶²
All Saints, Shooter's Hill	1876, 1881, 1885-6, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1868 ¹⁶³
St Mark, Lewisham	1870-5, 1881, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1914, 1918	1868 ¹⁶⁴
St Mary, Shortlands	1872, 1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1893, 1898, 1902	1868 ¹⁶⁵
St Mary, Strood	1886	1869 ¹⁶⁶
St Andrew, Teynham	1869-1925	?1869 ¹⁶⁷
Christ Church, Southborough	1876, 1889, 1898, 1902	1870 ¹⁶⁸
St Peter, Eltham	1881, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1915, 1918	1871 ¹⁶⁹
St Luke, Deptford	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1872 ¹⁷⁰
St Paul, Sheerness	1872, 1876, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1907, 1912, 1926	1872 ¹⁷¹
St Michael, Ditton	1886	1872 ¹⁷²
St Leonard, Deal	1872, 1880, 1885-6	1872 ¹⁷³
All Saints, Hatcham Park	1869-70, 1881, 1884-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1872 ¹⁷⁴
Christ Church, Chislehurst	1858, 1876, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902	1872 ¹⁷⁵
St John, Bexley	1872, 1876, 1885, 1889, 1893	1872 ¹⁷⁶
St Augustine, Forest Hill, Lewisham	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1873 ¹⁷⁷
St James, Westgate-on-Sea	1873, 1876, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1904-1934	1873 ¹⁷⁸
St Paul, Cliftonville	1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1907, 1912, 1932-67	1873 ¹⁷⁹
St Mildred, Burnt Ash, Lee	1881, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1897-1918	1874 ¹⁸⁰
St Peter, Windmill Fields, Tunbridge Wells	1876, 1880, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1898	1874 ¹⁸¹
St Luke, Ramsgate	1877, 1885-6, 1888-1902, 1907, 1912, 1930-41	1875 ¹⁸²
Christ Church, Beckenham	1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902, 1950	1876 ¹⁸³
St Saviour, Tonbridge	1876, 1880, 1885-6, 1889	1876 ¹⁸⁴
St John the Baptist, Foord, Folkestone	1880, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902-17	1877 ¹⁸⁵
St James, Plumstead	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915	1878 ¹⁸⁶
St Luke, Sevenoaks	1907-40	1878 ¹⁸⁷
Holy Trinity, Beckenham	1880, 1886, 1889, 1893, 1902	1878 ¹⁸⁸
Christ Church, Longlands, Sidcup	1886, 1893, 1898, 1902	1879 ¹⁸⁹
St Mary, Kippington	1880, 1885-6, 1898, 1902, 1918-20	1880 ¹⁹⁰
St George, Perry Hill, Catford	1881, 1885-6, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1880 ¹⁹¹
St Paul, Four Elms, Edenbridge	1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1898, 1902	1881 ¹⁹²
St John the Baptist, Plumstead	1884, 1886, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902	1883 ¹⁹³
St Mark, Deptford	1889	1883 ¹⁹⁴
St Paul, Lewisham	1886, 1889, 1907, 1915, 1918	1883 ¹⁹⁵
St Andrew, Mottingham	1881, 1885-6, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1884 ¹⁹⁶
St Saviour, Westgate-on-Sea	1884-1940	1884 ¹⁹⁷
St Matthew, Southborough	1902	1886 ¹⁹⁸
St Augustine, Grove Park	1891-1941	1886 ¹⁹⁹
St Luke, Maidstone	1897-1950s	1887 ²⁰⁰
Christ Church, Bromley Park	1893	1887 ²⁰¹
St Luke, Gravesend	1899	1890 ²⁰²

St Swithun, Hither Green	1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1892 ²⁰³
St George, Westcombe Park, Greenwich	1893, 1899, 1902, 1907	1892 ²⁰⁴
Holy Trinity, New Charlton	1889	1894 ²⁰⁵
St Catherine, Hatcham Park	1893, 1899, 1902, 1907, 1915, 1918	1894 ²⁰⁶
St John the Baptist, Herne Bay	1902	1899 ²⁰⁷
St Paul, Northumberland Heath, Erith	1902	1901 ²⁰⁸
All Saints, Sydenham	1901, 1918	1901 ²⁰⁹
St Mary, Milton-next-Sittingbourne	1902	1902 ²¹⁰
St John the Baptist, Southend, Lewisham	1918	1916 ²¹¹

TABLE 2 – All Bristol Anglican Churches (under Bristol’s 1951 Boundaries) Found to have Rented Sittings (or in 1886 to have Rentable Sittings), 1800-1960

Church	Years Renting Sittings	Consecrated
St Andrew, Clifton	1870-5, 1903-6, 1902-12, 1911	Pre-reformation ²¹²
Sts Philip & Jacob, Bristol	1783-1880, 1883-7	Pre-reformation ²¹³
Temple Church, Bristol	1881-7, 1893-6	Pre-reformation ²¹⁴
St Michael, Bristol	1800-4, 1806-8, 1812-15, 1817-26, 1828-29, 1831-2, 1834, 1840-1, 1886	Pre-reformation ²¹⁵
St John, Clifton	1941-42, 1945-49	Pre-reformation ²¹⁶
St James, Bristol	1886	Pre-reformation ²¹⁷
Holy Trinity, Westbury-on-Trym	1898-1922, 1925-26	Pre-reformation ²¹⁸
St John the Martyr, Bristol	1886	Pre-reformation ²¹⁹
St Werburgh, Bristol	1907, 1930	Pre-reformation ²²⁰
St Stephen, Bristol	1800-09, 1811-15, 1818-19, 1821, 1828, 1922-4	Pre-reformation ²²¹
St Mary, Shirehampton	1919	1727 ²²²
St Paul, Bristol	1886, 1941	1790s ²²³
St George, Brandon Hill, Bristol	1825, 1854-5, 1873-4	1823 ²²⁴
Holy Trinity, Hotwells	1830, 1844, 1874, 1881, 1885, 1919	1830 ²²⁵
St Luke, Bedminster	1886	1831 ²²⁶
Holy Trinity, St. Philip, Bristol	1835, 1903-10, 1935	1832 ²²⁷
Christ Church, Downend	1886	1832 ²²⁸
St Matthew, Kingsdown	1843, 1863-88, 1947-54	1835 ²²⁹
St Luke, Bristol	1886	1840s ²³⁰
Christ Church, Clifton	1844-1875, 1877-84, 1886-7	1844 ²³¹
St Jude, Bristol	1868	1844 ²³²
St Matthias, Bristol	1886	1846 ²³³
St Simon, Bristol	1849, 1885	1847 ²³⁴
St Michael, Two Mile Hill	1849, 1851, 1853-61	1848 ²³⁵
St Paul, Clifton	1869-1940, 1942, 1948-50	1854 ²³⁶
St Clement, Bristol	1857-1887	1855 ²³⁷
St Mary Magdalene, Stoke Bishop	1874-1913, 1915-1939	1860 ²³⁸
St Bartholomew, Bristol	1886, 1894-95, 1912	1861 ²³⁹
St James, Clifton	1895-98, 1900-01, 1903, 1907	1862 ²⁴⁰
Emmanuel (the Unity), Bristol	1886, 1888, 1905, 1910, 1912, 1914-18, 1939-47	1862 ²⁴¹
St Nathanael, Redland	1886, 1918-1952	1875 ²⁴²
St Andrew, Avonmouth	1918, 1921	1893 ²⁴³
St Katharine, Bishopston	1905-28, 1930-37, 1939-40	1898 ²⁴⁴

- ¹ CCA U3/243/8/1; *Religious Worship in Kent: The Census of 1851*, Roake, M., ed. (Maidstone: Kent Archaeological Society, 1999), p. 316; LPL VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a & VG 3/10a; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ² BLSA P47/4/1; LPL VG 3/4a, VG 3/5a; email from Jennifer Ann Lewis, Archivist, St Peter & St Paul, Bromley, 23 March 2006; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/brml_c01.htm
- ³ LMA DR/VB/9, DR/VB/22; MALSC P305/5B/3/1, P305/5B/5/1, P305/5B/5/2, P305/5B/28/1, P305/5B/31 & P305/5B/35; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1869, 1913 & 1919; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/roch_c02.htm
- ⁴ LPL VG 3/4a; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=St+Peters>
- ⁵ LPL VG 3/4a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1919; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/bras_c01.htm
- ⁶ LPL VG 3/4d; <http://www.stalphegeseasalter.org/history/>
- ⁷ LPL VG 3/4b, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b & VG 3/10b; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/hadl_c01.htm
- ⁸ Email from Judy Noakes, Parish Administrator, 6 April 2006; http://www.mardenchurch.org.uk/ck/index.php?page_ref=216
- ⁹ LPL VG 3/4d & VG 3/8c; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Farningham>
- ¹⁰ LPL VG 3/4b & VG 3/10b; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/kest_c01.htm
- ¹¹ MALSC P159/5/1 & P159/5/2; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1882 & 1935; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/grav_c01.htm
- ¹² LLSA SM/1/3/48; LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21 & DS/VB/4; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/lewi_c01.htm
- ¹³ LPL VG 3/4b, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b & VG 3/8b; CKS P145/5/3; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/frni_c01.htm
- ¹⁴ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 4; LPL VG 3/4a, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a & VG 3/7a; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Borden>
- ¹⁵ LPL VG 3/5c; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/stan_c01.htm
- ¹⁶ LPL VG 3/4b & VG 3/5a; <http://www.kentarchives.org.uk/ccatalogues%20march%2005.pdf>
- ¹⁷ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886) p. 4; LPL VG 3/4a, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a & VG 3/11a; CKS P78/5/7; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Charing>
- ¹⁸ LPL VG 3/6a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a & VG 3/10a; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Ashford+1>
- ¹⁹ LPL VG 3/5a & VG 3/6a; http://www.detlingparish.co.uk/church_shorthistory.shtml
- ²⁰ LPL VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b; <http://www.allsaintsstaplehurst.co.uk/history.html>
- ²¹ BLSAC PA/23/6/B/4, at www.a2a.org.uk; LPL VG 3/4b, VG 3/5a & VG 3/11a; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1935; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/bexl_c01.htm; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ²² LPL VG 3/4c, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b & VG 3/11b; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/knoc_c01.htm
- ²³ LPL VG 3/5a, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b & VG 3/11a; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Eastry>
- ²⁴ LPL VG 3/7b & VG 3/9b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Loose>
- ²⁵ LMA DR/VB/25; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/stro_c01.htm
- ²⁶ LPL VG 3/7b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Nonington>
- ²⁷ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 4; LPL VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a & VG 3/11a; CKS P39/5/2 & P39/8/1; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Boughton+Monchelsea>
- ²⁸ Email from Suresh Khanna, 10 March 2006; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 16; <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/bredhurstchurch/history.htm>
- ²⁹ CCA U3/140/1/6; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 10; LPL VG 3/4b, VG 3/5a, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b & VG 3/9b; <http://www.st-johnschurch.co.uk/history.html>
- ³⁰ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 42; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70; LPL TAIT 259 ff. 260-261; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/dart_c01.htm; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ³² *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 16; LPL VG 3/4d, TAIT 440 & TAIT 441; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/wool_c01.htm
- ³³ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 353; CCA U3/26/8/3, U3/26/8/6/58, U3/26/8/6/69, U3/26/8/6/79, U3/26/8/7/1, U3/26/8/16/2 & U3/26/8/16/28; LPL VG 3/3a, VG 3/5a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a, VG 3/11a, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Dover+3>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ³⁴ *Religious Worship in Kent*, pp. 355-6; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 6; LPL VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a, VG 3/11a, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b; <http://www.stmarysdover.org.uk/>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ³⁵ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 360; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ³⁶ LPL VG 3/11a; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/frnb_c01.htm
- ³⁷ LPL VG 3/10b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Ickham>

- ³⁸ LPL VG 3/9b & VG 3/10a; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Eastling>
- ³⁹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 8; LPL VG 3/5a, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10b & VG 3/11b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Lenham>
- ⁴⁰ LPL VG 3/5a; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Minster+in+Sheppey>
- ⁴¹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 8; LPL VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b & VG 3/11b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Littlebourne>
- ⁴² LPL VG 3/6c; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Wormshill>
- ⁴³ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 10; LPL VG 3/4c, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10b & VG 3/11b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Maidstone+1>
- ⁴⁴ CKS P287/5/4; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 10; LPL VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7b & VG 3/8c; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/pens_c01.htm
- ⁴⁵ Email from Dr David Killingray, 17 March 2006; CKS P330/6/16; <http://www.stnicholas-sevenoaks.org/about-us/history/>
- ⁴⁶ LPL VG 3/10c; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Tonbridge+1>
- ⁴⁷ MALSC P/110/5/3; LPL TAIT 259 ff. 260-268, VG 3/4c & VG 3/11a; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/dart_c01.htm
- ⁴⁸ CCA U3/76/8/A/3; *Religious Worship in Kent*, pp. 308-9; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ⁴⁹ CKS P4B/8/2; LPL VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c & VG 3/10c; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Smeeth>
- ⁵⁰ LPL VG 3/9c; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Stodmarsh>
- ⁵¹ CCA U3/287/5/D2; LPL, VG 3/12b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Dover+4>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ⁵² LMA DR/VB/4, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/25 & DS/VB/2; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/plum_c01.htm
- ⁵³ LMA DS/VB/1; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/elth_plc.htm
- ⁵⁴ LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/3, DS/VB/5 & DS/VB/6; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/grnw_c01.htm
- ⁵⁵ LPL VG 3/12b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Hythe>
- ⁵⁶ LPL VG 3/10a; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Addington>
- ⁵⁷ <http://cornishwebservices.co.uk/fordwich/>; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Fordwich>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ⁵⁸ Email from Fiona Haskett, 8 March 2006; <http://www.stmarysleigh.org.uk/StMary.html>
- ⁵⁹ LPL TAIT 440 & TAIT 441; *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 30; LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/2, DS/VB/4 & DS/VB/5; LLSA A78/18M/A9/3, A78/18M/A9/7 & A78/18M/A9/9, at www.a2a.org.uk; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/LEE____.HTM; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁶⁰ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 91; LMA DR/VB/4, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22 & DR/VB/25; MALSC P306/4/1, P306/5/2, P306/5/3 & P306/8/1; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1882, 1919, 1923 & 1938; <http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/ROCHESTE.HTM>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁶¹ LPL VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c & VG 3/9c; CKS P371E/5/1; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Tunbridge+Wells+1>
- ⁶² LPL TAIT 441; LMA DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DS/VB/2, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/blac_plc.htm
- ⁶³ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 23; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁶⁴ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 26; CCA U3/67/5/1, U3/67/5/3, U3/67/5/4, U3/67/28/6; LPL VG 3/4b, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a, VG 3/11a & VG 3/12b Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁶⁵ LPL TAIT 440; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 26; LMA DR/VB/2, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11 & DR/VB/20; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/dept_c02.htm; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁶⁶ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 54; LPL VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10b & VG 3/11b.
- ⁶⁷ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 36; LPL TAIT 440; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁶⁸ LMA A/FH/B/03/022/001 to A/FH/B/03/022/003, A/FH/B/03/022/005, A/FH/B/03/023/001/01 & A/FH/B/03/023/017, at www.a2a.org.uk; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51; <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/searches/sidocs.asp?SIR=O65305>
- ⁶⁹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 60; LMA DR/VB/5, DR/VB/9 & DR/VB/10.
- ⁷⁰ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 28; LMA DR/VB/2, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 28.
- ⁷¹ LPL TAIT 441; 'Events of the Month', *The British Magazine*, v. 7 (1865), pp. 480-486, p. 483; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 6; LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/grnw_plc.htm; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.

- ⁷² *Religious Worship in Kent*, pp. 354-5; <http://home.freeuk.net/eastkent/dover/church/stjohn.htm>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁷³ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 168; CKS P241A/6/5 & P241A/8/4; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 46; CERC 17,819; LPL, VG 3/4c, VG 3/5b, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10b, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", pp. 51-52.
- ⁷⁴ CCA U3/231/3/1, U3/231/5/2 & U3/231/5/4; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 54; LPL VG 3/4c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10b, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12c & VG 3/13c; CERC 18,157.
- ⁷⁵ <http://uk.geocities.com/twyorkroad/tw1855/colbrantunbridgewells1855.html>; CKS P371L/5/4, P371L/5/5, P371L/8/2 & P371L/8/31; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 60; CERC 18,381; LPL VG 3/4d, VG 3/5c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1919; <http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/TONBRIDG.HTM>; CERC CBC/4/2/2; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁷⁶ Walton, H.M., *A Short History of Holy Trinity Church, Margate, 1825-1932* (Margate: Simon & Turner, 1932), p. 42; *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 312; CCA U3/268/6/B/16; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 48; LPL VG 3/4b, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b; *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 312; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁷⁷ ESRO PAR387/10/5/144, at www.a2a.org.uk; LPL VG 3/5a & VG 3/6b; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51; <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~shebra/margate.htm>
- ⁷⁸ *Religious Worship in Kent*, pp. 23-4; LMA DR/VB/1, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/6; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁷⁹ LPL VG 3/5c; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/rive_c01.htm
- ⁸⁰ CKS P271B/8/1; LPL VG 3/4d, VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1913 & 1919; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51; <http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/TONBRIDG.HTM>
- ⁸¹ LPL TAIT 440 & TAIT 441; LMA DR/OP/80, DR/VB/5, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/VB/2, DS/VB/4 & DS/VB/6; LLSA A71/30/3/5; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 60; *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 36; <http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/LEWISHAM.HTM>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁸² <http://eagle.cch.kcl.ac.uk:8080/cce/locations/CreateLocationFrames.jsp?locKey=837>
- ⁸³ LPL VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c & VG 3/10b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=River>
- ⁸⁴ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 66; CERC ECE/7/1/16279; LPL TAIT 441; LMA DR/VB/6, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25 & DS/VB/2; CERC CBC/4/2/2; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/wool_plc.htm
- ⁸⁵ <http://website.lineone.net/~stjohns/history.htm>
- ⁸⁶ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 356; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 28; CCA U3/30/5/2; LPL VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁸⁷ <http://uk.geocities.com/twyorkroad/tw1855/colbrantunbridgewells1855.html>; *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 143; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 62; LPL VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c & VG 3/11b; CKS P371H/8/12; <http://www.crossandcrown.org.uk/>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁸⁸ BLSAC PA23C/5/A/1/1 & PA23C/5/A/1/2, at www.a2a.org.uk; LPL VG 3/4a, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a & VG 3/11a; <http://www.bexley.gov.uk/service/lib-christchurch-bexleyheath.html>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁸⁹ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 299; CKS P254B/5/2 & P254B/18/1; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 56; LPL VG 3/4c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c, VG 3/12c & VG 3/13c; CERC CBC/4/2/2; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁹⁰ LPL VG 3/4a, VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Sissinghurst>
- ⁹¹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 56; LPL F. Temple 48 ff. 309-312, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b.
- ⁹² *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 188; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 56; LPL VG 3/7c; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁹³ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 166; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 46; LPL VG 3/4c, VG 3/5b, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10b, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b; CKS P241K/5/2; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁹⁴ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 53; LPL VG 3/4a, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/10b & VG 3/11b; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁹⁵ CCA U3/204/5/1; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 36; LPL VG 3/4b, VG 3/5a, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10b & VG 3/11b.
- ⁹⁶ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 165-6; CKS P241M/8/6; LPL, VG 3/6c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12c & VG 3/13c; CERC CBC/4/2/2; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ⁹⁷ LPL VG 3/4c, VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10b & VG 3/11b; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1938; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/pcke_c02.htm

- ⁹⁸ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 22; LPL VG 3/4a, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a & VG 3/11a; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1913 & 1919; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/brml_c05.htm
- ⁹⁹ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 98; MALSC P85D/8/1; LMA DR/VB/3; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1869 & 1882; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/CHATHAM_.HTM; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹⁰⁰ LPL VG 3/6c, VG 3/8c & VG 3/11b; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/plat_c01.htm
- ¹⁰¹ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 50; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 56; LPL VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b; <http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/CHISLEHU.HTM>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹⁰² LPL VG 3/4d, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7b, VG 3/9c & VG 3/10c; CKS P371C/5/1 to P371C/5/20; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/hild_c01.htm
- ¹⁰³ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p.359; CCA U3/203/3/3 & U3/203/3/6; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 36; LPL VG 3/4b, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a, VG 3/11a & VG 3/13b; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 48; LMA DR/VB/9, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22 & DR/VB/25.
- ¹⁰⁵ CKS P253/6/B; LPL VG 3/4c, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6b, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c, VG 3/11b & VG 3/12c; *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 74; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 319; CCA U3/228/8/1; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 60; LPL VG 3/4b, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10b, VG 3/12c & VG 3/13c; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹⁰⁷ LPL TAIT 440 & TAIT 441; LMA DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24 & DS/VB/5; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/hatc_c01.htm
- ¹⁰⁸ LPL VG 3/8b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Frittenden>
- ¹⁰⁹ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 320; CCA U3/226/5/6, U3/226/5/F1, U3/226/5/8, U3/226/8/3 & U3/226/8/4; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 54; LPL VG 3/3g, VG 3/4c, VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10b, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12c & VG 3/13c; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹¹⁰ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 68; LPL TAIT 440 & TAIT 441; CERC ECE/7/1/16279; LMA DR/VB/6, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25 & DS/VB/2.
- ¹¹¹ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 155; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/YALDING_.HTM; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹¹² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 12; LPL VG 3/4d, VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12c & VG 3/13c; CERC ECE/7/1/21796; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Walmer+3>
- ¹¹³ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 8; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 32; LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1 & DS/VB/3; LPL VG 3/7c, TAIT 440 & TAIT 441; CERC CBC/4/2/2; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹¹⁴ LMA DR/VB/1, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22 & DR/VB/24; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 22; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/brmp_plc.htm; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ¹¹⁵ CCA U3/277/5/A2 & U3/277/8/A1; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 56; LPL VG 3/4d, VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12c & VG 3/13c; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Sandgate>
- ¹¹⁶ CCA U3/271/8/A2, U3/271/5/D1, U3/271/5/D2 & U3/271/28/2; *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 345; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 26; LPL VG 3/3a, VG 3/4b, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a, VG 3/11a, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b; *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 345; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹¹⁷ LPL TAIT 440 & TAIT 441; LMA DR/VB/6, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/20, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/3, DS/VB/6 & P97/TMS/25; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 66; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/char_plc.htm
- ¹¹⁸ CKS P344b/6/B/17; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 54; LPL VG 3/4c, VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c & VG 3/11b; LMA DS/VB/3; *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 142; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ¹¹⁹ LPL TAIT 440 & TAIT 441; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 30; LMA DR/VB/2, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/VB/2, DS/VB/3, DS/VB/5 & P86/Ctc1/50.
- ¹²⁰ CCA U3/217/3/1; LPL VG 3/5a, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10a, VG 3/11a, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b; <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~folkestonefamilies/churches.htm>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ¹²¹ *Religious Worship in Kent*, pp. 24-5; LMA DR/VB/22 & DR/VB/24; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51; <http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/CHARLTON.HTM>
- ¹²² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 52; LPL VG 3/4a, VG 3/5c, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10b & VG 3/11b; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1913, 1919 & 1923.

- ¹²³ LPL TAIT 440 & TAIT 441; *Religious Worship in Kent.*, p. 12; LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5, P78/Ctc/57/1, P78/Ctc/57/2 & P78/Ctc/57/3; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 32; CERC 12,987; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹²⁴ CKS P371D/5/1; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 60; LPL VG 3/4d, VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b; CKS P371D/5/1; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51; http://web.ukonline.co.uk/st-stephens.tonbridge/about_us/origins.htm
- ¹²⁵ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 95; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/CHATHAM_.HTM; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹²⁶ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 32; LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24; MALSC, P159B/7/1, P159B/7/2, P159B/8/1, P159B/8/2, P159B/8/3 & P159B/8/4; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1869.
- ¹²⁷ LPL TAIT 441; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 68; LMA DR/VB/1, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1 & DS/VB/5; http://www.southwark.anglican.org/parishes/032j_a.htm
- ¹²⁸ LPL TAIT 440 & TAIT 441; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 26; LMA DR/VB/2, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5.
- ¹²⁹ MALSC P270B/5/5, P270B/5/6 & P270B/7/2; LMA, DR/VB/4 & DR/VB/9; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1869, 1882 & 1913; Email from Jan Knight, MALSC, 20 January 2009.
- ¹³⁰ LPL TAIT 440 & TAIT 441; LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/OP/1919/4, DS/VB/2 & DS/VB/5; LLSA A78/18/CC/F1/3; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 42; CERC CBC/4/2/2; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/LEE_.HTM; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ¹³¹ LMA DR/VB/8 & DR/VB/11; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1869; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/chat_plc.htm
- ¹³² MALSC P252C/1/5/1 & P252C/8/2; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 48; LMA DR/VB/4, DR/VB/9 & DR/VB/10; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1882, 1913, 1919 & 1923.
- ¹³³ LPL TAIT 440 & TAIT 441; LMA DR/VB/5, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/4 & DS/VB/6; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/shoo_plc.htm
- ¹³⁴ Email from St Mary, Greenhithe, 7 March 2006; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 32; LPL VG 3/7b; LMA, DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22 & DR/VB/25; <http://www.stmarygreenhithe.com/>
- ¹³⁵ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 62; LPL VG 3/4d, VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b.
- ¹³⁶ CKS P241G/5/A/7 & P241G/5/A/8; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 46; LPL VG 3/4c, VG 3/5b, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10b, VG 3/11b & VG 3/13b; <http://home.freuk.net/eastkent/dover/church/stjohn.htm>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹³⁷ CKS P241F/5/1, P241F/6/10 & P241F/6/18; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 46; LPL VG 3/4c, VG 3/5b, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10b, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b; http://www.churchplansonline.org/retrieve_results.asp?search_args=x%3DMAIDSTONE%2C+St.+Paul%7C%3DMAIDSTONE%7Cc%3DKent; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹³⁸ LMA DR/VB/4, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/VB/2 & DS/VB/6; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/plum_plc.htm
- ¹³⁹ Email from St Thomas, Southborough, 28 March 2006; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 58; LPL VG 3/4d, VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b; CKS P371K/5/1, uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1919; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/sthb_c02.htm
- ¹⁴⁰ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 16; LPL VG 3/4b, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6b, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a & VG 3/11a; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/belv_c01.htm
- ¹⁴¹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 60; LPL VG 3/4d, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b.
- ¹⁴² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 62; LPL VG 3/4d, VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b; CKS P371G/5/F/1, P371G/8/A/10 & P371G/8/A1.
- ¹⁴³ Chatham News, April 1861, quoted in www.stmarkschurchgillingham.co.uk/historylong.htm; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51; <http://www.stmarkschurchgillingham.co.uk/history.htm#St.%20Mark's>; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 16.
- ¹⁴⁴ LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DS/VB/2, DS/VB/4 & DS/VB/5; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/lee_plc.htm
- ¹⁴⁵ LPL TAIT 175 f. 141 to 148, TAIT 440 & VG 3/4a; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/plai_c01.htm
- ¹⁴⁶ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 32; LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/grnw_c04.htm
- ¹⁴⁷ LMA DR/OP/88, DR/VB/5, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DS/VB/2 & DS/VB/4; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51; <http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/LEWISHAM.HTM>
- ¹⁴⁸ Email from Toni Gandy, Church Administrator, St Paul, Beckenham, 7 March 2006; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 16; LPL VG 3/4a, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a & VG 3/11a; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1935 & 1938.

- ¹⁴⁹ LMA DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22 & DR/VB/24; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/dept_plc.htm
- ¹⁵⁰ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 68; LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/VB/2, DS/VB/4 & DS/VB/5.
- ¹⁵¹ BLSA P47D/5/1 & P47D/6/3; LPL, VG 3/4a, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a & VG 3/11a; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1913, 1919 & 1923; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/bick_c01.htm
- ¹⁵² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 32; LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24 & DS/VB/5; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/grnw_plc.htm
- ¹⁵³ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 60; LMA DR/VB/5, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/VB/2 & DS/VB/6; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/syde_plc.htm
- ¹⁵⁴ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 56; LPL VG 3/4d, VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c & VG 3/8c.
- ¹⁵⁵ LLSA A78/26/3/35 to A78/26/3/49; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 26; LMA DR/VB/2, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5.
- ¹⁵⁶ Email from Tony Gammon, 21 March 2006.
- ¹⁵⁷ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 42; LMA DR/VB/1, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/VB/2, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5.
- ¹⁵⁸ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 54; LMA DR/VB/4, DR/VB/9 & DR/VB/25; CKS uncatalogued Rochester Diocese visitation returns, 1882.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 8; LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/kidb_c01.htm
- ¹⁶⁰ LPL TAIT 441; LMA DR/VB/1, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5; LLSA A97/1/3/2 & A97/1/3/3, at www.a2a.org.uk; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 42; http://www.southwark.anglican.org/parishes/031m_a.htm; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹⁶¹ LMA DR/VB/2, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1 & DS/VB/3; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/char_plc.htm
- ¹⁶² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 30; <http://www.thetrinitybenefice-folkestone.org.uk/html/history.html>; LPL TAIT 248 ff. 54-56, VG 3/5a, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10a, VG 3/11a, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Folkestone+6>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ¹⁶³ LMA DR/OP/131, DR/VB/4, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/4 & DS/VB/6; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 56; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52; http://www.churchplansonline.org/retrieve_results.asp?c=Kent&offset=1070
- ¹⁶⁴ LMA DR/OP/85, DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/OP/1914/6, DS/VB/2 & DS/VB/5; LLSA A68/16/B/1; <http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/LEWISHAM.HTM>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51.
- ¹⁶⁵ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 56; LPL VG 3/4a, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a & VG 3/11a.
- ¹⁶⁶ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 60.
- ¹⁶⁷ CCA U3/227/4/1; LPL VG 3/4d, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c & VG 3/11b.
- ¹⁶⁸ LPL VG 3/5c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Southborough+2>
- ¹⁶⁹ LMA DR/VB/2, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/elth_plc.htm
- ¹⁷⁰ LMA DR/VB/2, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/elth_plc.htm
- ¹⁷¹ 'Annual Report', *The Free and Open Church Advocate*, v. V, no. 40 (1927, January), p. 474; LPL VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12c & VG 3/13c; <http://www.sheernessheritagecentre.com/page2chronology.htm>
- ¹⁷² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 28.
- ¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 6; LPL VG 3/6a & VG 3/7a; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/chis_c03.htm
- ¹⁷⁴ LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/11, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/3, DS/VB/5, P75/ALL/25/6, P75/ALL/26/1, P75/ALL/26/2 & P75/ALL/26/3; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 34.
- ¹⁷⁵ LPL TAIT 441, VG 3/5a, VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a & VG 3/11a; http://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/chis_c03.htm
- ¹⁷⁶ LPL VG 3/4a, VG 3/5a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a & VG 3/9a; <http://www.ideal-homes.org.uk/bromley/bromley/st-johns.htm>
- ¹⁷⁷ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 30; LMA DR/VB/3, DR/VB/8, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/VB/2, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5.
- ¹⁷⁸ CCA U3/279/5/D1/1, U3/279/5/D2; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 62; LPL VG 3/5a, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12c & VG 3/13c; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 51; <http://www.stjameswestgate.org.uk/page5history.htm>
- ¹⁷⁹ CCA U3/281/5/A1; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 48; LPL VG 3/7b, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10b, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b; freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~shebra/margate.htm; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.

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- ¹⁸¹ LPL VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c & VG 3/10c; <http://www.kentchurches.info/church.asp?p=Tunbridge+Wells+9>
- ¹⁸² CCA U3/225/5/2, U3/225/5/2; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 54; LPL VG 3/7c, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10b, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12c & VG 3/13c; email from Rev. Paul Worledge, St Luke, Ramsgate, 13 January 2006; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ¹⁸³ <http://www.ccb.org.uk/ccb125.php>; LPL VG 3/6a, VG 3/7a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a, VG 3/10a & VG 3/11a; <http://www.ccb.org.uk/history.php>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ¹⁸⁴ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 60; LPL VG 3/5c, VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c & VG 3/8c.
- ¹⁸⁵ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 30; CCA U3/178/4/4/16 – 28; email from Ruth Jones, Administrator, St John, Folkestone, 20 March 2006; LPL VG 3/6b, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10a, VG 3/11a, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b.
- ¹⁸⁶ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 52; LMA DR/VB/4, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/VB/2 & DS/VB/4.
- ¹⁸⁷ <http://www.stlukes-sevenoaks.org.uk/history1.htm>; <http://www.stlukes-sevenoaks.org.uk/history2.htm>; LPL VG 3/8c; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ¹⁸⁸ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 68; LPL VG 3/6a, VG 3/8a, VG 3/9a & VG 3/11a.
- ¹⁸⁹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 56; LPL VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b.
- ¹⁹⁰ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 40; CKS P330D/5/A/13/1; LPL VG 3/6c, VG 3/7c, VG 3/10c & VG 3/11b; http://www.nwkfhs.org.uk/kipp_plc.htm
- ¹⁹¹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 42; LMA DR/VB/4, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/VB/2, DS/VB/4 & DS/VB/6; http://www.nwkfhs.org.uk/catf_plc.htm
- ¹⁹² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 30; LPL VG 3/7b, VG 3/8b, VG 3/9b, VG 3/10b & VG 3/11b.
- ¹⁹³ LMA DR/OP/147, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22 & DR/VB/25; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 52; <http://www.nwkfhs.org.uk/PLUMSTEA.HTM>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ¹⁹⁴ LMA DR/VB/11; http://www.nwkfhs.org.uk/dept_plc.htm
- ¹⁹⁵ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 42; LMA DR/VB/11, DS/VB/2, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5.
- ¹⁹⁶ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 48; LPL VG 3/6c; LMA DR/VB/4, DR/VB/9, DR/VB/10, DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/4 & DS/VB/6.
- ¹⁹⁷ CCA U3/272/5/A2; LPL BENSON 17 f. 313, VG 3/7b, VG 3/8c, VG 3/9c, VG 3/10c, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12c & VG 3/13c; <http://www.piltown.org.uk/kcapeals/kcapeals2001.htm>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52.
- ¹⁹⁸ LPL VG 3/11b; http://www.nwkfhs.org.uk/sthb_c04.htm
- ¹⁹⁹ LLSA A79/13 A4/2; LMA DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/2, DS/VB/3 & SA/2/B/2/A/3/1; http://www.nwkfhs.org.uk/grov_plc.htm
- ²⁰⁰ Email from Robin Williamson (Hon. Curate), St Luke, Maidstone, 1 March 2006; LPL VG 3/10b, VG 3/11b, VG 3/12b & VG 3/13b; <http://www.stlukes.org.uk/>
- ²⁰¹ LPL VG 3/9a; http://www.nwkfhs.org.uk/brml_c02.htm
- ²⁰² LMA DR/VB/22; http://www.nwkfhs.org.uk/grav_plc.htm
- ²⁰³ LMA DR/OP/93, DR/VB/21, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/25, DS/VB/2, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 52; http://www.southwark.anglican.org/parishes/155j_a.htm
- ²⁰⁴ LMA DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24 & DS/VB/1; http://www.nwkfhs.org.uk/wstc_c01.htm
- ²⁰⁵ LMA DR/VB/11; http://www.nwkfhs.org.uk/char_plc.htm
- ²⁰⁶ LMA DR/VB/20, DR/VB/22, DR/VB/24, DS/VB/1, DS/VB/3 & DS/VB/5; http://www.nwkfhs.org.uk/hatc_c03.htm
- ²⁰⁷ LPL VG 3/11b; email from Sheila Malloch, CCA, 21 January 2009.
- ²⁰⁸ LPL VG 3/11a; CKS CCA-DCb-VC/1/C/1/B/9.
- ²⁰⁹ LMA DS/VB/5 & DS/VB/6; http://www.nwkfhs.org.uk/syde_plc.htm
- ²¹⁰ LPL VG 3/11b; CCA, DCb-E/C/1/M/19/1.
- ²¹¹ LMA DS/VB/6; <http://www.southwark.anglican.org/downloads/lostchurches/CAT03.pdf>
- ²¹² BRRO P/StA/ChW/2/1(b), P/StA/ChW/2/1(d), P/StA/ChW/10/6, P/StA/ChW/10/9/8, P/StA/PR/1(a), P/StA/PR/1(c), P/StA/PR/1(e). <http://brisray.com/bristol/bclifton2.htm>
- ²¹³ BRRO P/StP&J/ChW/3b & P/StP&J/ChW/4a; <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/details/default.aspx?id=380710>

- ²¹⁴ <http://web.archive.org/web/20050517165336/http://www.geocities.com/churchcrawler/bristol/temple.htm>; BRRO P.Tem/Lc/4 & P.Tem/Lc/5.
- ²¹⁵ Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 4; BRRO P/St.M/ChW/1(d) & P/St.M/ChW/1(e); Wilkins, H.J., *Was John Wycliffe a Negligent Pluralist? also John de Trivisa: His Life and Work* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1915), p. 58.
- ²¹⁶ BRRO P/StJC/PCC/1(a) & P/StJC/PCC/2(b).; <http://www.about-bristol.co.uk/chu-07.asp>
- ²¹⁷ Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 4; BRRO P/StJ/HM/4(d).
- ²¹⁸ <http://www.westbury-parish-church.org.uk/>; BRRO P/HTW/ChW/2(a), P/HTW/ChW/2(b), P/HTW/ChW/2(c), P/HTW/ChW/3(b) & P/HTW/ChW/4(a);
- ²¹⁹ Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 4; BRRO P/CC/PCC/1(a).
- ²²⁰ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=104331>; BRRO P/St.W/ChW/14.
- ²²¹ <http://www.about-bristol.co.uk/chu-09.asp>; BRRO P/St.S/ChW/1(a), P/St.S/ChW/1(e) & P/St.S/ChW/1(f).
- ²²² <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/23806349/Places-of-Worship-Past-and-Present---in-Bristol-Bristol-Avon>; BRRO P/StMS/PCC/1(a).
- ²²³ P/St.P/ChW/22(b); <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/details/default.aspx?id=380191>; Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 20.
- ²²⁴ <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bristol3/stgeobh.htm> ; BRRO P/St.GB/ChW/2(a) & P/St.GB/ChW/2(b); CERC CBC/4/2/2.
- ²²⁵ Leech, *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*, pp. 158-9; <http://www.holytrinityhotwells.org/>; BRRO P/HTC/PR/3, P/HTC/I/7/2-3 & P/HTC/V/2.
- ²²⁶ Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 16
- ²²⁷ <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/pmdraper10/bristol1.htm>; BRRO P/HT/ChW/5 & P/HT/ChW/7; CERC CBC/4/2/2.
- ²²⁸ Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 28.
- ²²⁹ <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/23806349/Places-of-Worship-Past-and-Present---in-Bristol-Bristol-Avon>; BRRO P/StMK/ChW/1(c), P/StMK/ChW/2(c), P/StMK/ChW/3, P/StMK/ChW/4; Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 40.
- ²³⁰ Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 20.
- ²³¹ Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 24; BRRO P/CC/ChW/1(a) & P/CC/ChW/2; Leech, J., *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*, Sutton, A., ed. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1982), p. 157.
- ²³² <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/pmdraper10/bristol1.htm>; BRRO P/StJu/ChW/1.
- ²³³ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstmat&cid=-1#-1>; Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 20.
- ²³⁴ BRRO P/St.Sim/V/1 & P/St.Sim/HM/2; CERC CBC/4/2/2; CERC ECE/7/1/8122.
- ²³⁵ <http://www.eastbristol.org.uk/stmichael/Welcome.htm>; BRRO P/St.MiT/ChW/1(a) & P/St.MiT/V/1(a).
- ²³⁶ [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstpc&cid=0&kw=st paul clifton#0](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstpc&cid=0&kw=st%20paul%20clifton#0); BRRO P/St.PC/ChW/2(a), P/St.PC/ChW/2(b), P/St.PC/ChW/2(c), P/St.PC/ChW/2(g), P/St.PC/ChW/2(h), P/St.PC/ChW/2(i), P/St.PC/ChW/2(j), P/St.PC/ChW/2(m), P/St.PC/ChW/2(n), P/St.PC/ChW/2(o), P/St.PC/ChW/2(p), P/St.PC/ChW/2(q), P/St.PC/ChW/2(r), P/St.PC/ChW/2(s), P/St.PC/ChW/2(t), P/St.PC/ChW/2(u), P/St.PC/1/5(b) & P/St.PC/PCC/4.
- ²³⁷ <http://www.bristolinformation.co.uk/srch/srchit.asp?list=list&gdoc=rs&howmany=200>; Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 20; BRRO P/StC/V/2.
- ²³⁸ http://www.stmarysb.org.uk/?page_id=246; Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 20; BRRO P/StMSB/ChW/1(a), P/StMSB/ChW/1(b), P/StMSB/ChW/1(c), P/StMSB/ChW/1(d), P/StMSB/ChW/1(d), P/StMSB/ChW/1(f), P/StMSB/ChW/1(h)i-ii, P/StMSB/ChW/2(b), P/StMSB/ChW/2(a).
- ²³⁹ <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/pmdraper10/bristol1.htm>; Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 20; BRRO P/StBM/ChW/5/1, P/StBM/ChW/11/3 & P/St.BM/V/1.
- ²⁴⁰ <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bristol5/clifjam.htm>; BRRO P/StA/PR/1(a).
- ²⁴¹ Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 20; BRRO P/EC/V/1.
- ²⁴² <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstk&cid=-1#-1>; Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (1886), p. 20; P/St.Nat/PCC/3(a), P/St.Nat/PCC/3(b), P/St.Nat/PCC/3(c), P/St.Nat/ChW/1(w), P/St.Nat/ChW/1(x), P/St.Nat/ChW/1(y), P/St.Nat/ChW/1(z), P/St.Nat/ChW/1(A), P/St.Nat/ChW/1(B), P/St.Nat/ChW/1(C), P/St.Nat/ChW/1(D), P/St.Nat/ChW/1(E), P/St.Nat/ChW/1(F), P/St.Nat/ChW/1(G), P/St.Nat/ChW/1(I) & P/St.Nat/ChW/2.
- ²⁴³ <http://www.shire.org.uk/shire.php?edition=451> & <http://www.achurchnearyou.com/avonmouth-st-andrew/>; BRRO P/Avon/PCC/1(a).
- ²⁴⁴ <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/23806349/Places-of-Worship-Past-and-Present---in-Bristol-Bristol-Avon>; BRRO P/StK/ChW/1, P/StK/PCC/1(a) & P/StK/PCC/1(b).

CHAPTER FOUR

CHARACTERISTICS OF ANGLICAN CHURCHES THAT LEVIED PEW-RENTS FROM 1800 TO 1960

This chapter documents the Kentish and Bristol churches that rented at least some of their pews in the period under study, and looks at the particular types of churches – *i.e.*, urban versus rural, high-church versus low-church, wealthier area versus poorer area – most likely to do so. Pews rented privately by owners are discussed in a later chapter.

The Limits of this Part of the Study

Since the practice was first officially illegal although unofficially tolerated, and since it was extremely unpopular particularly later in the Victorian era, some pews may have been let without the publicity generated by written statements.¹ Some churches documented pew-rents separately from other receipts, excluding them for various reasons from their formal records. A notice was included in the 1944 published Parochial Church Council's accounts of Christ Church, Tunbridge Wells, for example, stating that

The Council's income from pew rents has been excluded from these accounts as this was included under the Vicar's emoluments of office upon his appointment and is collected by the Churchwardens, as agents for the Vicar.²

Some analysis is possible, though, based on years when, and locations where, pew-renting can be shown to have been certainly or nearly certainly in existence. Here the 'nearly certainly' judgement was made by viewing the circumstances of each individual church and the records that indicate pew-renting in various years. For example, the churchwardens' accounts of Sts Philip & Jacob, Bristol, reflect that from 1878 to 1879 pew rents are listed as 'Seat Subscriptions', but in 1880 the same listings are simply 'Subscriptions'. Accordingly, although the 'subscribers' are generally the same and generally paid the same amounts, the evidence does not show 'almost certainly' that sittings were allocated in return for the

¹ Bennett, J.C., "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly': The Practice of Pew-renting at Kentish Anglican Churches" (unpublished MTh dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2006), p. 16.

² CKS P371H/8/12.

subscriptions, and therefore pew-renting is not listed for those years. In 1883-4 the words ‘Seat Subscriptions’ are again used, so those years *are* counted. Beginning in 1888-9 the same space in the accounts is given to ‘Subscriptions towards Maintenance of Churchyard’, and while the amounts are generally the same and look very much like other churches’ lists of rents for sittings, the names of the subscribers are largely different, so the assumption that these were actually pew-rents cannot be made. In 1899 and the years following, one gets the impression that these are *not* pew-rents, since ‘small sums under 2/6’ are also listed there. This assumption becomes stronger in 1905, when one such subscription is from ‘A. Friend’, strongly indicating an anonymity that pew-renting does not confer.³

In the previous chapter, Table 1 lists the Kentish Anglican churches, and Table 2 lists the Bristol ones, found in this study to have charged pew-rents from 1800 to 1960, and broken down into 1800-1850, 1851-1900, and 1901-1960, with the years each one is *known* to have assessed such rents, the year of consecration, and the location – in or near an urban area, or rural. For comparison, Table 3, on pages 109-110 lists the Bristol churches whose records are largely extant, but which do not indicate that pew-renting was ever done there, with the years from 1800 to 1960 in which each church held services.

Although the populations of the churches’ parishes in the nineteenth century are readily available and sometimes exist from earlier times, those statistics are not usable here due to the parishes’ varying sizes and shapes and the consequent discrepancies between congregants’ residences and the churches they attended.

In the part of Table 1 in the previous chapter noting that each church was located either ‘in or near urban areas’ or ‘rural areas’, ‘near’ indicates that the town in which the church or chapel is located is within five miles of London (Charing Cross), or the centre of one of the urban areas listed below. These distances are of course arbitrary, but were chosen in order to distinguish extensions of towns from truly rural areas, particularly when the

³ BRRO P/St.P&J/ChW/3b.

population was much smaller and more spread out. Since the period 1800-1960 is most relevant here, the area comprising Bristol is taken to be the boundaries of 1951, the last change before 1960. Of Kent, principal or sub-regional towns centres of Kent are taken to be those with a population of at least 2,500 in 1801, 5,000 in 1851, or 10,000 in 1901. In 1801 those with 2,500 or more residents were:

- Ashford
- Bromley
- Canterbury
- Chatham
- Dartford
- Deal/Walmer
- Deptford
- Dover
- Faversham
- Folkestone
- Gillingham
- Gravesend
- Greenwich
- Hythe
- Lewisham
- Maidstone
- Margate
- Milton/Sittingbourne
- Ramsgate
- Rochester
- Sandwich
- Sheerness
- Sevenoaks
- Strood
- Tonbridge
- Tunbridge Wells
- Woolwich

In 1851, Kentish towns with 5,000 or more were:

- Ashford
- Bromley
- Canterbury
- Charlton
- Chatham
- Dartford
- Deal/Walmer
- Deptford
- Dover
- Faversham
- Folkestone
- Gillingham
- Gravesend
- Greenwich
- Hythe

Lee
Lewisham
Maidstone
Margate
Milton/Sittingbourne
Plumstead
Ramsgate
Rochester
Sandwich
Sevenoaks
Sheerness
Strood
Tonbridge
Tunbridge Wells
Woolwich

And in 1901, those with 10,000 or more residents were:

Ashford
Broadstairs
Canterbury
Chatham
Chislehurst
Crayford
Dover
Deal/Walmer
Erith
Faversham
Folkestone
Footscray
Gillingham
Gravesend
Herne Bay
Maidstone
Margate
Milton/Sittingbourne
Ramsgate
Rochester
Sevenoaks
Sheerness
Strood
Tonbridge
Tunbridge Wells
Whitstable.⁴

Also, the population of Greater London more than doubled from 1851 to 1901 – from 2,652,000 to 6,507,000.⁵ Accordingly, in the period from 1901 to 1960 any churches in

⁴ Chalkin, C., 'The Growth of Urban Kent 1700-1901', in *An Historical Atlas of Kent*, Lawson, T. & Killingray, D., eds. (Chichester: Phillimore, 2004), pp. 100-101.

⁵ <http://www.storyoflondon.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=474&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0>

Kentish London, even if designated as in Greater London after changes were made in 1889,⁶ will be counted as urban. Churches are listed as in or near the listed urban areas only if they rented some sittings in the half-centuries listed – a Hythe church letting its pews in 1901 will not be counted as having rented sittings in an urban church even though Hythe is listed as a town in 1801 and 1851, since it did not have the requisite population at the turn of the twentieth century. Since some churches held services long before they were consecrated, the ‘Consecrated’ column of Table 1 gives the earliest of the following: ‘consecrated’, ‘licenced’, or built. If all these are unavailable, the date listed is that at which the plan for the building of the particular church was approved.

The Percentages of Churches Renting Sittings

Table 4 shows the results of the 1886 survey of England and Wales by a Select Committee of the House of Lords. The figures are not completely accurate, since at least a few churches considered that they did not rent pews despite expecting money in return for allocating sittings to particular congregants⁷ – these are discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Nevertheless, of 11,155 churches, 1,741 (18 per cent) reported they had at least *some* of their sittings available for rent. Of those, the vast majority – 1410 – were listed as ‘New Parish and District Churches.’ This formed 45.2 per cent of all ‘New Parish and District Churches.’

TABLE 4 – Percentages of Anglican Churches in England and Wales with Rentable Sittings in 1886, Broken Down by Old Parish Churches versus New Parish and District Churches⁸

Overall number of churches	11,155
Number with sittings available for rent	1,741
Number without rentable sittings	9,414
Overall percentage of churches with rentable sittings	18.5%
Number of old parish churches	8,034

⁶ <http://www.fhsc.org.uk/genuki/reg/Ind.htm#wool>

⁷ *Free Seats in Churches -- Return to an Order of the House of Lords, dated 29th July 1889, for Returns of the 7,703 Old Parish Churches and the 1,711 New Parish or District Churches, and the 754 Churches in Which Sittings are Held by Faculty, Referred to in the Report of the Select Committee on the Parish Churches Bill, 1886, as Having no Pews or Sittings Rented; with the Answers Received to the Questions of the Committee* (London: Hansard & Son, 1890).

⁸ Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill (London: Hansard, 1886), p. 3.

Number of old parish churches with rentable sittings	331
Number of old parish churches without rentable sittings	7,703
Percentage of old parish churches with rentable sittings	4.1%
Number of new parish and district churches	3,121
Number of new parish and district churches with rentable sittings	1,410
Number of new parish and district churches	1,711
Percentage of new parish and district churches with rentable sittings	45.2%

Table 5, taken from the Rochester Archdeaconry visitation returns of 1881, shows that of 105 churches in the diocese answering questions on pew-renting, 50, or 47.6 per cent, reported that they let at least some of their sittings. These were generally larger churches serving greater populations than those not renting – the average pew-renting church officially had seating for an average of over 800 congregants and served parishes or districts with an average population of 5,547, while those letting no sittings had an average of seating for 433 – just over half of those of churches which rented pews – and their parishes or districts contained only 2,937 people, again just over half of the areas served by pew-renting churches. Pew-letting churches also reported a slightly higher proportion of regular communicants than churches that rented no sittings; more than a quarter of the overall sittings in pew-renting churches were taken by regular communicants, while only just over a fifth of sittings in non-renting churches were filled by those who attended communion recurrently.

The 1851 census also provides a ‘snapshot’ of the characteristics of Anglican churches charging pew-rents in Kent at that time, including the sittings of renting versus non-renting

TABLE 5 – Percentages of Anglican Churches in the Archdeaconry of Rochester Renting Sittings in 1881, with Particular Characteristics of the Populations, Numbers of Sittings, and Numbers of Communicants of Those Churches⁹

Number of churches in the Rochester Archdeaconry with extant 1881 visitation returns	105
Number of those churches renting sittings	50
Overall percentage of those churches renting sittings	47.6%
Average total number of sittings in those churches renting sittings	810
Average total number of sittings in those churches not renting sittings	433
Average population of the parishes or districts of those churches renting sittings	5,547
Average population of the parishes or districts of those churches not renting sittings	2,937
Percentage of sittings filled by regular communicants in churches renting sittings	25.4%
Percentage of sittings filled by regular communicants in churches not renting sittings	20.1%

⁹ LMA DR/VB/1 to DR/VB/6.

churches. The returns must be used with caution, though, since the total seats listed by each church is vague – some parish officials listed the total *official* number of sittings, while others listed only the total number of people that could *comfortably* be seated. The two were not always identical, as some returns noted. However, the numbers given are a rough guide to the churches' seating capacity. With this qualification in mind, the returns show the average seating capacity of the Kentish pew-rent churches was 825, compared to 441 in rent-free churches.¹⁰ This may result from the cost or trouble of administering pew-rents; where fewer seats could be rented, the potential profit would usually be less.

The Findings Regarding High-Church versus Low-Church Orientation

Table 6 and Chart 1, below, concern high-church versus low-church characteristics of pew-letting churches in Kent and Bristol. The *Tourist's Church Guide* is a 'relatively accurate guide to the geography of ritualism'.¹¹ The low-church *Ritualistic Clergy List*, used below to analyse the findings from Bristol, is not helpful for a large county such as Kent – the *List* often omits the county in which a particular town or village is located, so the researcher cannot be sure the church listed corresponds to one in which pew-rents have been found in Kent. For Bristol, though, the entries in the *List* virtually always give the city or suburb name.

The results can be given with some detail. Of the 129 Kentish churches found to have let some pews in 1892-3, a minority – 57, or 44.2 per cent – are listed in the high-church oriented *Tourist's Church Guide* for 1892/3. Even those Kentish pew-renting churches included in the *Tourist's Church Guide* were not generally described there as having frequent and profound high-church characteristics. None of the 57 used incense, and while the celebrants of 40 of the 57 turned to the east during Holy Eucharist, only ten of the 57 offered

¹⁰ *Religious Worship in Kent: The Census of 1851*, Roake, M., ed. (Maidstone: Kent Archaeological Society, 1999), p. 65; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 18.

¹¹ Yates, N., *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain, 1830-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 70.

Holy Eucharist services on weekdays and only five had celebrants who wore vestments. Also, while 20 of the 57 had altar candles, only 13 *lit* their candles.¹²

TABLE 6 – Percentages of Kentish Anglican Churches Found to have Rented Sittings in 1893 which also had Particular High-Church Characteristics¹³

Number of Kentish churches found to rent sittings in 1893	129
Number of Kentish churches listed in the 1892/3 <i>Tourist Church Guide</i>	213
Number of Kentish churches listed in the 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> and renting sittings in 1893	57
Percentage of Kentish churches listed in the 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> and renting sittings in 1893	44.2%
Number of churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which used incense	88
Number of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which used incense	2
Number of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which rented sittings <i>and</i> used incense	0
Percentage of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which rented sittings <i>and</i> used incense	0%
Number of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which rented sittings <i>and</i> whose celebrant turned eastward during Holy Eucharist	40
Percentage of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which rented sittings <i>and</i> whose celebrant turned eastward during Holy Eucharist	70.2%
Number of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which rented sittings <i>and</i> which celebrated Holy Eucharist on weekdays	10
Percentage of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which rented sittings <i>and</i> which celebrated Holy Eucharist on weekdays	17.5%
Number of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which rented sittings <i>and</i> used vestments	5
Percentage of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which rented sittings <i>and</i> used vestments	8.8%
Number of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which rented sittings <i>and</i> had altar candles	20
Percentage of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which rented sittings <i>and</i> had altar candles	35.1%
Number of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which rented sittings <i>and</i> had <i>lit</i> altar candles	13
Percentage of Kentish churches in 1892/3 <i>TCG</i> which rented sittings <i>and</i> had <i>lit</i> altar candles	28.2%

By 1910 the discrepancy between high-church and low-church orientation appears even more pronounced; of the 24 Kentish churches found to have charged pew-rents in that year, only four are listed in the year's edition of *Tourist's Church Guide*, which gave the names and locations of churches in which Holy Communion was 'normally' celebrated at 8 a.m. 'every Sunday and Holy Day'.¹⁴ The *Guide* that year contained many fewer details of the churches it listed than did the 1892/3 version, but of the four Kentish pew-renting churches listed only one – St Margaret, Lee – was said to have daily Eucharist services, and two others – St Paul, Sandgate, and St Saviour, Westgate-on-Sea – were designated as celebrating Holy Communion 'occasionally during the week'. The fourth, St Mark, Rosherville, Norfleet, is simply mentioned as normally having Eucharist services on Sundays

¹² *Tourist's Church Guide*, Waram, J.C., ed. (London: English Church Union, 1893).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Tourist's Church Guide for the Year 1910* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1910).

and Holy Days.¹⁵ And 213 Kentish churches were listed in the 1892/3 *Tourist's Church Guide*, while only 57 of them have been found to have let sittings that year. Thus of those Kentish churches thought to be of high-church orientation in 1892 and 1893, only 26.7 per cent were found to rent pews.¹⁶ Accordingly, a guarded conclusion can be drawn that, at least in 1893 and perhaps more so in 1910, Kentish Anglican pew-renting was more a low- or broad-church phenomenon than a high-church one.

The evidence from Bristol is even more telling regarding a high-church/low-church distinction regarding pew-renting. Chart 1 shows the numbers of churches listed in the *Ritualistic Clergy List* of 1902 and its successor of 1908,¹⁷ and in the *Tourist Church Guide* of 1910. These are separated into the churches which charged pew-rents at any time from 1900-1960 and the churches that held services from 1902 to 1910 and that were not found to rent sittings. The chart also shows the percentage of pew-renting churches found to have engaged in that practice during the period 1902 to 1910, *i.e.*, only one out of 33 Bristol churches.

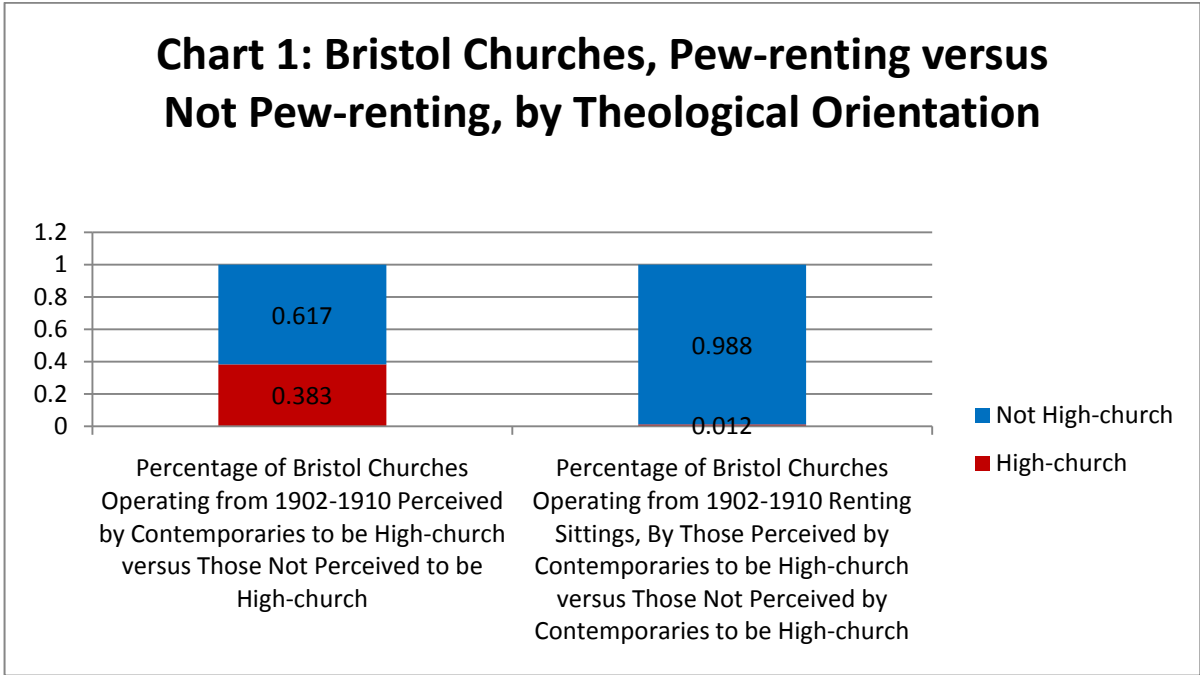
The findings must be moderated somewhat due to use of the *Ritualistic Clergy List*, since the qualities which lead to entry in those lists are at times ambiguous. Churches are placed in the lists if, for example, their incumbent or even one of their curates is an *ex*-member of the English Church Union, or an *ex*-priest, which says little of such a clergyman's current outlook and approach. These difficulties are attenuated since only one church listed on Tables 2 and 3 is given in the 1908 *List* as being an *ex*-member of the English Church Union, and the curate in question from that church, according to the *List*, also uses a mixed chalice and 'adopts the Eastward or Sacerdotal Position at the Holy Communion,' and its

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6, 29-30, 35.

¹⁶ *Tourist Church Guide* (1893).

¹⁷ *The Ritualistic Clergy List: A Guide for Patrons and Others to Certain of the Clergy of the Church of England; being a List of some 9600 Clergymen who are Helping the Romeward Movement in the National Church* (London: Church Association, 1902); *The Ritualistic Clergy List: A Guide for Patrons and Others to Certain of the Clergy of the Church of England; being a List of some 9000 Clergymen who are Helping the Romeward Movement in the National Church* (London: Church Association, 1908).

vicar not only adopted such a position at Communion but burnt candles in daylight.¹⁸ And no ex-ECU members or ex-priests are given in the 1902 *List* as serving Bristol churches.



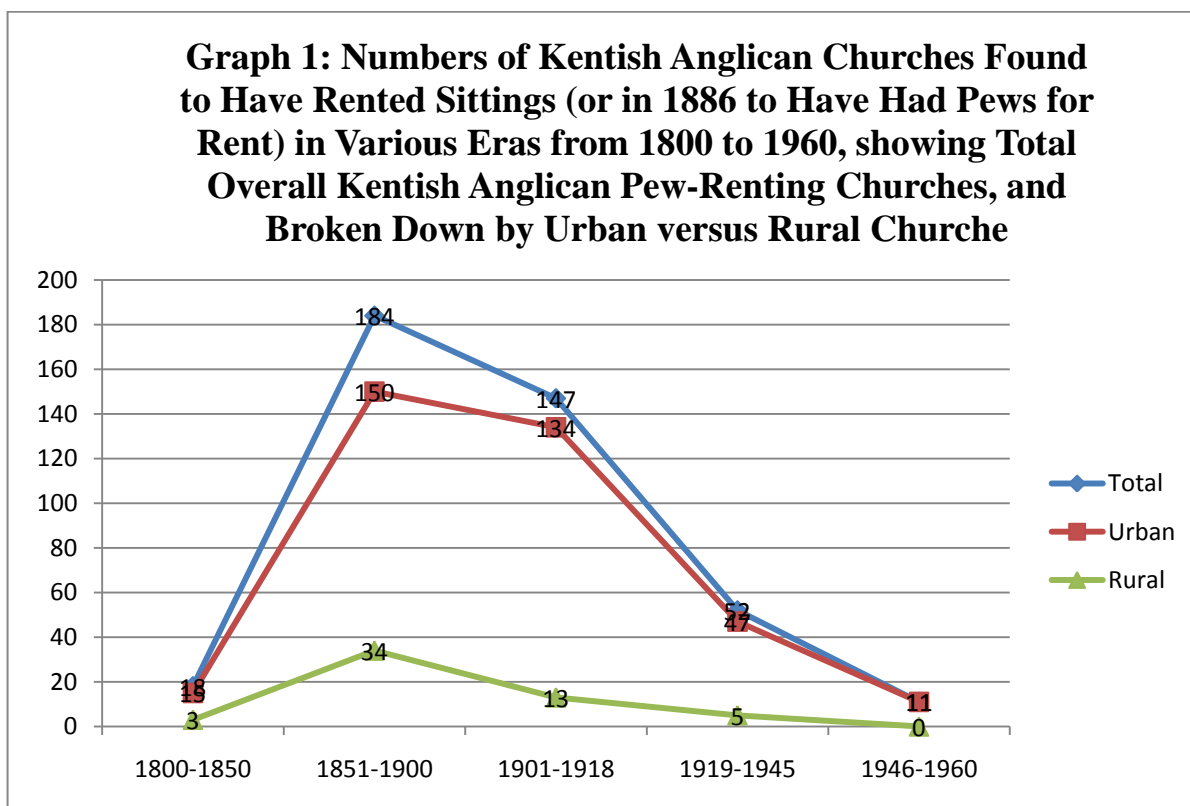
Despite this difficulty, the findings for Bristol are instructive. Of the 81 Bristol churches found to have been holding services in the period 1902 to 1910 whose surviving records are available for research, 31 appear in one or more of the *Ritualistic Clergy List* for 1902, the same for 1908 and the *Tourist Church Guide* for 1910. Only one Bristol church perceived by these three sources as high-church was found to have rented pews in that period, and nine other pew-renting churches were not perceived to be high-church. Accordingly, the figures show that, of all Bristol churches from 1902 through 1910 whose extant records permit comparison, only slightly more than *one* per cent described by contemporaries as high church rented any sittings during that period. In short, another conclusion – less guarded than the Kentish one but still tentative to a degree – can be made: that Anglican pew-renting in Bristol was more common among low-church or broad-church orientations than among high-church ones.

¹⁸ *Ritualistic Clergy List*, 1908, p. 104.

Characteristics of Pew-renting Churches

Table 1 in the previous chapter shows the 211 Kentish churches that were found to have rented some sittings or have some sittings available for rent, in any year between 1800 and 1960, with the years in which they at least had some sittings they could let and the dates on which each church was consecrated, licensed or built. In Kent, of the 211 pew-renting churches found, 70 – 33.2 per cent – were opened or built before 1818, and the rest, 66.8 per cent, were built after that year. This comports with the 1886 House of Lords study in Table 1, which also found that, nationwide, pew-renting churches were likely to be newer ones.

The numbers of Kentish churches renting or having pews for rent in the eras 1800-50, 1851-1899, 1900-18, 1919-45 and 1946-1960 can be more clearly seen in Graph 1, below.



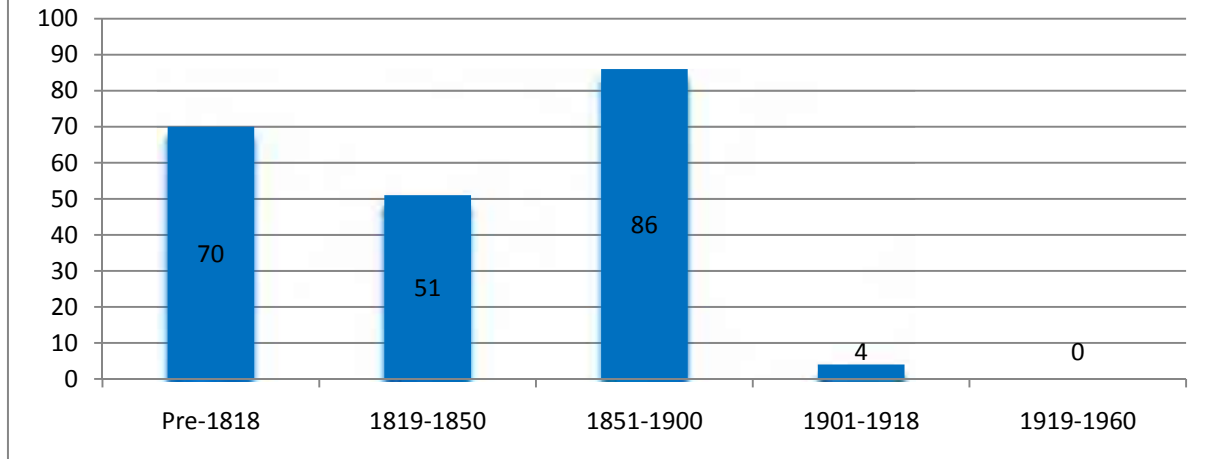
Graph 1 breaks down the list of Kentish pew-renting churches by era and location. It shows that 15 urban Kentish churches were found to have rented sittings in one or more years from 1800 to 1850, and that only three in rural areas did so. It also reflects that many more Kentish churches were found to have rented pews from 1851 to 1900 than in the previous half-century. In those years 150 urban churches let sittings in any of the years from 1851 to

the turn of the twentieth century, while 34 rural churches did so.¹⁹ Graph 1 also reflects, not only that fewer Kentish churches were found to have engaged in pew-renting in the twentieth century than in the second half of the nineteenth and that the total dropped off quickly in the period 1919 to 1945 and even more sharply from 1945 to 1960.

These figures must be used with great caution, though, since as tables 5 and 6 below make clear, greater information is likely to be available about churches' fund-raising methods from 1851 onwards. The data of Table 4 is more reliable, though, where they display the ratio between rural and urban pew-renting churches, *i.e.*, that the discrepancy became even more marked as the twentieth century progressed. While 81.5 per cent (150 of 184) of the Kentish pew-renting churches in the later nineteenth century were urban, the percentage of such urban churches in 1901 to 1918 was 97.8 per cent (134 of 147), 90.4 per cent (47 of 52) in the period 1919-1945, and 100 per cent (11 of 11) in 1946-1960. Overall the data indicates of a 'golden age' of pew-renting hypothesised earlier, which from about 1850 to about 1918.

¹⁹ LMA DR/VB 10 & DR/VB 11.

Chart 2: The Numbers of Kentish Anglican Churches Found to have Rented Pews (or in 1886 to have had Pews for Rent) from 1800 to 1960, By the Era of those Churches' Consecration



The urban-rural discrepancy is not surprising. While almost all churches would have had some agriculture in their vicinities, towns were likely to have concentrations of wealth which would depend less on good harvests than would strictly rural locations, and also sufficient numbers of wealthy congregants to make a pew-rent system worth its cost and effort.²⁰ The lesser likelihood of pew-rents successfully raising much revenue in rural areas was noted in the Commons in 1855 during a debate regarding the abolition of church rate.²¹ And urban churches were less likely to have large endowments, and so had to rely on other sources of income.²²

Chart 2 reflects that of the Kentish churches found to rent sittings at any time from 1800 to 1960, a large minority – 70 out of 211 – were those which could have legally done so only if a private parliamentary Act could have authorized them to do so, or if the Church Building Commissioners or Ecclesiastical Commissioners had later given each one a grant after (and some of them long after) its consecration in order to make a building extension or alteration – and had thereby authorized pew-renting in each particular church. Since the

²⁰ Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 19.

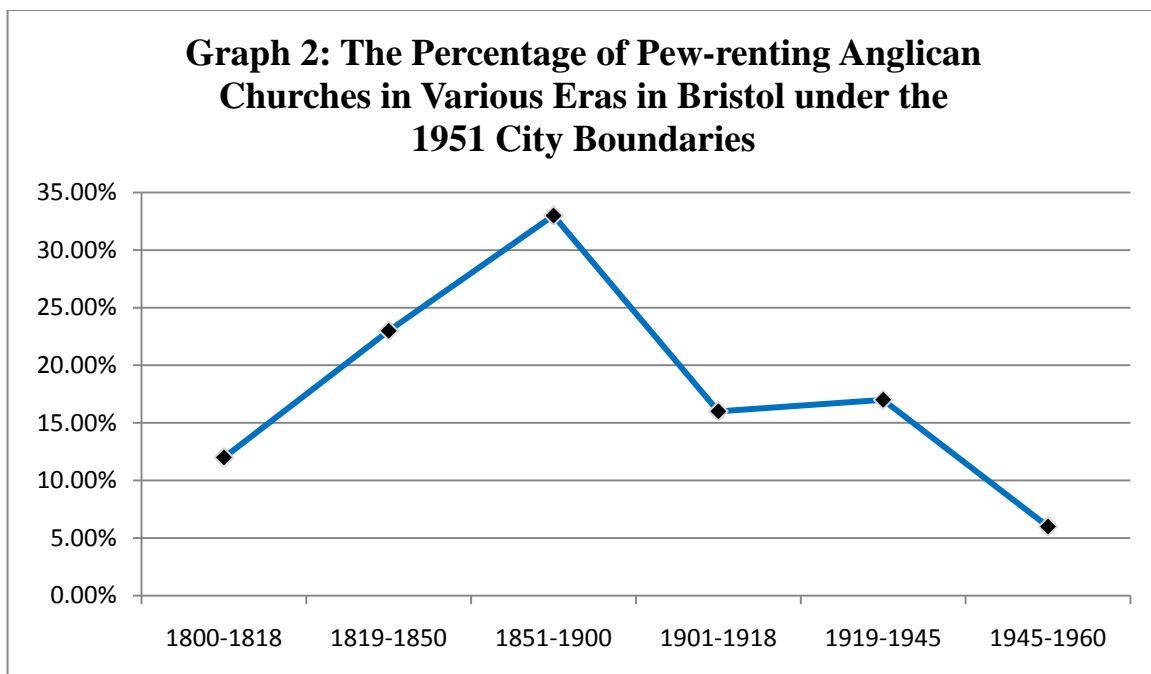
²¹ HC Deb 29 March 1855 v. 137 c. 1358.

²² Tomlinson, J.W.B., 'From Parson to Professional: The Changing Ministry of the Anglican Clergy in Staffordshire, 1830-1960' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2008), p. 187.

existence of a private parliamentary Act, particularly back in the mists of time, is difficult to ascertain, one suspects that many of the older churches let pews without legal authority. The data also suggest that few churches consecrated in the twentieth century rented any sittings in any era up to 1960, and the last pew-renting church was consecrated in 1916. And no Kentish churches built after the First World War found to have rented any sittings at any time. The same conclusion is prompted by the Bristol data in Table 2 (in the previous chapter), which reflects that every pew-renting church in Bristol began holding services before the twentieth century, while none of the fourteen opened in the twentieth century were found to rent any sittings. The Bristol statistics are even more telling in this regard than the Kentish ones: of the 21 pew-renting churches which opened in Bristol in the period 1800-1960, over half – 12 – were consecrated in 1848 or before, and the 1850s saw only two new pew-renting churches; the 1860s, four; the 1870s, only one; none at all in the 1880s; and two in the 1890s. This suggests the practice of funding new churches with pew-rents dropped as the nineteenth century wore on. At least as far as Bristol is concerned, the ‘golden age’ of pew-renting evidently was characterised largely by churches that already had pew-rents by about 1870, and which retained the practice until later, often well into the twentieth century.

Graph 2 shows the percent of Bristol churches found to have rented sittings in the same periods into which the Kentish statistics were divided, but also as a percentage of the total Bristol churches for which sufficient records exist to permit a comparison to be made. It reflects that the percentage of Bristol churches renting sittings rose steadily in the nineteenth century, from three of a total 26 churches (12 per cent) holding services between 1800 and 1818, to ten of a total 44 (23 per cent) of those in operation between 1818 and 1850, and finally to 26 of 78 (33 per cent) holding services in the period 1851 to 1900. The ratio fell sharply in the early twentieth century, to 12 of 76 churches (16 per cent) up to the end of the First World War, rose slightly up to the end of the Second (14 of 84 churches, or 17 per cent), and then dwindled again in the post-war period (5 of 85 churches, or 6 per cent).

Conclusions must be tempered, though, by the knowledge that the 1886 House of Lords survey specifically asked local church officials whether pews were available for rent. This type of resource is not available for any other of the eras into which the churches were here divided; visitation returns, in existence for much of Kent from 1870 for many decades to



come, could not be located regarding Bristol churches, so other eras might have seen statistics closer to the third of all Bristol churches that had sittings available for rent in 1851-1900. Nevertheless, Graph 2 corroborates the figures from Table 1 showing that more churches consecrated in the Victorian ‘boom’ were inclined to rent sittings than were existing churches.

Table 7 shows the total pew-rents and total income from other sources of twenty Kentish churches which offered such information in the 1851 religious census.

TABLE 7 – Receipts Self-reported by Kentish Anglican Churches with Totals from Pew-rents and Totals from Other Sources Per Annum, 1851²³

Church	Total Pew-rents	Total - Other Sources	Ratio of Pew-Rents to Other	Consecrated
St Mary, Woolwich	£50	£890	.053	Pre-reformation
St Mary, Hayes	£3	£330	.009	Pre-reformation
St James, Dover	£52 10s	£195	.212	Pre-reformation

²³ *Religious Worship in Kent*, pp. 8-9, 12, 16, 30, 36, 42, 50, 53, 91, 144, 155, 166, 168, 299, 320, 345, 353, 355-6; part of this table was also printed in Bennett, ““Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly””, p. 60. Dates of consecration and urban or rural status are taken from Table 4. The total pew-rents at St John, Sidcup, listed in *Religious Worship in Kent* as £40-50, was taken to be £45.

St Margaret, Lee	£50	£595	.078	1579
St Nicholas, Rochester	£14	£160	.080	1624
St George the Martyr, Deal	£100	£72	.581	1715
St John Mariners' Chapel, Dover	£90	£0	1.000	1823
Holy Trinity, Maidstone	£340	£112	.752	1828
St Bartholomew, Sydenham	£274	£81	.772	1831
St Peter, Southborough	£50	£110	.313	1831
Holy Trinity, Dover	£160	£0	1.000	1835
Holy Trinity, Sheerness	£160	£0	1.000	1836
Holy Trinity, Lamorbey, Bexley	£18	£100	.153	1840
St Margaret, Yalding	£9	£100	.083	1841
St Stephen, Tovil, Maidstone	£20	£56 10s.	.261	1841
St John, Sidcup	£40-50	£156	.224	1843
Christ Church, Ramsgate	£500	£1000	.333	1847
Holy Trinity, Blackheath Hill	£500 (gross)	£100	.833	1848
St Andrew, Deal	£50	£0	1.000	1850

Table 7 indicates that newer Kentish pew-renting churches – those consecrated in the nineteenth century – relied much more heavily on pew-rents for their total income in 1851 than did churches that let sittings that year but which were consecrated before the turn of that century. This is unsurprising, since the older churches were much more likely to have endowments from which to pay their expenses. These figures indicate that – at least on this type of evidence, earlier noted as questionable – most pew-renting churches in 1851 relied on that source as a significant part of their outside income, and for five of the twenty churches pew-rents comprised all or nearly all their revenue. These were unlikely to be in any position to hand over the bulk of the receipts to the incumbent.²⁴ Elsewhere the sums raised by pew-rents were clearly insufficient to pay church expenses. St Mary, Hayes, collected £3 from pew-rents in 1851, which it spent ‘for the repair of the chancel’.²⁵

In Summary

This chapter has documented the evidence indicating that Anglican pew-renting was largely an urban phenomenon, and that the churches engaging in it were larger, probably serving greater populations than those not letting pews. It mainly occurred from the mid-nineteenth century until the First World War, but was often practised by churches whose right

²⁴ Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 36.

²⁵ *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 42, Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 36.

to do so was tenuous. Pew-renting was also more likely to have been engaged in by those with low-church approaches than those of high-church ones. Finally, newer churches which engaged in pew-renting in 1851 were more likely to depend on that source of revenue than churches consecrated in the eighteenth century and earlier. How those churches went about the practice is the subject of the next chapter.

TABLE 3 – Bristol Anglican Churches For Which Information of Fund-raising Survives, But Which were Not Found to have Rented Sittings from 1800-1960

Church	Years Holding Services Between 1800-1960
St Thomas, Bristol	1800-1960 ²⁴⁵
Holy Trinity, Horfield	1800-1960 ²⁴⁶
St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol	1800-1960 ²⁴⁷
St Luke, Brislington	1800-1960 ²⁴⁸
St John Baptist, Bristol	1800-1960 ²⁴⁹
St John Baptist, Bedminster	1800-1960 ²⁵⁰
Holy Trinity, Stapleton	1800-1960 ²⁵¹
St James, Bristol	1800-1960 ²⁵²
Redland Green Parish Church, Redland	1800-1960 ²⁵³
St Ewen's, Bristol	1800-1820 ²⁵⁴
Temple Church (Holy Cross), Bristol	1800-1940 ²⁵⁵
St Augustine-the-Less, Bristol	1800-1940 ²⁵⁶
All Saints, Bristol	1800-1954 ²⁵⁷
St Nicholas, Bristol	1800-1959 ²⁵⁸
St Mary, Fishponds	1821-1960 ²⁵⁹
St Paul, Bedminster	1831-1941, 1959-60 ²⁶⁰
St Peter, Bishopsworth	1841-1960 ²⁶¹
St Luke, Barton Hill	1843-1960 ²⁶²
St Barnabas, Bristol	1843-1955 ²⁶³
St Andrew, Montpelier	1845-1960 ²⁶⁴
St Mark, Easton	1848-1960 ²⁶⁵
St Matthias on the Weir, Bristol	1851-1930s ²⁶⁶
St Peter, Clifton Wood	1855-1939 ²⁶⁷
St Raphael, Bristol	1859-1878, 1893-1940 ²⁶⁸
St Michael and All Angels, Bishopston	1862-1960 ²⁶⁹
Holy Trinity (Holy Nativity), Knowle	1865-1960 ²⁷⁰
St Silas, Bedminster	1867-1941 ²⁷¹
All Saints, Clifton	1868-1960 ²⁷²
St Gabriel, Easton	1870-1960 ²⁷³
St Matthew, Moorfields	1873-1960 ²⁷⁴
St Andrew-the-Less, Clifton	1873-1958 ²⁷⁵
St Saviour, Woolcot Park	1875-1960 ²⁷⁶
St Mary, Barnard's Place	1882-1941 ²⁷⁷
St Francis, Ashton Gate	1883-1960 ²⁷⁸
St Lawrence, Easton	1883-1954 ²⁷⁹

St Michael and All Angels, Bedminster	1884-1960 ²⁸⁰
St Agnes, Bristol	1885-1960 ²⁸¹
Christ Church, Barton Hill	1885-1954 ²⁸²
St John the Divine, Fishponds	1887-1960 ²⁸³
St Thomas, Eastville	1889-1960 ²⁸⁴
St Katharine, Knowle	1889-1960 ²⁸⁵
St Alban's, Bristol	1892-1960 ²⁸⁶
All Hallows, Easton	1893-1960 ²⁸⁷
St Aidan, East Bristol	1898-1960 ²⁸⁸
St Anne, Greenbank	1901-1960 ²⁸⁹
St Martin, Knowle	1901-1960 ²⁹⁰
St Dunstan, Bedminster Down	1902-1960 ²⁹¹
St Anne, Brislington	1903-1960 ²⁹²
St Ambrose, Whitehall	1905-1960 ²⁹³
All Saints, Fishponds	1905-1960 ²⁹⁴
St Leonard (initially Sts Peter & Paul), Redfield	1907-1960 ²⁹⁵
St Gregory, Horfield	1911-1960 ²⁹⁶
St Christopher, Brislington	1920-1960 ²⁹⁷
St Edyth, Sea Mills	1921-1960 ²⁹⁸
St Oswald, Bedminster Down	1927-1960 ²⁹⁹
St Peter, Henleaze	1927-1960 ³⁰⁰
Church of the Good Shepherd, Bishopston	1927-1960 ³⁰¹
St Barnabas, Knowle	1933-1960 ³⁰²
St Cuthbert, Brislington	1933-1960 ³⁰³
Christ Church, Hengrove	1934-1960 ³⁰⁴

²⁴⁵ BRRO P/St.M/PM/29.

²⁴⁶ http://www.horfieldparishchurch.org.uk/history/history_of_our_church.html

²⁴⁷ <http://www.stmaryredcliffe.co.uk/>; <http://www.about-bristol.co.uk/chu-12.asp>

²⁴⁸ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstlb&cid=0&kw=st luke brislington#0;>
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstlb&cid=2-3#2-3>

²⁴⁹ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstjb&cid=0&kw=#0>

²⁵⁰ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstjbed&cid=0&kw=#0;>
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstjbed&cid=2-3#2-3>

²⁵¹ <http://www.holytrinitystapleton.org.uk/history.htm>

²⁵² <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstj&cid=0&kw=#0>
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstj&cid=2-3#2-3>

²⁵³ <http://www.redland.org.uk/cgi-bin/page.cgi?90>

²⁵⁴ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pste&cid=0&kw=st ewen bristol#0>

²⁵⁵ <http://web.archive.org/web/20050517165336/http://www.geocities.com/churchcrawler/bristol/temple.htm>; BRRO 40901/HM/2(c).

²⁵⁶ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstag&cid=0#0;>
<http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bristol4/augless.htm>

²⁵⁷ <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/23806349/Places-of-Worship-Past-and-Present---in-Bristol-Bristol-Avon>

²⁵⁸ <http://www.about-bristol.co.uk/chu-06.asp>

²⁵⁹ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstmf&cid=0&kw=st mary fishponds#0;>
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstmf&cid=2-3#2-3>

²⁶⁰ <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bristolchurches/svlpaul.htm>

²⁶¹ <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bristolchurches/bpsworth.htm>

²⁶² <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstlbh&cid=0&kw=st luke barton hill#0;>
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstlbh&cid=2-2#2-2>

²⁶³ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstag&cid=0#0;>
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstb&cid=0&kw=bristol st barnabas#0>

²⁶⁴ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstam&cid=0&kw=st andrew montpelier#0>

265 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstme&cid=0&kw=st mark easton#0>

266 <http://www.bristolinformation.co.uk/srch/srchit.asp?list=list&gdoc=rs&howmany=200>

267 <http://bells.lyndenlea.info/lostrings.php?br=bristol&twr=cliftonwood>

268 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstr&cid=0#0>

269 <http://www.about-bristol.co.uk/bsh-03.asp>

270 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-phnk&cid=0&kw=holy nativity knowle bristol#0>; BRRO P/HNK/1/2(q) & P/HNK/1/2(r).

271 <http://www.bafhs.org.uk/resources/worshipat2.pdf>

272 <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/23806349/Places-of-Worship-Past-and-Present---in-Bristol-Bristol-Avon>

273 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstgab&cid=0&kw=st gabriel easton#0>;
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstgab&cid=2-2#2-2>

274 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstmm&cid=0#0>;
<http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/pmdraper10/bristol1.htm>

275 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstalc&cid=0&kw=st andrew the less clifton#0>

276 <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bristol2/saviour.htm>

277 <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/23806349/Places-of-Worship-Past-and-Present---in-Bristol-Bristol-Avon>

278 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstf&cid=0&kw=st francis ashton gate#0>;
<http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bristolchurches/ashgate.htm>

279 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstlaw&cid=0&kw=st lawrence easton#0>

280 <http://www.stmichaelandallangels.info/stmikes/history.html>

281 <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/pmdraper10/bristol1.htm>

282 <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/ccbrtnhl.htm>

283 <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bristol2/fishjohn.htm>;
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstjf&cid=-1>

284 <http://www.bafhs.org.uk/parishes/stapleton/stapleton.htm>;
<http://www.hidden-heritage.co.uk/services/sources/parish-registers/>

285 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstkk&cid=0&kw=st katharine knowle#0>

286 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstalb&cid=0#0>;
http://www.stalbanschoir.co.uk/html/the_church.html

287 <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/23806349/Places-of-Worship-Past-and-Present---in-Bristol-Bristol-Avon>

288 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstaid&cid=2-2#2-2>

289 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstang&cid=0&kw=#0>
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstang&cid=2-2#2-2>

290 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstmak&cid=0&kw=st martin knowle#0>;
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstmak&cid=3-1#3-1>

291 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstd&cid=0&kw=st dunstan's bedminster#0>

292 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstanb&cid=2-1#2-1>
<http://www.achurchnearyou.com/brislington-st-anne/>

293 <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/ambrose.htm>;
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstaw&cid=2-2#2-2>

294 <http://www.bafhs.org.uk/parishes/fishponds/fishponds.htm>; <http://www.allsaintsfishponds.co.uk/#>

295 <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bristol/redfield.htm>;
<http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/pmdraper10/bristol1.htm>

296 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstgh&cid=2-2#2-2>

297 <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/christo.htm>

298 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-psted&cid=0&kw=#0>
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-psted&cid=2-2#2-2>

299 <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bristol2/oswald.htm>

300 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstph&cid=8-3-2#8-3-2>

301 <http://www.bishopstonandstandrews.org.uk/COGSHistory.htm>

302 <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bristol4/kwbbas.htm>;
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=002-pstbk&cid=2-2#2-2>

303 <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/cuthbrt.htm>;

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=002-pstcub&cid=5-1-6#5-1-6>

³⁰⁴ <http://www.churchcrawler.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bristol4/hengrove.htm>

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TERMS ON WHICH CHURCHES LET PEWS TO CONGREGANTS

This chapter examines the terms agreed to by those who rented Anglican pews in the period in question. Although much variation occurred among churches and chapels in each of these matters, some trends appeared in this study suggesting answers to interesting questions regarding the nature of pew-renting itself.

Length of Rental Periods

By the nineteenth century the vast majority of parish churches and chapels-of-ease which rented pews seem to have let each sitting for set periods of one year or less. This was a drastic change from the leases for lives popular earlier in history. The Church Building Acts and private parliamentary acts of the nineteenth century accelerated the change by severely limiting rental periods – at Oldham, Lancashire, in 1824, for example, a private act allowed sales of pews, but limited any lease of them to terms ‘not exceeding three years’.¹ This naturally permitted more frequent changes in price due to supply or demand. Leases for lives, even if small annual payments were required – as the vicar, churchwardens and vestry of St Andrew, Plymouth, realised in 1818 – were less profitable in the long run than more frequent and more substantial pew-rents, so the church changed to the latter.² The Bishop of Chester in 1803 noted, for example, that the officials of St John, Chester, had set rents for sittings, ‘by reason of the great length of time since many of the present possessors of the said seats were appointed to sit therein’, which, when combined with ‘the want of regular removals thereof upon the death or removal of Inhabitants of the said Parish appointed to sit therein’, made the rents of those sittings seem too low – ‘by no means equal to the present value thereof’.³

¹ 5 Geo. IV, c. lxiv, s. 31.

² PWDRO 937/92.

³ CCALSS P51/7/4.

The process by which amounts to be charged for pew-rents were actually decided in particular churches was evidently rarely committed to writing, since few surviving records mention the procedure, and then only in passing.

The Amounts Charged

The general reason pew-renting was instituted in particular churches seems clear – financial gain. In 1829 an official of Holy Trinity, Tunbridge Wells, did not even bother to tactfully conceal the pecuniary motive; he sent a proposed pew-rent scale to the Church Building Commissioners with a note that ‘The above scale is made out on the allowance of 20 Inches to each sitting, in which case there will be a surplus of 9 inches in each of the Gallery Pews, & Inches in those in the body’, and added that the sittings could be made smaller to produce more revenue: ‘at 18½ Inches per Sitting, the Pews in the Body would hold 8 instead of 7. – and at 18½ those in the Gallery would hold 9 instead of 8’.⁴ Churches might also free up sittings by questioning the title to pews claimed to be privately owned – in 1851 the vestry of St Giles in the Fields, Middlesex, appointed a committee to enquire into the state of the church’s pew-rents. Noting that some congregants had purchased pews at least between 1796 and 1816, the committee requested each person constantly using but not paying rent for ninety-six pews in the body of the church to appear and show what title they had.⁵

Before about 1810, the revenue anticipated from pew-renting was often used to finance extra seating. Particularly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries before the Victorian boom in church building began, many churches dealt with increases in local population by enlarging their present spaces with galleries or new aisles, or by replacing their current facilities with new ones, often on nearby sites. To finance the construction, these churches often allotted the new sittings to those who subscribed to a fund instituted for the purpose, generally for the lives of the donors or so long as they resided in the parish in

⁴ CERC 18,381.

⁵ CLSAC P/GF/C/5.

question, as at St Leonard, Streatham, in the 1770s.⁶ This was of course pew-renting in all but name. Generally the subscribers were given preference to choose among the new sittings in order of the amounts they subscribed. In many such churches the sittings were also subject to an annual rent. At St Anne, Turton, Lancashire, this occurred in 1779-80, although the annual rent was ‘first fixed and decided on by the Minister and major part of the Commissioners to be appointed for executing the said Enlargement’.⁷

At St Leonard, Hythe, in 1810, the procedure was more involved. The vestry agreed that eleven new pews would be built in the chancel, to be

occupied by the following Persons according to lots drawn on condition of their paying the sum of £3 3s each to defray the expence of erecting the same agreeable to a stipulation Contract entered into for that purpose by the Church Wardens.

In the next year the vestry also erected pews ‘similar to those lately built in the Chancel’, and ‘to be paid for by the Persons to whom they may be appropriated’, although it ‘was also agreed that a large Pew for general purposes be erected at the Public Charge on the opposite side of the space before named’. And in 1812 the vestry further resolved that those who contributed to the new chancel pews, and occupied them on that basis, were entitled when vacating the sittings to be compensated by the new occupants:

the newly erected Pews in the Chancel are not to be disposed of by the persons occupying them but by the Churchwardens for the time being who are to take care that the Persons to whom they transfer them, reimburse the Parties leaving them the Three Guineas paid for them.

In 1819 and 1821 more pews were agreed to, also to be occupied by those who paid for them and who were again to be repaid by their successors.⁸

But generally, despite the complaints of a member of the Commons in 1860 that renters should have some say in the rents charged,⁹ the rents were set by formal deed, by the Commissioners or by church authorities themselves. Assigning renters to particular seats was

⁶ LMA P95/LEN/225.

⁷ MALS L98/2/1/1.

⁸ CCA U3/282/8/A2.

⁹ HC Deb 28 March 1860 v. 157 c. 1467.

done differently in different churches. Christ Church and St Michael, both in Birkenhead, Cheshire, evidently allowed nineteenth-century parishioners to choose where they would sit, taking into account how much would be charged for each sitting.¹⁰ In the 1920s at Emmanuel Church, West Dulwich, however, the churchwardens evidently wanted a greater say in the particular seat a prospective renter would occupy – a notice of the rents due for particular pews stated that ‘The vicar’s warden will be pleased to *interview* prospective seat-holders at the Church, before or after Morning or Evening Services, or at the address below by appointment’.¹¹ Generally, also, churchwardens were responsible for the day-to-day running of pew-rent systems. In 1858 the Select Committee of the House of Lords, after hearing the testimony of many clerical and lay witnesses, recommended among other things that:

the right of placing parishioners [in pews] in the first instance will then remain with the churchwardens...The Archdeacon, we think, may be safely intrusted with the power of remedying any evils which may arise from indiscretion in the churchwardens...¹²

But sometimes vestries decided the prices to be charged and the occupant of each rentable sitting, as at St Michael, Coventry, in 1818 where application for rented seats was made to a churchwarden, but the vestry chose the seats actually allocated.¹³ And under the Church Building Acts, some churches had ‘trustees’, which occasionally did the seat-letting, as happened for a gallery at St Martin, Windermere, Cumberland, in the 1830s.¹⁴ Trustees were occasionally appointed for this purpose by private parliamentary act before 1818, as well; a local act of 1815 empowered trustees of St Mark, Liverpool, to let certain pews,¹⁵ and

¹⁰ <http://christchurch.birkenhead.net/pages/history/je08.htm>

¹¹ LMA P85/EMM2/70 (emphasis added).

¹² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into The Deficiency of Means of Spiritual Instruction and Places of Divine Worship in the Metropolis, and in other Populous Districts in England and Wales, especially in the Mining and Manufacturing Districts; and to Consider the Fittest Means of Meeting the Difficulties of the Case; and to Report Thereon to the House; Together With the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: House of Commons, 1858), p. xviii.

¹³ ‘The City of Coventry: Churches: Churches built before 1800’, in *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 8: The City of Coventry and Borough of Warwick* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1969), pp. 321-61, at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=16038>.

¹⁴ CROK WPR 61/1/3/8.

¹⁵ 56 Geo. III, c. lxxv.

a similar act of the same year gave the trustees of Camden Chapel, St Pancras, power to recover pew-rent arrears and to enter and take back possession of renters in default.¹⁶ Up to 1879 the trustees of St Mary, Lewisham, let the church's pews, until in that year they sought to pass the responsibility to the churchwardens.¹⁷

The vast majority of churches used a graduated scale of rents: those sitting nearest the chancel (or in rare cases *in* the chancel) either in the body of the church or in a gallery, paid the most, while those further back paid less.¹⁸ Thus when a proposal to let the pews was put forward at St John, Chichester, in 1813, the authorities formally recommended that:

The front pews in the galleries being undoubtedly the best situated for both seeing & hearing, & being likewise handsomely fitted up, they are proposed to form the first class, at 30s. per sitting...& next to them may be reckoned the front pews below, fitted up in the same manner, which form the 2d class at 27s...¹⁹

In at least three nonconformist chapels the opposite was true: Ashford Baptist Church in Kent, where before 1906 'it is probable that those [sittings] nearer the front were offered at a lower rate than those at the back';²⁰ a chapel in Middlesex now called Twickenham United Reformed Church, where up to 1911 'You could sit at the front for two shillings and sixpence or at the back for five shillings' or in the middle for various other amounts;²¹ and the Wesleyan Chapel at Offerton in Greater Manchester, which in the late Victorian period charged 9d. per year for the first row, 1s. 6d. for the second and 1s. for the third.²² Only a few Anglican churches in the nineteenth century and later have been found to have charged the same rent for every sitting let, among them St James, Clerkenwell, which at mid-nineteenth

¹⁶ 56 Geo. III, c. xxxix, s. 55.

¹⁷ LLSA SM/1/3/48.

¹⁸ Bennett, J.C., "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly": The Practice of Pew-renting at Kentish Anglican Churches' (unpublished MTh dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2006), p. 26.

¹⁹ WSRO Par/39/47.

²⁰ <http://www.ashfordbaptist.org.uk/>

²¹ <http://www.twickenhamurc.org.uk/pewrent.htm>; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 26.

²² <http://www.offerton84.freeweb.co.uk/historyr.htm>

century was authorised by a special act to let its sittings at 10s. each,²³ and Christ Church, Highbury, which during the same period let its sittings at 25s., each, ‘with the exception of some situate in a remote part of the Church’.²⁴

In rare cases, though, the sittings designated as rentable were unintentionally the most undesirable in a church. In the north aisle of St John, Sevenoaks, the only rentable pews were ‘the worst in the church, under a low N. aisle roof and very dark’ while sittings in more desirable areas of the church were rent-free, which in 1898 the incumbent sought to change.²⁵ Yet the situation at St John was by far the exception rather than the rule. Despite the Church Building Acts’ requirement that rent-free seats be as ‘well-placed and convenient’ as rented ones,²⁶ in the 1850s the *Times* and the *Record* each pointed out that rent-free seats were likely to be in the most inconvenient parts of each church, from which hearing and seeing divine service was extremely difficult.²⁷

Sittings throughout the period in question, though, cost less than one might expect, and prices were effectively lower later on since they were rarely adjusted upwards for inflation. The 1858 Select Committee of the House of Lords noted that in some churches pew-rents consisted of ‘many trifling payments’.²⁸ When St Peter, Southborough, opened in 1830, church officials required that renters take only entire pews, the most expensive of which had five sittings each and cost £5 5s per pew, and thus a guinea per sitting; several pews seating seven were each let at £5 17s. per pew, per year or 16s. 8½d. per sitting; and other pews could be rented for £2 10s. and £1 15s each, which came to 10s. and 7s. per sitting per

²³ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 537.

²⁴ LMA P83/CTC/10/4.

²⁵ LPL F. TEMPLE 15 ff. 196-197.

²⁶ 19 & 20 Vict, c. 104, s. 6, cited in Heales, A., *History and Law of Church Seats*, Book II (London: Butterworths, 1872), pp. 141-2.

²⁷ The *Times* (14 July 1859), and the *Record* (6 January 1856), quoted in Stuart, E., *The Pew System and the Injuries Which It Inflicts on the Church of England* (London: Bell and Daldy, ?1860), p. 17; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, pp. 43-44.

²⁸ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 594.

year, respectively. At other churches the best sittings were slightly cheaper – at St Michael & All Angels, Sydenham, in 1868 pew-rents were fixed ranging from £1 to 30s. per sitting per year, while in the year 1879-80 at Christchurch, Tunbridge Wells, a Mr Wackling rented two seats at 25s. each; at St James, Westgate, in 1857 seats in thirteen pews cost a mere 1s. 6d. annually, and at St Philip, Maidstone, sittings were much cheaper even than that; in 1858 pew-rents ranged from 4s. to 7s. 6d. per sitting per year; these prices evidently changed little by at least 1888. Prices were much the same in the twentieth century – the records from 1930-41 of St Luke, Ramsgate, show that most sittings there cost 10s. 6d. per annum, while a few were let at 12s. 6d, and individual rents at St Paul, Cliftonville, Margate, rose after the Second World War – the prewar average at that church was 15s. annually per sitting, while by 1945 the cost ranged from £1 to 25s.²⁹ But at St Mary, Scarborough, rental prices charged for pews in the seventeenth century were similar to those levied in the twentieth.³⁰

On the whole, before 1818 the business of pew-renting appears to have been done with little professional acumen. As the nineteenth century progressed, though, with the exception of the relatively low rents, pew-renting seems to have been conducted more and more in a profit-oriented fashion, with transactions recording not only payments or the total received, but with the particular pew and the number of sittings held by each renter, sometimes with the renter's address, and often lists of late or defaulted payments or that the renter was by then deceased or had left the parish. The wish for the most revenue possible seems to have become not only more widespread but more openly expressed after the advent of the Church Building Acts. The potential for the highest receipts possible was also expressed as a proper result of an incumbent's ministrations and efficacy as a preacher. At hearings before the House of Lords in 1858, the vicar of St Philip's, Birmingham, implied that incumbents' efforts and work among their parishioners determined how full rent-free sittings

²⁹ CCA U3/225/5/2, U3/279/5/D1/1 & U3/281/5/A1; CKS P271B/8/1, P371H/5/24 & P241G/5/A/7; LMA DR/OP/88; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", pp. 4, 27.

³⁰ ERYARS PE165/241.

would be and how much the church would net in pew-rents.³¹ The senior parish curate of Liverpool testified he had never heard of an instance in which a preacher's popularity affected the amounts for which individual pews were rented,³² but the Manchester coroner had no doubt this occurred.³³

The transition from haphazard or limited pew-letting in the early and mid-eighteenth century to a more businesslike approach at the turn of the nineteenth can be seen in the records of St Mary, Beverley, Yorkshire. There the churchwardens' accounts from the 1770s have sporadic references to the practice, such as 'Mr. Wadforth Pew in North Loft, ~ 5 ~' in 1772 mixed in with sums received for other purposes.³⁴ By 1798, though, a book was devoted solely to recording pew-rents, and a similar volume was used in 1803.³⁵

And greater ruthlessness in the early Victorian era is obvious from some records. The vestry of St Martin, Liskeard, Cornwall, in 1835, ordered 'that rents of sittings & pews in arrear be immediately demanded and payment enforced'.³⁶ These new cut-throat attitudes were to be expected, since the Church Building Acts envisioned and enacted the practice of paying the incumbent, clerk, and other expenses – which were essentials rather than frills – from pew-rent revenue. But the reason behind the new mercenary behaviour would not make it more palatable for the renters. Lady Frederick Cavendish felt 'considerably disgusted by the drive-a-good-bargain fashion' in which the official of St Martin-in-the-Fields rented herself and her husband a pew in 1865, 'certainly putting before one the odiousness of the

³¹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), pp. 326, 330.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 401.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

³⁴ ERYARS PE1/114.

³⁵ ERYARS DDBC/14/24 & DDBC/14/26.

³⁶ CRO P126/7/5.

pew system in most lively colors'.³⁷ Church officials' business-oriented behaviour regarding pew-rents also appears at St Margaret, Rochester, in the 1860s, where discounted prices were given to those taking sittings for longer periods: a congregant could rent an entire pew or single sittings in particular pews, although a single sitting cost between 20 and 27 per cent of the full price of the pew and most pews held six or seven sittings.³⁸ Many other examples may also be found from the Victorian period of churches allowing discount to those who rented pews for longer periods, although this practice was not universal.³⁹ Only two instances have been found of a church formally renting out seats for one Sunday only: at St Philip & St James, Ilfracombe, Devon, where single-day sittings cost 9d. or a shilling each,⁴⁰ and Christ Church, Hougham-in-Dover, where in 1848 some sittings, regardless of desirability, cost one shilling each for the day,⁴¹ amounting to £2 12s. per year, making it expensive in relation to the prices other churches charged for three, six or twelve months. Due to the church's location the practice was almost certainly instituted to accommodate wealthy holidaymakers.

Other instances of 'good business practices' are also apparent. An Anglican Hampstead chapel in 1796 welcomed newcomers the first time they attended services – but on their second visit the pew-opener was to ask them to pay a minimum annual fee of 10s. 6d.⁴² This might have improved the chapel's finances, but hardly seems cordial. This is not to suggest that churchwardens were entirely ruthless in renting sittings; like their counterparts who administered rented real estate, their attitudes toward non-paying tenants are likely to

³⁷ Picard, L., *Victorian London: The Life of a City 1840-1870* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), p.283, quoting Cavendish, L.C., *The Diary of Lady Frederick Cavendish*, Bailey, J., ed. (London: Frederick A. Stokes, 1927).

³⁸ MALSC P305/5B/5/1.

³⁹ MALSC P159B/8/2.

⁴⁰ CERC ECE/7/1/11779.

⁴¹ CCA U3/203/3/6.

⁴² Langford, P., *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 23.

have varied – while some landlords had no qualms about evicting defaulters or distraining their possessions, others were more compassionate.⁴³

In some churches, pew-holding residents likely were acquainted with the ‘quality’ on holiday and invited them to sit with them in their pews where there was room, or proprietary chapels might accommodate them. But some churches were eager to cater to holiday-makers without local connections. In addition to the shilling-per-Sunday charged by Christ Church, Dover, St Saviour, Westgate, was eager to cater to an influx of wealthy holidaymakers. In 1895 the church applied for a faculty to remove twelve pews, evidently rent-free and designed for children, and replace them with nine pews suitable for adult congregants – which would create 44 seats to be let at 10/6 each. To church officials’ evident relief the faculty was granted in 1898, since those ‘Churchwardens have had many requests for sittings beyond their power to allot’. The churchwardens later wrote that ‘Our Season is now close upon us and the extra accommodation is even now very much needed’.⁴⁴ By 1938, however, seat-holders at St Saviour appear to have been almost exclusively those with fixed addresses in the area.⁴⁵

On the other hand, little evidence has been found of churches that, finding some sittings remained unlet, dropped prices to fill them with renters, which is surprising in light of the business acumen the churches showed. Christ Church, Harpurhey, is noted above, and the two other exceptions found are St James, Dover, in 1858, and Christ Church, Luton, in the 1870s. At St James an existing vestry committee realised that forty seats had no takers ‘owing to their position being not sufficient favorable to procure the rents at which they are offered’. The committee ‘therefore authorized the Collector to let those Sittings upon the best terms he can, as they are at present yielding no income’.⁴⁶ At Christ Church, Luton, due to a

⁴³ Englander, D., *Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 6-7.

⁴⁴ CCA DCb/Westgate, St Saviour/3 (underlining in original).

⁴⁵ CCA U3/272/6/E1.

⁴⁶ CCA U3/26/8/7/1.

dearth of renters in the 1870s, pew-rent prices had ‘been reduced much below the prices authorised by’ the instrument setting them.⁴⁷ Generally, though, churches seem to have been loath to drop their prices to meet demand. St George, Deal, from 1909 to 1928, was typical – the number of sittings rented in the side aisles dropped gradually without a decrease in prices until, at the end of the period, only fourteen such seats were let. At St James, Piccadilly, rents were re-assessed in 1805, and changed little up to 1905 although the total revenue dropped considerably in that time.⁴⁸ Even churches strapped for funds appear to have been unwilling to tie pew-rents to market forces. This may be due to the fact that pew-rent prices were low anyway, and that any significant decrease might make a pew-letting system more trouble than it was worth, particularly when the difficulty and expense of litigating instances of non-payment was taken into account.

In rare cases prices were raised due to demand. Colonel Jarvis, mentioned earlier, resided at Lincoln but held what he considered to be a prescriptive right to a pew at St Mary, Dover. In 1842 the churchwardens asked him to pay £6 a year for it, although he was allowed the use of the sittings for, as his son wrote him, ‘the coming lecturer or services as well, whereas other pews have an additional price to pay’. Colonel Jarvis was informed by his son that ‘the sittings have been seised [sic] upon most greedily’. Considering the £6 to be in lieu of various other payments, such as Easter Offerings, lecture submissions and rate, Colonel Jarvis instructed his son to pay the sum but to protest ‘against compromising his Prescriptive Claim to the pew’. His son accordingly paid £3, presumably for half the year, and was given a receipt stating that the payment was ‘without prejudice to [the Colonel’s] right to hold exclusive possession of his pew in the said church under his ancient faculty’. Nevertheless, two years later a churchwarden or other church official told his son that supposing the Colonel ‘ever had a faculty, it is vitiated by the collections that have taken place’. Colonel Jarvis’s

⁴⁷ BLARS P135/3/1.

⁴⁸ CWAC 484/168, 494/286.

son had a lock put on the pew door, but was then informed that the *new* rent for the pew was considered to be £9 per annum.⁴⁹ The outcome of the dispute is unknown.

Over the nineteenth century the average price rose at some churches, but not by any great amount. Christ Church, Hougham-in-Dover, kept a pew-rent scale in 1848 and ‘pew-rents books’ from 1869 to 1936, allowing some degree of analysis of the effect of inflation on the rents due in one church. Inflation had caused a drop in the pound’s value by over five percent between 1848 and 1884.⁵⁰ In 1848 the church let seats by the Sunday, as noted above, and by the month, two months, quarter, half-year and year, and gave proportional discounts where pews were rented for the longer periods, and sittings at that time, including evening services, ranged from 12s. 6d. to 30s. per annum for those who wanted them for morning, afternoon *and* evening services. *If*, then, the number of sittings in each respective pew was the same as under the 1884 scheme (which is of course only an assumption) the average for the 493 sittings was about 18s. 11½d. The records of 1884 do not mention discounts or evening services, but the highest priced seats were evidently either removed or their price reduced, since rents at that time ranged from 12s. 6d. to 25s. per year. In this instance, at least, inflation cannot be said to have had much effect on pew-letting.⁵¹

And the principle that the Commissioners were to set the rents but the bishop and other church officials could change them, if acting in concert, was prone to difficulties. At Trinity Church, Upper Chelsea, for example, an exchange of letters shows that the Church Building Commissioners did not anticipate that their actions might be quickly altered by the ordinary and local church officials. In May 1842 the incumbent complained that the plans approved by the Commissioners twelve years earlier were being ignored – from the pew-rents £600 was to go annually to him and £20 to the clerk, with the remainder put towards building

⁴⁹ LA JARVIS 5P/11/17.

⁵⁰ <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/rp99/rp99-020.pdf>

⁵¹ CCA U3/203/3/3 & U3/203/3/6; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, pp. 27-28; Twigger, R., *Inflation: The Value of the Pound, 1750-1998* (House of Commons Research Paper 99/20, 23 February 1999), pp. 11-12, at <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp99/rp99-020.pdf>

a parsonage. In practice, said the incumbent, the average annual pew-rent income was £750, but the surplus of £130 had been used to erect another church rather than a parsonage. The Commissioners' secretary responded with astonishment to the complaint, saying that even if all the rentable sittings were taken, the scale of pew-rents approved in 1833 should have produced only £633 10s rather than £750 – the secretary therefore asked the incumbent to explain the discrepancy. The incumbent pled ignorance, stating that he had been at the church only since 1836, but that one of the prior churchwardens had informed him that in 1833 – three years after the Commissioners had set the rents – the value of some sittings had improved due to the removal of the pulpit and reading desk, and their price had been adjusted on this basis. Also, 'Some Changes in the Price of Sittings were also made in other Places of the Church upon the same Principle of equitable Adjustment.' The bishop, said the incumbent, had approved of these adjustments, but no written record of this was likely to be found. When the Commissioners nevertheless requested to see such a document, the incumbent produced one some four months later, in November, 1842. The instrument had been properly signed by the bishop, but only a *month* before that, on 10 October 1842.⁵²

A few churches enhanced their profits by levying assessments specifically on sittings: a private parliamentary act of 1815 permitted churchwardens of St Mark, Liverpool, to levy such a charge on rented pews.⁵³ A Cumberland church, also, made a rate in 1824, not specifically 'upon the pews', but directed 'To the occupiers of Seats' in the chapel.⁵⁴ In 1898, at Holy Trinity, Tunbridge Wells, in addition to the pew-rents, the vestry resolved 'That no Voluntary Church Rate be made but that in lieu of same, all seatholders in the Church be charged the usual 1/5th extra for church expenses'.⁵⁵ And at Christ Church, Highbury Grove, in the early 1860s and possibly earlier, the churchwardens were told that due to financial

⁵² LPL 5194.C6.

⁵³ 56 Geo. III, c. lxxv; *Brumfitt v. Roberts*, L.R. 5 C.P. 224, 234 (1870).

⁵⁴ CROK WPR/31/2/3.

⁵⁵ CKS P371L/8/2.

necessity they were to charge ‘an extra rate of 8/- per Sitting’ on top of the 25s. most renters paid per seat, deemed necessary ‘for payment of the incidental expenses’. The churchwardens responded, though, that they had also been ‘instructed that’ the total of 33s. per sitting ‘is decidedly illegal, and could not be enforced’.⁵⁶ The same sort of additional charge was levied at Christ Church, Tunbridge Wells, in 1877.⁵⁷ But examples of this sort of surcharge are rare.

At Emmanuel Church, West Dulwich, from 1922 to 1935 the church made a bit more out of pew-rents by charging ‘cushion rents’ as well – cushions were available as an optional extra for 6d. each per sitting per year, and almost every pew-renter paid the additional charge.⁵⁸ The bit of extra revenue may not have been the *only* reason for cushion rents; the rent may have helped regulate who used the cushions and discouraged the greedy from appropriating more than their share. When Joseph Leech attended a service at Redcliff Church in Bristol in 1843, he was shown into a pew for four congregants in which two young ladies already sat. Leech was forced to occupy ‘a bare seat’ since

not content with one cushion, and probably expecting no other visitor, they had made themselves a little more comfortable by laying their foundations upon two. I gave rather a significant glance to our relative conditions, but they did not seem to understand me.⁵⁹

In the 1890s the vestry of St Bartholomew, Montpelier, required pew-renters to buy their own ‘cushions, hassocks &c’, and required that all such items be ‘of uniform colour (crimson)’. Some renters evidently ignored the restriction, since four years later the vestry placed in the churchwardens’ hands the task of reminding those who had chosen their own colours.⁶⁰

Congregants could rent kneelings at least as late as 1883 at Holy Trinity, Bordesley, Birmingham.⁶¹ And although St Andrew, Deal, provided hassocks for pew-renters’ use, the

⁵⁶ LMA P83/CTC/10/4.

⁵⁷ CKS P371H/28/22.

⁵⁸ LMA P/85/EMM2/70.

⁵⁹ Leech, J., *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*, Sutton, A., ed. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1982), p. 15.

⁶⁰ BRRO P/St.BM/V/1.

⁶¹ <http://anglicanhistory.org/england/enraght/prosecution.html>

renters were responsible for mending the hassocks in their pews in 1903; the parish magazine noted that some hassocks had come ‘unstitched, and thus cause much untidiness from the material with which they are stuffed, escaping’. A year later the church made an appeal for funds to buy hassocks for the ‘many seats in the church’ which lacked them.⁶²

But the virtually static prices were the sole exception to the business acumen. Church officials sometimes even tried to raise revenue by shaming those using free sittings into paying. Christ Church, Herne Bay, for example, raised money in the late 1860s in addition to pew-rent by instituting ‘Non Seat Holders Boxes’⁶³ to receive donations. The implication must have been clear that those who paid no seat rent were expected to remit something anyway when attending services. In 1907 at Hope St James, Pendleton, the church tried to raise £100 16s. ‘with the object of temporarily freeing half the sittings’. But in their written appeal to the congregants the church’s officials asked that those in the rent-free seats pay anyway:

It is hoped that those who occupy the existing free seats in the church will accept their responsibilities and subscribe generously, seeing that the pew holders already pay for their own seats besides providing by far the greater portion of the Easter offering.⁶⁴

At the Kippington (Kent) Iron Church from 1884 to 1894, the churchwardens placed notices on each printed annual Statement of Receipts and Expenditure reminding the congregation ‘that, as the sittings are entirely free, the maintenance of the Services is dependent solely on the Offertories, and they trust each one will contribute *something*, however little’.⁶⁵

The Size of Each Sitting

As Callum Brown noted in his study of Glasgow church seating, the wish for maximum revenue also led to the size of each paid sitting being trimmed to what appears

⁶² CCA U3/271/28/2.

⁶³ CCA U3/282/8/A2.

⁶⁴ MAL5 L115/3/10/6.

⁶⁵ CKS P330D/5/A/9.

today to be almost an intolerable breadth, particularly in an age of bustles and crinolines. For example, in setting rents for pews at St James, Westgate, in the later nineteenth century, the churchwardens must have either deemed their congregants to be smallish people or anticipated that many smaller children would be taken into the rented pews – each rented sitting was to be only twenty inches wide.⁶⁶ And this was generous compared with the 17 to 18 inches allowed by Glaswegian churches,⁶⁷ and with the spaces allotted by St Peter, Brighton, in 1872, of only 16 inches per sitting, which was deemed without apparent litotes to be ‘rather close quarters’.⁶⁸ And at St John the Baptist, Penistone, in 1796, three men shared a pew four feet long.⁶⁹ These restrictions were unrealistic – in 1843, during the popularity of the crinoline but before the bustle, Joseph Leech noticed in one Clifton church

One, two three four feathered dowagers, a fifth, a sixth and the line threatens to stretch out to the crack of doom – each occupying for the most part a whole pew to herself, while several anxiously looking for a place crowded round the door.⁷⁰

St George, Brandon Hill, Bristol, appears to be an exception – there up to 1874 sittings for adults were between 36 and 56 inches, and the plans for reseating guaranteed 56 inches for each adult and 42 for each child.⁷¹ Sometimes children’s pews allowed even less space; Sts Philip & Jacob, Bristol, gave some children 13 or 14 inch-sittings, which must have done little to promote proper church behaviour in those pews.⁷² But despite the knowledge that children would generally take up less room, no instance has been found of a church renting sittings for children at a lesser price than it charged for adult-sized seats.

⁶⁶ CCA U3/279/5/D1/D; Bennett, ‘“Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”’, pp. 29-30.

⁶⁷ Brown, C.G., ‘The Costs of Pew-renting: Church Management, Church-going and Social Class in Nineteenth-century Glasgow’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, v. 38, n. 3 (July 1987), pp. 347-361, pp. 356-7.

⁶⁸ ESRO PAR 277/6/2/1.

⁶⁹ WYASK WDP 28/54A.

⁷⁰ Leech, J., *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*, A. Sutton, ed. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Press, 1982), p. 10.

⁷¹ BRRO P/StGB/V/1(a).

⁷² BRRO P/St.P&J/M/7.

The generally small spaces allowed per rented sitting may have prompted the wish, expressed by several renters at Crewkerne Parish Church, Somerset, in 1888 after the Church had been restored, for ‘short’ pews which would accommodate only the number of sittings they themselves took.⁷³ At Christ Church, Harpurhey, Greater Manchester, the incumbent and churchwardens evidently had some impetus in 1851 to change the dimensions of some sittings as well as to lower the rental prices – they resolved that ‘the Pews at the front of the Gallery wh. have hitherto been regarded as four sittings shall in future be considered to contain three only & shall be let accordingly at the rate of 4s. a sitting per quarter.’⁷⁴

Payment for narrow sittings likely had a particularly discordant effect on parish life. Larger congregants and those with wide clothes, including hoop skirts and large hats whose diameters are more than 18 inches or so, are likely to have caused disagreements. Although few instances have been found of smaller congregants complaining when larger ones took up more space than they were entitled, and although only a small minority probably measured the pews to determine how much each could legally use, the feeling of being monetarily cheated surely existed. A few examples of such disputes can be found, such as at St Margaret, Rochester, in 1861, where one congregant wrote to another citing not only the formal size of his sittings in a pew divided between his family and the others, but emphasising his status:

The part assigned to me extends from the door as far as the third hat peg which, & also the cushions were placed there at our expense – So that you may observe, I am much the senior occupant of the Pew and can only regret the necessity for this unpleasant correspondence.⁷⁵

The First Lesson Rule

Seating conflicts continued well into the nineteenth century, when opponents claimed that allocated pews caused congregants to ‘lounge into church at any time in the Service’,⁷⁶

⁷³ SRO D\P\crew/7/3/1.

⁷⁴ MAL5 M415/2/3/1.

⁷⁵ MAL5C P305/5B/12/1 (underlining in original).

⁷⁶ London Free and Open Church Association, ‘*The Parochial System*’, p. 14; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 14.

and indeed these churchgoers liked having their assigned sittings saved for them when they arrived after a service had begun.⁷⁷ Green's study in the West Riding noted that several chapels declared rented pews open for anyone if unfilled shortly after services began.⁷⁸ At St Pancras pew-renters were to occupy their pews before the Psalms were ended, or before the first lesson, or else strangers would be shown into their pews. This was also the practice at the mother church of Clerkenwell parish.⁷⁹ Hence the term 'first lesson rule' is applied here.

When seat-renting was instituted at Smeeth Parish, Kent, in 1881, renters were warned that

All sittings will be allotted on the understanding that they will be occupied by the Subscribers, but if any seat is left vacant at any service, and room is needed, the Churchwardens reserve the right of showing any person into such seat for that particular service.⁸⁰

A notice issued in 1890 by the vicar and churchwardens of St John, Glastonbury – which had rented sittings at some time in the nineteenth century – declared all unoccupied sittings free after 'Commencement of Divine Service', but 'particularly requested that latecomers will not move about, during the prayers or whilst the congregation are kneeling'.⁸¹

The earliest example found of the rule is from St Mary Magdalene, Maidenhead, where new regulations drawn up in 1822 allowed 'any accidental attendant' to sit in any place left unoccupied 'by the time the Psalms are concluded'.⁸² This may have been unusual at that time; in the previous century Harriet Kelham wrote to thank a Mr. Butcher for giving her 'leave to sitt in one of the Duke of Bedford's pews in Streatham Church'.⁸³ The Canterbury

⁷⁷ Stuart, E., *The Pew System and the Injuries Which It Inflicts on the Church of England* (London: Bell and Daldy, ?1860), p. 14

⁷⁸ Green, S.J.D., *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 151.

⁷⁹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into The Deficiency of Means of Spiritual Instruction and Places of Divine Worship in the Metropolis, and in other Populous Districts in England and Wales, especially in the Mining and Manufacturing Districts; and to Consider the Fittest Means of Meeting the Difficulties of the Case; and to Report Thereon to the House; Together With the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: House of Commons, 1858), pp. 211, 540.

⁸⁰ CKS P4B/8/2.

⁸¹ SRO D\P\gla.j/7/4.

⁸² BRO D/EX 1625/4/4.

⁸³ LAD IV/35/28/9.

Diocese visitation returns suggest that the first lesson rule was more generally used at the turn of the twentieth century than three decades earlier. Although a few returns from the 1870s to the early 1890s stated that all sittings in various pew-renting churches were declared free early in each service, those of 1898 and 1902 more frequently reflect such a practice, perhaps indicating greater willingness to allow non-renters to use absent renters' sittings.⁸⁴

Whether or not the first lesson rule operated evidently depended on local practice – churches located in relative proximity to each other might have opposite customs, and the congregants' attitudes might differ on whether they should sit in pews rented by others. At St Peter, Sudbury, testimony in the 1858 House of Lords hearings revealed that the church's enclosed pews had no locks but were not used by anyone but their owners without 'special invitation'; another person would 'certainly not' use an empty pew in the owner's absence.⁸⁵ On the other side of London the perpetual curate of St Peter, Stepney, testified that congregants were allowed to fill unoccupied rented seats after any service began, while at nearby St George's-in-the-East the poor were prevented from entering empty pews,⁸⁶ as also occurred in a parish church near Chelsea, except at the evening service, and at St Michael, Wood-street with St Mary, Staining.⁸⁷ Three miles away in St Clement Danes, in the Strand, the poor could not be persuaded to go into unused pews even if asked to do so, preferring to stand near the free sittings.⁸⁸

Other examples are fairly common, although several Anglican churches in the 1851 census indicated they did *not* allow appropriated seats to be used by others even when empty throughout services.⁸⁹ And where a congregant had bought a devisable right to use a pew at

⁸⁴ LPL VG3 to VG 11.

⁸⁵ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), pp. 319, 378.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 162.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 238, 247, 292.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸⁹ *Religious Worship in Kent: The Census of 1851*, Roake, M., ed. (Maidstone: Kent Archaeological Society, 1999), pp. 28, 53, 65.

St Mark, Liverpool – and thus a quasi-rent – beginning in April, 1863, a court in 1870 noted that ‘No other person has at any time been allowed to use such pew without the permission of’ that congregant.⁹⁰ In informing pew-renters of increased rents at Christ Church, Hougham-in-Dover in 1884, the churchwardens stated the seat holders would be given sittings for Sunday services temporarily held in the town hall, but that ‘These seats will be kept vacant only until the commencement of Divine Service’.⁹¹ This caution would likely have been unnecessary had established practice in the church been to declare all seats open when services began. Holy Trinity, Broadstairs had pew-rents in the years around 1888, but empty seats were evidently not filled at least until that year, when the vestry resolved that ‘the seatholders be written to informing them the seats would be filled in as soon as service commenced’.⁹²

The first lesson rule was naturally less likely to have operated in churches whose seating primarily consisted of locked pews. In 1858 the pews in one church were all privately owned and sub-let, and some were ‘locked up, so that no one may sit in them without paying a rent.’⁹³ Locks were, though, often placed on pews to keep out specific people rather than the general collection of congregants. In 1786 at West Drayton Church, London, for example, a pew-holder asked that a lock be put on the doors of his pews, ‘particularly’ to keep out ‘M^r. Marshall or any Person on his Account from sitting there’.⁹⁴ But elsewhere the locks may not have existed *due* to the operation of the first lesson rule; at one Kentish church in the 1850s some pews were deliberately locked ‘so that no one may sit in them without paying a rent’.⁹⁵ Like pews in general, locks on pews were disappearing in Victorian times, perhaps to put the first lesson rule into operation. In 1830-31 at St Mary the Virgin, Dover, a Colonel Jarvis

⁹⁰ *Brumfitt v. Roberts*, L.R. 5 C.P. 224, 226 (1870).

⁹¹ CCA U3/203/3/9.

⁹² CCA U3/243/8/1.

⁹³ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 454.

⁹⁴ LMA ACC/0539/111.

⁹⁵ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 454.

while out of town was requested to forward to the churchwardens the key to his pew so that ‘respectable communicants’ could be seated in it during divine service – many complaints had been made that the locked door prevented congregants from using Colonel Jarvis’s pew.⁹⁶

In 1929 a pew-renter at St Gabriel, Warwick Square, Westminster, wrote to the church saying that he was giving up his rented pew to take sittings at another church nearby, and when attending St Gabriel in the future would ‘just chance a seat’,⁹⁷ indicating that the first lesson rule was used there. At Kensington in 1858, vacant pews were to be filled as soon as the Psalms began.⁹⁸ In the mid-twentieth century St John the Baptist, Hove, required pew-renters to be in their seats at least five minutes before services began; at that time a bell was rung to tell those waiting outside they could sit in any unoccupied seats.⁹⁹ At the 1858 Lords hearings, the vicar of Bradford testified he had instituted a rule of allowing empty pews to be filled as soon as each service began – ‘the officers of the church are directed to show them into any pew’.¹⁰⁰ As a result, said the vicar, the poor had a chance at a seat and actually crowded the church.¹⁰¹ And pew-holders were not always antagonistic to the first lesson rule – in 1888 at St Ann, Bishop Auckland, Durham, the pew-owners passed a resolution ‘allowing all seats to be open to the public five minutes before the commencement of each service instead of three minutes as before’.¹⁰²

Where a shortage of seats existed, the practical effect of the rule could be a distracting rush for open sittings during services. Until the 1950s at Holy Trinity, Brompton, said a long-time parishioner, any congregants not renting a pew – presumably if no space was available in

⁹⁶ CCA U3/30/8/4; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 15.

⁹⁷ CWAC 1436/45/20.

⁹⁸ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 215.

⁹⁹ http://www.historicchurches.org.uk/recent_grants.cfm?sort=grantdate+desc

¹⁰⁰ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords*, (1858), pp. 418, 427.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

¹⁰² DuRO EP/Au.SAN 2/10, 4/2.

free seats – ‘had to wait until five minutes to 11’ before being allowed to sit in vacant rented pews, ‘in case the occupiers were coming. So there was always a scrum waiting for a seat’.¹⁰³

Accommodation of those who had not paid for sittings, though, may not have been the sole reason for the first lesson rule, or even the primary one, at least in churches such as St Peter, Tunbridge Wells, noted above, in which pews were deemed open ‘when the bell had ceased tolling’.¹⁰⁴ The M.P. who found ‘monstrous’ the idea of legislation regarding a man who entered his pew some minutes after the commencement of a service¹⁰⁵ may have been in the minority. Some churchgoers were predictably irritated when interrupted by latecomers, and some latecomers made a habit of their unpunctuality, as Joseph Leech found in Bristol:

The last stroke of the bell is to many the signal for leaving their dwellings, when they hurriedly throw down some book or newspaper which they had been reading, hasten to church in any but a proper frame of mind...The late comer bangs the door, puts down his umbrella as if he were ‘grounding’ a musket, and in his flurry overturns two or three Bibles, and mumbles a few words...five minutes in the house of God before his services commence is deemed a sad waste of our precious moments...¹⁰⁶

The reason for the first lesson rule at the end of the bell’s tolling may, therefore, have been intended more to encourage punctuality than to accommodate non-renters.

In sum, the first lesson rule is likely to have done much to alleviate any offence the poor might take at being relegated to the free seats. But where it existed in areas of low attendance, the rule was likely to have been inimical to pew-renting, since it reduced the demand for the better seats – anyone who appeared might get a decent sitting.

Donations from Non-renters

Perhaps the most obvious solicitation of donations from those who did not rent seats *because of that fact* occurred at the Foundling Hospital Chapel, London. There the officials

¹⁰³ <http://htb.org.uk/features/2004/06/90thbirthday.htm>; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 9-15.

¹⁰⁴ CKS P371G/8/A1.

¹⁰⁵ HC Deb 16 July 1872 v. 212 cc 1291-5.

¹⁰⁶ Leech, J., *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*, Sutton, A., ed. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1982), pp. 58, 74.

tried to solicit further money, apparently for charity, via notes on the printed pew-rent receipts. This language was subtly changed several times. The 1847 receipt stated that:

The Pew Renters are informed that they have not the right of transferring their seats, and are requested, when they occasionally allow their Friends to occupy their Pews, to signify to them, that they are expected to contribute towards the Charity at the Chapel Doors.¹⁰⁷

By 1866 the receipt told pew-renters they were to ‘signify to’ their friends, not that they were ‘expected’ to contribute, but ‘that they *are* to contribute towards the Charity at the Chapel doors’.¹⁰⁸ Possibly this was caused by a drop in pew-rent revenue in the mid-1860s to an average of about £770 from the usual total of over £800 in previous years. In 1868 and later years the pew-rents produced £820 or more,¹⁰⁹ and in 1878 the 1847 language was again used.¹¹⁰ By 1887, however the demand for contributions from friends disappeared – the receipt stated only that ‘The Pew Renters have not the right of transferring their Seats’.¹¹¹ This seems typical; as pew-renting dropped in popularity, as will be discussed below, communications from churchwardens regarding pew-letting appear to have become less demanding and more coaxing. At Christ Church, Penrith, pew-rent revenue dropped quickly in the 1950s; reminders were sent with language much nicer than that of the Foundling Hospital 75 years before: ‘The Churchwardens beg to remind you that your Pew Rent, amounting to £___ is now due, and would be obliged if it could be paid not later than the end of the year’. Unfortunately for the church, the pew-rents nevertheless netted only £8 18s. 6d. four years later.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ LMA A/FH/B3/23/2.

¹⁰⁸ LMA A/FH/B3/23/12 (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁹ LMA A/FH/B3/22/5.

¹¹⁰ LMA A/FH/B3/23/16.

¹¹¹ LMA A/FH/B3/23/17.

¹¹² CROC PR 110CC/42 & PR 110CC/49.

Deception

While attending Bristol churches in the 1840s, Joseph Leech was convinced that ‘pecuniary recompense is the last thing taken into account by clergymen of the Church of England – to do good is their first consideration, to get their money last and least...’¹¹³ Not all, however, agreed with this assessment. Contemporaries suspected clergymen and other officials of pew-renting churches of fiddling their figures, as in ecclesiastical financial dealings in general; for the 1851 Religious Census the minister of St George, Wrotham, included with his return a note accusing other clergy of ‘frequent false representations’ of their income, making the totals seem less than they actually were.¹¹⁴ In many returns the space for pew-rent in the endowment section of the census returns was left blank, while others drew lines through the answer area, and even more listed several types of endowment, possibly including pew-rents, simply as ‘fees’ or ‘subscriptions’. *Intentional* deception appears to have occurred at Christ Church, Milton-next-Gravesend, in 1931, when church officials announced in a written notice that, in return for an annual grant of £24 from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, the vicar was ‘sacrificing £50 per annum’ in pew-rents, which would no longer be charged. This assumes that the vicar was receiving £74 per year from pew-rents. ‘It is hoped, therefore’, said the notice the church officials circulated, ‘that a good many seat-holders will still want to give the money’. But though a quarter of the pew-rents had gone to the church, the three-quarters received by the vicar had rarely amounted to £74 – in 1930, just the year before the claim of ‘sacrificing £50 per annum’ was made and evidently the last year sittings were rentable, the vicar had only had £54 3s. 9d., and in the three preceding years less than £50 per year. By accepting the Commissioners’ grant, then, the

¹¹³ Leech, *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*, p. 77.

¹¹⁴ *Religious Worship in Kent: The Census of 1851*, Roake, M., ed. (Maidstone: Kent Archaeological Society, 1999), p. 121; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 4.

vicar sacrificed much less than the £50 alleged – from the average of the last four years of pew-renting, he gave up just over £20.¹¹⁵ In those days the difference was significant.

The records of Christ Church, Ramsgate, in the 1920s also indicate they may not have been honestly kept. The church maintained a pew-rent book indicating the vicar was paid all proceeds from the practice, including in the years 1927 to 1929. Yet as well as the total amounts listed in the pew-rent book, an entry in a ‘cash book’ notes that on 4 April 1927 the vicar was remitted another £12 from ‘pew rents’, although this sum appears nowhere in the pew-rent book. Similar entries exist in the cash book for 1928 and 1929, awarding the vicar £24 and £24 9s., respectively, from ‘pew-rents’, but are not listed in the pew-rent book. Despite the apparent discrepancies, the Parochial Council Minute Book unanimously passed the accounts for each of these years, stating that the accounts were ‘most satisfactory’ (1927), ‘eminently satisfactory’ (1928) and ‘very satisfactory’ (1929).¹¹⁶

Purposeful deception may also have occurred at Christ Church, Tunbridge Wells, for example, which clearly charged pew-rents in 1879-80; in that year a Mr. Wackling was sent a reminder slip with pre-printed writing stating that pew-rents were payable in advance, and a hand-written figure of £2 10s. was noted as due.¹¹⁷ But the expense accounts for that year and others surrounding it list no pew-rents – the receipts are noted as ‘Quarterly Collections’, ‘Additional Offertories’, ‘Donations’ and ‘Boxes at Doors’.¹¹⁸ Even if pew-rents were included in ‘Quarterly Collections’, the amount of detail elsewhere makes the omission of the collections’ sources all the more curious – in 1864 the receipts include an amount for ‘gas fittings sold’, and in 1895 one for ‘Half Harvest Fest’, but no mention of pew-rents.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ MALSC P252C/8/2 & P252C/1/5/1.

¹¹⁶ CCA U3/226/5/6, U3/226/5/8 & U3/226/8/3; Bennett, “Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ CKS P371/H/5/24.

¹¹⁸ CKS P371/H/5/1.

¹¹⁹ *Religious Worship in Kent* & CKS P371/H/5/4; Bennett, “Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”, p. 4.

In Summary

This chapter notes that pew-renting was done in a much more profit-oriented fashion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries than earlier, but that, unlike the circumstances Brown found in Glasgow,¹²⁰ English churches generally did not alter prices to meet demand. The chapter attempts to address the paucity, noted by Brown, of work addressing the effects of pew-renting on congregational life,¹²¹ at least among Church of England parishes. The pecuniary motive that widespread pew-renting brought to Victorian churches,¹²² the consequent narrow sittings and the impression that church officials were much too concerned with money could only have caused animosity among congregants toward their churches.

¹²⁰ Brown, 'The Costs of Pew-renting', p. 348.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

¹²² Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 39.

CHAPTER SIX

THE MECHANICS OF PEW-RENTING

This chapter examines how Anglican pew-rents were paid and the purpose to which the funds were put. The hiring of paid and sometimes commissioned collectors is noted, as is the likely impact such collectors had on those letting pews.

Collecting the Rent Due

Since churchwardens largely administered pew-rent systems, it was natural that they themselves or their agents collected the money due.¹ An exception occurred at St Mark, Torwood, Torquay, when in 1890 the rector and churchwardens agreed that the rector himself would continue to collect and keep the pew-rents, ‘as has been the custom, and that the churchwardens shall not be held responsible for any loss in the money, although keeping in their hands the letting of the seats’.²

Methods of actual collection varied. Some churchwardens sent bills to each tenant and received the funds remitted. Others, probably in smaller parishes, simply announced that pew-rents would be payable at a particular time and place and expected the tenants to appear and pay what they owed, or else trusted that each renter would approach them at his or her convenience and remit the sum due. Many churches, among them All Saints, Cockermouth, in 1820, allowed renters to pay in instalments throughout the year.³ Early in the nineteenth century at St George, Kendal, Cumberland, pew-renters were expected to approach the collector, rather than the other way round, at a particular time on a particular day; a notice from St George in 1824 informed ‘all Occupiers of Seates and Sitings’ they were ‘Desired to have the Goodness to go to pay the Seat Money Due the 24 Dec^r 1824, at his Dwelling House

¹ Bennett, J.C., ‘“Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”: The Practice of Pew-renting at Kentish Anglican Churches’ (unpublished MTh dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2006), p. 32.

² DRO 2998A/PV1.

³ CROW YPR/26/142.

of James Dockers' since he 'is not able to Collect it from House to House'. This was to occur, rather enigmatically, 'on Monday the 27th Day of Dec^r Instant Betwixt the Hours of 10 OClock in the Morning, till 3 OClock in the Evening *Each Day*'.⁴ And at All Saints, Hatcham Park, Kent, when sittings were rented quarterly in 1884, payment was expected in advance; the churchwardens made it known in an annual report they would 'attend in the Vestry at the commencement of each quarter to receive Pew Rents, and to let Sittings'.⁵ This method was sometimes thought imprudent. In 1885 the church council of St George, Deal – despite the fact that the councilors were largely pew-renters themselves – 'thought that Seat holders would fail to appear' if simply bidden to come and pay their pew-rents, and instead 'require to be waited on'.⁶

Later in the nineteenth century and henceforth, when pew-letting was less common than it had been, some churches turned to less formal methods of prompting payments. In the 1890s the churchwardens of Christ Church, Ellacombe, Torquay, for example, sent notices asking that 'in order to save the trouble and expense of collecting the pew-rents', the money due be placed 'in the Vicar's box, just within the church door', with the renter's name, address and pew number, 'next Sunday...or the following Sunday', or to send the total directly to the vicar, by cheque or postal order.⁷ In 1935 St Margaret, Brighton, distributed a printed notice stating rents due could be paid quarterly, if the renters found that more convenient than annual payments, and that the sums could be paid either to the secretary in the vestry, 'which is open Daily for the transaction of Church business between the hours of 10.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m.', or by 'placing the amount in an envelope to be put in the plate at the Church Offertory',⁸ which was also the practice at Emmanuel Church, West Dulwich.⁹

⁴ CROK WPR31/2/3 (emphasis added).

⁵ LMA P75/ALL/25/6.

⁶ CCA U3/67/8/1.

⁷ DRO 3000A/PW1 (underlining in original).

⁸ ESRO PAR /269/6/2.

In at least one church notices of rents due were *inscribed* on the rented seats themselves – some of the pews at St George, Perry Hill, Southwark, have ‘Victorian numbers and pew rent notices under a century of varnish’.¹⁰ In at least one nonconformist church in England, those behind in paying for or in default on their pew-rents were known to the entire congregation: the vestry of Mount Zion Methodist Church, Ogden, Halifax, still displays a ‘pew-rent board, complete with pegs’.¹¹ One Anglican church, the Foundling Hospital Chapel, London, in the 1770s and 1780s organised part of its pew-renting via a ticket system in which the money due was likely to have been collected when the tickets were issued. Different tickets were used for particular areas of the church – the accounts list ‘North & South Gallery Tickets to Christmas’, ‘Aile [sic] Tickets from Mich to Xmass at 1/6’ ‘Annual Aile [sic] tickets’, and ‘East Gallery Tickets’.¹² St James Chapel in Whitehaven also used tickets to signify the congregants and their ‘Heirs, Executors, Administrators, and Assigns’ entitled to particular pews – evidently these served a real purpose, since an undated ticket survives with boilerplate type stating that it was issued due to ‘the Original One being lost’.¹³ At St Paul’s Cathedral, a full choral service was advertised for three o’clock in the afternoon of 12 May 1852. Those with tickets, obtainable on becoming members of Sons of the Clergy, were to be admitted at two o’clock, when those members presumably had their choice of sittings, while those without tickets could enter the Cathedral only at a quarter to three,¹⁴ to take whatever seats were left over.

In some cases churchwardens paid a salary to someone they designated to collect the pew-rent revenue. Historical precedent existed for paying agents to collect rental income of

⁹ LMA P/85/EMM2/70.

¹⁰ <http://www.southwark.anglican.org/bridge/0103/page03.htm>

¹¹ <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/whsnl/bull37.html>

¹² LMA A/FH/B8/4/1.

¹³ CROW YPR45/41.

¹⁴ CROK WPR 89/Z5.

other types of church property, such as land-rents in the sixteenth century.¹⁵ In the nineteenth century, paid pew-rent collectors seem to have been fairly common. In 1887 St Philip, Maidstone, paid a Mr L. Howard £7 15s. 3d., including £1 5s. 6d. for collecting the pew-rents, and at St George, Deal, in 1859-60 a representative was allotted £5 for ‘Collecting Pew Rents’ and five shillings as a ‘Fee for letting seats’.¹⁶ At Christ Church, Milton-next-Gravesend, in July 1922 the church paid 10s. to a Mr De Wardt for ‘Pew Rent Notices’ and the stamps to send them.¹⁷ Where the churchwardens employed a collector, the proceeds were reduced by the salary paid. At St Peter, Stepney, and St Thomas, Telford Park, Streatham, in the 1850s, the perpetual curate received the entire income from pew-rents, less the cost of collection.¹⁸

Several examples have been found in this study in which a church gave the collector a percentage of the proceeds as commission. At Holy Trinity, Wordsley, Kingswinford, in the 1840s, the rector received the entire sum after ‘deducting 5 per Cent paid to Mr. Meredith for collection’.¹⁹ In 1830 St Peter, Southborough, paid its clerk a salary of £8 per annum plus 6d. for each £1 of the ‘Rents of Pews and Sittings and on Tickets disposed of during the week and on Sundays’, and ‘voluntary rents’ at St Stephen, Tonbridge, just after 1900 were collected by a Miss Seale, who received about 14 per cent of the sum she gathered.²⁰ St George, Deal, paid the collector similarly; the commission fell with the total revenue in the 1880s, but went back up when pew-rents later produced more money.²¹

¹⁵ *The Canterbury Chantries and Hospitals, Together with Some Others in the Neighbourhood, in 1546*, Cotton, C., ed (Ashford: Headley Brothers, 1934), pp. 5, 35, 41.

¹⁶ CCA U3/67/5/3; CKS P241G/5/A/7; Bennett, ‘“Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”’, p. 33.

¹⁷ MALSC P252C/8/2 & P/252C/1/5/1.

¹⁸ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into The Deficiency of Means of Spiritual Instruction and Places of Divine Worship in the Metropolis, and in other Populous Districts in England and Wales, especially in the Mining and Manufacturing Districts; and to Consider the Fittest Means of Meeting the Difficulties of the Case; and to Report Thereon to the House; Together With the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: House of Commons, 1858), p. 66; *Wolfe v. Clerk*, 1 K. B. 439, 449 (1905).

¹⁹ DALHC PR/KIN(W) II/4/3.

²⁰ CKS P371D/5/1 & P371B/8/1; Bennett, ‘“Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”’, p. 33.

²¹ CCA U3/67/5/3.

This cannot have promoted good relations between clergy and laity. Even if having such commissioned agents collect pew-rent revenues did not result in some degree of coercion – which such an arrangement obviously often might – such a practice may have seemed to some as making their church no better than a proprietary chapel. Paying individuals based on the amount they collected persisted past the First World War – in the 1920s St Mary, Scarborough, paid its pew-rent collectors about five per cent of the sums collected.²²

Not all churches paid collectors a decent sum for their efforts. In 1888 the vestry of St Andrew, Deal, noted that the sexton's duties included not only collecting pew-rents but ringing the bells, assisting at services and keeping the churchyard tidy. Pew-rent collection there was either not a very onerous responsibility or was not deemed worthy of much remuneration – for performing all of these tasks the sexton received only £6, plus 2s. 6d. for each marriage and other sundry duties.²³ Although St George, Deal, paid its collector a commission according to the total pew-rent revenue in the 1880s, in 1901 a Mrs Watts – apparently the wife of a former churchwarden – spent part of her time 'keeping the Seat Rent Books & collecting the amounts', but evidently received only a 'very hearty vote of thanks'.²⁴

St James, Piccadilly, paid out significant sums in various years from the 1780s to 1805 for someone to write out both receipts and orders for pew-rents due – the latter were placed in the pews for the assigned renters to find and pay. In 1788 the cost for these orders was £11 4s., while in 1790 and 1791 the totals were £8 12s. and £8 3s., respectively.²⁵ The job of writing receipts for payments paid even more; in 1784 a Mr Dyson was paid £17 5s. for making out 345 pew-rent receipts – a shilling each, which seems high for the time.²⁶

²² ERYARS PE165/189.

²³ CCA U3/271/8/A1.

²⁴ CCA U3/67/5/3.

²⁵ CWAC 494/153, 494/156 & 494/157.

²⁶ CWAC 494/150.

Pew-renters who failed to inform churchwardens of their intent not to renew sittings might be asked to pay the rent nonetheless, or at least might expect repeated demands for payment. At All Saints, Cockermouth, a former congregant was ‘annoyed at having received a second demand for a subscription of 7/- for’ a seat that ‘we have not occupied for the last three years, for the solid reason that the aforesaid seat has been, and still is used by other people... We have given 7/- for the last two years for other peoples [sic] convenience...’.²⁷

Disbursement of the Funds

Once the funds were collected and counted, as in centuries past, the totals were originally claimed by several different entities. At St Michael, Coventry, it had been agreed in 1725 that some of the pew rents would be used to improve the church’s appearance rather than to fund repairs or the communion bread and wine,²⁸ but by 1850 St Michael used its pew-rents to fund church services.²⁹ In the early nineteenth century St John the Baptist, Leytonstone, made pew-renters responsible for any extraordinary repairs to the church in addition to the usual sums for pew-rents, which were to be used to pay for casual repairs and the incumbent’s stipend.³⁰ At St Mary, Queen Square, Bath, in the year 1801 to 1802, pew-rents paid the salaries of the curate, sexton, clerk and trustees as well as many routine expenses.³¹ In accordance with an 1816 act authorising pew-renting at a new church in St Pancras, the estimated £1,150 received from pew-renting each year was used first for church expenses, then for paying lecturers appointed by the vicar, then to lighting and repairs, then finally for the expenses of other, poor churches. None went to the vicar.³²

²⁷ CROW YPR/26/150.

²⁸ ‘The City of Coventry: Churches: Churches built before 1800’, in *A History of the County of Warwick: Volume 8: The City of Coventry and Borough of Warwick* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1969), pp. 321-61, at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=16038>

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ <http://www.stjohns-leytonstone.org.uk/History%202.htm>

³¹ NAK C/114/185.

³² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 204.

The destination of the funds was likely to have been affected, in most places, by circumstances peculiar to each church. At St James, Dover, in 1927, the income of £83 17s. 6d. from pew-rents went into the church's general fund, from which were paid the salaries of what appear to be all the church personnel, as well as insurance, fabric repairs, 'organ and choir', and several other routine expenses.³³ In 1943 the Parochial Church Council of St Andrew, Ashton-on-Ribble, Lancashire, decided that revenue from pew-rents could no longer be depended upon to provide an adequate, fixed supplement to the vicar's income. Accordingly the Council voted that all rents collected would go to general church funds, and the vicar would be paid a fixed sum of £120 as part of his stipend.³⁴

Most churches in which the revenue was divided among two or more destinations allocated percentages to each, although some gave the incumbent a set stipend from the pew-rents. This naturally caused problems where insufficient funds were received to pay the full stipend, as at Kennington in 1866.³⁵ An incumbent was not legally entitled to advances on pew-rent income, even if the renters paid in advance.³⁶ The income also could not be legally mortgaged,³⁷ but dispensation from this latter rule was possible via private legislation, as occurred in 1805 when the trustees of Camden Chapel, Middlesex (a chapel of ease), and the vestry of St Marylebone, Middlesex, were authorised to borrow money on the credit of the pew-rents.³⁸ At St Andrew, Deal, the vestry in 1850 authorised the building of a gallery by borrowing funds to be repaid 'by the letting of the seats',³⁹ and four years later incurred more debt of £120 to buy a church organ, also 'on the security of the Pew rents'.⁴⁰ But the

³³ CCA U3/26/8/16/28.

³⁴ LaRO P3279/4/6/3.

³⁵ *Lloyd v. Burrup*, L. R. 4 Ex. 63 (1868).

³⁶ *Lloyd v. Burrup*, L. R. 4 Ex. 63 (1868).

³⁷ *In re Leveson*, L. R. 8 Ch. D. 96 (1878).

³⁸ 46 Geo. III, c. 124, s. 71; *Fitzgerald v. Champneys*, S. C. 30 L. J. Ch. 777, 2 J. & H. 31, 3-38 (1861).

³⁹ CCA U3/271/8/A1.

⁴⁰ CCA U3/271/8/A2.

Commissioners were wary of approving such precarious arrangements, refusing in 1825 to sanction raising money to erect Holy Trinity, Maidstone, ‘on the Pew Rents’, but granting £8,000 ‘towards the erection of the proposed Church or Chapel’.⁴¹ At St Matthew, Liverpool, in the 1840s, the incumbent could legally receive the value of ‘his interest in the surplus pew-rents’ in return for conveying his interest to others.⁴² And sometimes the Commissioners did approve mortgages on expected pew-rent revenue, as at St Silas, Pentonville, in 1863.⁴³

District chapels also relied on pew-rents to pay their expenses, including the wages of clerk, pew-opener and organist, and the defraying of lighting and heating costs.⁴⁴ In practice, though, this was not always, and perhaps not usually, followed. St Peter, Stepney, was built in the early 1840s,⁴⁵ and in 1858 its pew-rents went directly to the perpetual curate; the church expenses were paid from an offertory held four times annually.⁴⁶

The Church Building Acts were optimistic in assuming that pew-rents would always be substantial. *Some* churches and chapels netted sums from pew-rents in large amounts. In 1830 at St Peter, Southborough, for example, the total taken from pew-rents was £144 11s. 2d. After £96 5s. had been paid for salaries, the chapel had a balance of £48 6s. 2d. In 1841, with over £36 in hand, the church used pew-rent receipts to pay the incumbent £74, transferred £40 for ‘annual disbursement’ and allotted £3 11s. 11d. to collectors,⁴⁷ and paid a tailor’s bill for £3 10s. for the beadle’s coat, £1 15s for masonry work, £2 1s. 3d. to a parish official in charge of handling the funds, and £4 11s. 1d for new gates.⁴⁸

⁴¹ CKS P241A/6/2/1.

⁴² *Hillcoat v. Bird*, S. C. 19 L.J. C. P. 376, 10 C. B. 327, 341 (1850).

⁴³ CERC ECE/7/1/11615.

⁴⁴ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 60.

⁴⁵ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=22761>

⁴⁶ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 66.

⁴⁷ CKS P371B/8/1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 34.

But the results of a survey by a Select Committee of the House of Lords in 1886 reflect that those described as ‘Old Parish Churches in Which Seats are Rented’, which appear to be those built before 1800, generally used pew-rent receipts to pay for ‘Expenses of Divine Service’. Those listed as ‘New Parish and District Churches in which Seats are Rented or Rentable’, in contrast, most often used their pew-rent money to pay the income of the incumbent or curate.⁴⁹ Yet these rarely had endowments, and some could ill afford to turn over all such receipts to the incumbent, or to allot them as the 1819 and 1856 Acts dictated.⁵⁰ A return from the 1893 Canterbury Diocese visitation indicates this precise difficulty occurred at St Mary, Ramsgate:

About 150 are let for money – according to a special Act of Parliament, which settles how the Incumbent’s stipend is to be paid, but he never receives a farthing from that source, as the pew-rents do not nearly cover the Church Expenses.⁵¹

Under an 1816 act creating a chapel of ease in St Pancras, pew-rents were to be used to pay the minister, clerk, pew-openers and other church officials, but if insufficient money was taken from this source, the parish’s general pew-rent fund was to make up the deficiency.⁵²

At Ironbridge in 1887 a churchwarden was imprisoned for 28 days due to a suit by the incumbent, since the proceeds from the pew-rents, which were supposed to be divided between the church and the incumbent, were insufficient to both, and the churchwarden ‘deemed it his duty to pay off the church debt before paying the incumbent’.⁵³ By the nineteenth century the income clergymen derived from seat rental was thought moderate at best and insufficient at worst.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill* (London: Henry Hansard & Son, 1886), p. 3.

⁵⁰ Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 35.

⁵¹ LPL VG3/9c.

⁵² 56 Geo. III, c. xxxiv, s. 51.

⁵³ HC Deb 26 August 1887 v. 320 c. 28.

⁵⁴ *Free and Open Churches; and the Weekly Offertory* (London: G. J. Palmer, 1871), p. 7; ‘A Layman’, *The Pew System and the Injuries Inflicted Thereby on All Degrees of Men in the Church* (Liverpool: Benson & Mallett, 1860), p. 22.

But where the pew-rent totals were sufficiently high, the incumbent's right to the revenue persisted. At Minster in Sheppey Parish, comprising Sheerness, Blue Town and Mile Town, the minister's income in 1840 came from pew rents, as also occurred at Holy Trinity, Cliftonville, in 1864; in 1851 at St Mary the Virgin, Dover, the incumbent received from the pew-rents a 'residuum...of about £110', and in the same year the census return from St Andrew, Buckland, states 'pew rents (Lay Rector)',⁵⁵ an example found nowhere else in this study. In at least the first two decades of the twentieth century, two-thirds of the vicar's stipend at St John, Tunbridge Wells, came from pew-letting, although the vicar had to pay all expenses of the vicarage house and garden.⁵⁶ At Holy Trinity, Folkestone, up to the Second World War pew-rents provided the vicar's income, but the revenue dropped considerably during the conflict, and the church closed shortly thereafter, while at St Martin, Dover, from 1959 to 1969 pew-rents were paid 'by cheque to vicar'. Proprietary chapels relied on pew-rents to meet expenses and could not give the minister the entire sum unless he was also the proprietor; at Blackheath Park Church, Charlton, in 1851 the investor who built the church paid 'the Minister £200 a year', took the pew rents, and defrayed 'all outgoings'.⁵⁷

In Summary

This chapter describes how pew-rents were collected and used, and notes the difficulties many churches faced in paying their necessary expenses and the unrealistic assumptions made by Parliament in enacting the Church Building Acts. These difficulties were particularly acute in the late nineteenth century and later. The evidence found here confirms Green's conclusion that the Victorian period experienced so much church-building that the congregants could not amply fund the whole lot.

⁵⁵ ESRO PAR 387/10/5/44; *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 355, 360; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 35; http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~shebra/pigots_1840_-_sheerness_&c_.htm

⁵⁶ <http://www.parsonsfamily.co.uk/autobiography.php>; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 35.

⁵⁷ CCA U3/287/5/D2; <http://www.thetrinitybenefice-folkestone.org.uk/html/history.html>; *Religious Worship in Kent*, p. 24; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 35.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SORTS OF PEOPLE WHO RENTED ANGLICAN PEWS

This chapter delves into the relative classes and incomes of the people who evidently rented sittings in Anglican churches in the period under study and the possible reasons for their doing so, as well as the special rights that some pew-renters enjoyed. It is concluded that the majority of Anglican pew-renters belonged to the middle-middle or lower-middle class, with a large minority coming from the upper-middle class and upper-working class. The classes from which churchwardens came are also detailed.

The Social Class of Pew-renters

Initially, to make sense of the available lists of pew-renters and their occupations, some discussion is in order of the population and the classes into which different occupations fit during the time period studied here. Without endless detail, a description of social classes and the incomes of those in them will always be incomplete. For example, in weekly earnings, 'regional wage-differentials could be as great as those between skilled and unskilled' – in 1861 skilled engineers in London were likely to earn 35s. per week while their counterparts in Scotland earned 23s, or about two-thirds as much.¹ Also the lines between the classes were very indistinct:

Co-ordinating a social geography of Victorian Britain would have been a tricky business, for the boundaries between and within classes were blurred. Each contained its own hierarchy based upon income, pretensions, self-esteem and the esteem of others. For instance, where did a sometime grocer-turned-stationmaster belong in the triple-tiered society? Was he a 'have' or a 'have-not'? He lived in what his daughter remembered as an 'artisan' estate in London in the early 1900s, but wore a frock coat and silk hat when he went to church on Sundays. His wife joined other church-going matrons to sew clothes for poor children and her husband thought of himself as 'upper working class'. His neighbours may well have thought differently.²

Nevertheless, some guarded generalisations are possible.

¹ Gray, R., *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-Century Britain, c. 1850-1900* (London: MacMillan, 1981), p. 19.

² James, L., *The Middle Class: A History* (London: Abacus, 2006), p. 253.

In late-Victorian Britain the upper class formed about two per cent of the population, while the middle class made up about nineteen per cent and the working class 79 per cent.³ In contemporary analysis the middle class most often is itself divided into three subclasses – upper-middle, the middle-middle and the lower-middle. The upper-middle consisted of ‘senior professionals’, among them moneyed industrialists, financiers, stockbrokers, senior lawyers and doctors, leading clergy, and the like. The middle-middle was formed of ‘lesser businessmen’, ‘medium-sized shopkeepers’, local bank managers, and those of similar positions. Those of the lower-middle were generally schoolteachers, small shopkeepers, service providers, clerks, and so on.⁴ The working class is also generally divided into three subclasses: the upper-working class or labour aristocracy (skilled workers), the middle-working class (unskilled workers), and the lower-working class (those in abject poverty). The labour aristocracy was about ten to fifteen per cent of the total working class,⁵ and is generally thought to have included skilled artisans, among them ‘skilled engineering workers’, builders, those in urban crafts, miners, and cotton-spinners.⁶ The unskilled ranks were those of farm workers, domestic help, and the like.

These categories changed over time, but not by very much. In 1956, at the very end of the time period in question, more than two-thirds of a ‘highly representative sample’ of 6,000 Britons aged 16 and above believed that company directors, doctors, research scientists, and members of Parliament belonged to the upper-middle class, while more than two-thirds assigned fitters, carpenters, coal miners, bricklayers, lorry drivers and railway porters to the lower working class. Much less unanimity was found in the perceived social class of clergymen, works managers, film actors, journalists, elementary school teachers, civil

³ Lowerson, J., ‘Social Class’, in *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era*, v. 4, Adams, J.E., ed. (Danbury, CT: Grolier Academic Reference, 2004), pp. 399-405, p. 401.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 402.

⁵ Harrison, J.F.C., *Late Victorian Britain, 1875-1901* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 75.

⁶ Gray, *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, pp. 21-25.

servants, farmers, office clerks, small shopkeepers, factory foremen, electricians and shop assistants, but at least one respondent placed each of these in every category from the upper-middle to the lower-working classes.⁷

Of course the wages of those in the various categories differed markedly. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, Kent and Middlesex had the ‘best-paid labourers’ in England in the late eighteenth century, earning an average of 11s. 4d. per week, *i.e.*, under £30 per year, while working wives in 1793 could realise 6d. to 10d. per day and children 3d. to 4d. each, and more during the harvest.⁸ In Victorian times a shipping clerk, of the lower-middle class, and the average Anglican vicar, earned about £300 per year, and a very successful barrister about £1,000.⁹ Late Victorian England saw a rise in real wages, making salaries ‘about three quarters better’ in the late 1890s than in 1850.¹⁰ Around 1850 unskilled workers were paid an average of £25-30 annually and skilled labourers £37-50, while in late Victorian times the unskilled earned an average of £50 per year,¹¹ and the wages of those in the labour aristocracy were generally about double that.¹²

Considering all this, how far down the social scale were people able to afford pew-rents? According to each of the three synoptic gospels, the scribes and Pharisees ‘love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues’.¹³ In general the impression both in the nineteenth century and now is that only those above the middle-middle class could

⁷ Abrams, M., ‘Class Distinctions in Britain’, in *The Future of the Welfare State: Seven Oxford Lectures* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1958), pp. 61-75, p. 64.

⁸ Burnett, J., *A History of the Cost of Living* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 164, 166; Bennett, J.C., ‘“Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”: The Practice of Pew-renting at Kentish Anglican Churches’ (unpublished MTh dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2006), p. 28.

⁹ Rubenstein, W.D., ‘The Wealthy’, in *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era*, v. 4, Adams, J.E., ed. (Danbury, CT: Grolier Academic Reference, 2004), pp. 168-170, p. 168.

¹⁰ Mingay, G.E., ‘Living Standards’, in *Encyclopedia of the Victorian Era*, v. 2, Adams, J.E., ed. (Danbury, CT: Grolier Academic Reference, 2004), pp. 392-396, p. 392.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 392; Lowerson, ‘Social Class’, p. 402.

¹² Host, J., *Victorian Labour History: Experience, Identity, and the Politics of Representation* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 25.

¹³ Matthew 23:6 (KJV); see also Mark 12:39 and Luke 11:43.

afford to pay pew-rents, although M. H. Port has questioned this assumption.¹⁴ The Tractarians, particularly J.W. Bowden ('Newman's intimate and one of his first recruits to the pages of the *British Critic*'), deplored even the thought that 'the rich, as rich' should be given in churches 'any priority of place'.¹⁵ Douglas Houghton – Lord Houghton of Sowerby, born in 1898¹⁶ – told the Lords in 1992 that pew-rents at the village church when he was a boy had been 'beyond the purse of ordinary citizens'.¹⁷ What he meant by 'ordinary citizens' is, of course, unclear, but the Incorporated Free and Open Church Association in the early twentieth century described pew-renters as the 'rich and selfish' and the 'better-to-do'.¹⁸ Yet for the reasons that follow, this conclusion seems untenable.

First, had the upper- and upper-middle class been the typical pew-renters, the business acumen involved in pew-renting is likely have prompted higher prices for sittings.¹⁹ In general even the best sittings found in this study rarely cost more than £2 a year. The rents were most often set by the Commissioners, who evidently found it prudent to have seats let at lower costs. Churchwardens and incumbents could, of course, raise their church's pew-rents with the consent of the appropriate ordinary, yet few appear to have done so, and little evidence exists of churchwardens soliciting higher payments for better sittings, or receiving offers of greater payments for such seats. Examples can be *found* of intentions to set rents as high as possible, as was experienced by Colonel Jarvis at Dover in the early 1840s, mentioned earlier, and at St Mary-in-the-Castle, Pelham Crescent, Sussex, in 1825, where church officials were to let pews for 'the best and most improved yearly Rent that can be reasonably

¹⁴ Port, M.H., *600 New Churches: The Church Building Commission, 1818-1856* (Reading: Spire Books, 2006) (initially published in 1961 by S.P.C.K. Publishing), p. 218.

¹⁵ Skinner, S.A., *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England': The Social and Political Thought of the Oxford Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 177.

¹⁶ Dalyell, T., 'Obituary: Lord Houghton of Sowerby', *The Independent*, 3 May 1996, at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_19960503/ai_n14043770/pg_1?tag=content;coll

¹⁷ HL Deb 25 February 1992 v. 536 c. 197.

¹⁸ Dymott, S.E., *Ought Our Churches to be Free and Open?* (London: International Free and Open Church Association, c. 1915), p. 3-4.

¹⁹ Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 39.

obtained for the same’.²⁰ And in 1871 the incumbent of St James Chapel, Westmoreland, successfully petitioned to have his pew-rents raised since the scale, ranging from 21/- to 34/- per annum, was ‘not only below that of neighbouring Private chapels but below the scale of St Peter, Nere Street which is under the same Act of Parliament’.²¹ But these instances are rare – far more often even the *best* seats were intentionally rented at *low* prices, whether at the Commissioners’ behest or not. In 1811 at St Martin, Windermere, seats were proposed to be let ‘at moderate rents, to such opulent persons as might think proper to pay rent for Pews to enjoy the benefit of exclusive sittings’.²² At St Peter, Salesbury, Lancashire, the Sentence of Consecration of 8 September 1807 declared that many sittings go for ‘twenty shillings a year for each Pew or Seat’, and a document from January 1890 reflects that ‘there were about 300 appropriated sittings to be let at from about 1s. 3d. to 2/- per annum’ at St Peter.²³

Clearly the price of letting a pew was a pittance to the very rich. Boarding and tuition fees for one son at Harrow in 1890 ranged from £180 to £245.²⁴ Any family sufficiently wealthy to afford such an education is unlikely to have balked at paying £2 or less for the same son to have an allocated seat in church. The Marquis of Camden, who held estates in Wales, Kent and Sussex, rented a pew at St Mark, Audley Street, London, for two years in the early 1860s, evidently for his family to use during the ‘season’ alone.²⁵ Timothy Triebner, Esq., a Kensington merchant evidently of ‘considerable prosperity’ whose spending suggested nearly the highest income bracket in the country, in 1848 spent £87 on clothes for his wife and children, £45 on his own tailor, hatter and cobbler, and twelve guineas on a subscription to the Baltic Coffee House. His pew-rent bill at the nearby church was a total of eight guineas

²⁰ ESRO CHR/16/6/1.

²¹ NA WO 6-343/2.

²² CROK WPR 61/1/3/8.

²³ LaRO PR 3094/2/2.

²⁴ E-mail from Rita Boswell, Harrow School, 18 January 2006; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 29.

²⁵ CKS U840/A55.

a year for all of ten family members, a paltry sum compared to his other expenses.²⁶ The typical 'well-off' household in 1824 was able to give monthly dinner parties for 12, for which £25 would have been spent annually on table ale alone.²⁷ A total outlay of £12-£14 annually to rent the very best pews is unlikely to have bothered such a family. Those in the upper-middle class, particularly families taking in £750 or more annually, also would have thought little or nothing of paying the typical sums asked for pew-rents.

Moreover, had market forces measurably affected Anglican pew-rents, and had renters generally been those of higher incomes than were realised by the middle-middle class, as is commonly thought, the prices would likely have approached those of American pew-rents. These were substantially higher than English ones. H. Stowell Brown wrote in 1888 that 'pew-rents in England are a trifle compared with those charged in American cities'. His American friend mentioned that sittings there were the equivalent of about £8 each,²⁸ and some charged more; in 1867 Mark Twain complained – although evidently exaggerating – that pew-rent in New York was 'just about as high as house rent'.²⁹ Two New York churches in 1908 took in \$44,000 and \$55,000, respectively, from pew-letting,³⁰ and seats at the Providence, Rhode Island Methodist Episcopal Church in 1849 were rented to the highest bidder,³¹ which occurred elsewhere in the USA.³² No English parallel has been found, although at St Mark, Stretford, Manchester, subscribers to rebuilding the church in the 1840s were to 'have choice of Pews at the rents...in order of their amount of subscription'.³³

²⁶ <http://www.serpies.net/brian/family/Viv.html>

²⁷ Drummond, J.C., *The Englishman's Food: A History of Five Centuries of English Diet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1957), p. 336.

²⁸ <http://www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/fulltext/hsb1888/ch19.htm>

²⁹ <http://www.twainquotes.com/18670405.html>

³⁰ <http://www.rootsweb.com/~genepool/montnj15.htm>

³¹ <http://www.rootsweb.com/~palackaw/churches/provme.html>

³² <http://www.rootsweb.com/~paerie/church/albionme.html>

³³ <http://www.manchester2002-uk.com/buildings/churches1.html>

Second, had pew-rents been designed to accommodate only or even primarily the upper- and upper-middle classes, pew-letting would have existed mainly in districts that attracted mainly such people. Initially, the evidence from Bristol suggests it this *was* the case. While only the general rule of thumb substantiated by Pelling³⁴ can be used – that the north and west areas of Bristol were wealthier and the south and east less so – of the 33 churches listed in Table 2, only nine are or were located in the poorer southern and eastern parts of Bristol, while the rest were in the north and west, including five in the exclusive Clifton.

But on closer inspection those nine, and the lack of pew-renting at other churches in the Bristol's exclusive areas, cannot be overlooked. Goodridge, whose period was 1830-1880, found the residents of St Jude's Parish, Bristol, were 'to a great extent of the lowest order of Victorian proletariat',³⁵ but St Jude's charged pew-rents for at least one year during that period, 1868.³⁶ Goodridge also found sizable numbers of labourers and the working class at Sts Philip and Jacob, Bristol,³⁷ and Leech saw such people in the congregation itself in the 1840s,³⁸ although the church charged pew-rents throughout the entire period Goodridge studied.³⁹ Goodridge found the parishioners of Holy Trinity to be mainly 'skilled people like clerks and craftsmen' and that a 'more permanent type of residence' occurred there.⁴⁰ And Meller describes Clifton, Cotham and Redland as 'the exclusive areas,' of Bristol,⁴¹ but the Redland Green Parish Church, All Saints, Clifton, St Andrew the Less, Clifton, and St Peter, Clifton Wood, were *not* found to have charged pew-rents.

³⁴ Pelling, H., *Social Geography of British Elections* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1967), p. 145-6.

³⁵ Goodridge, R.M., 'Religion and the City with Reference to Bristol and Marseilles, 1830-1880: A Study in the Comparative Sociology of Religion' (unpublished MPhil thesis, University of London, 1969), pp. 106, 151, 176.

³⁶ BRRO P/StJu/ChW/1.

³⁷ Goodridge, R.M., 'Religion and the City with Reference to Bristol and Marseilles, 1830-1880', p. 161.

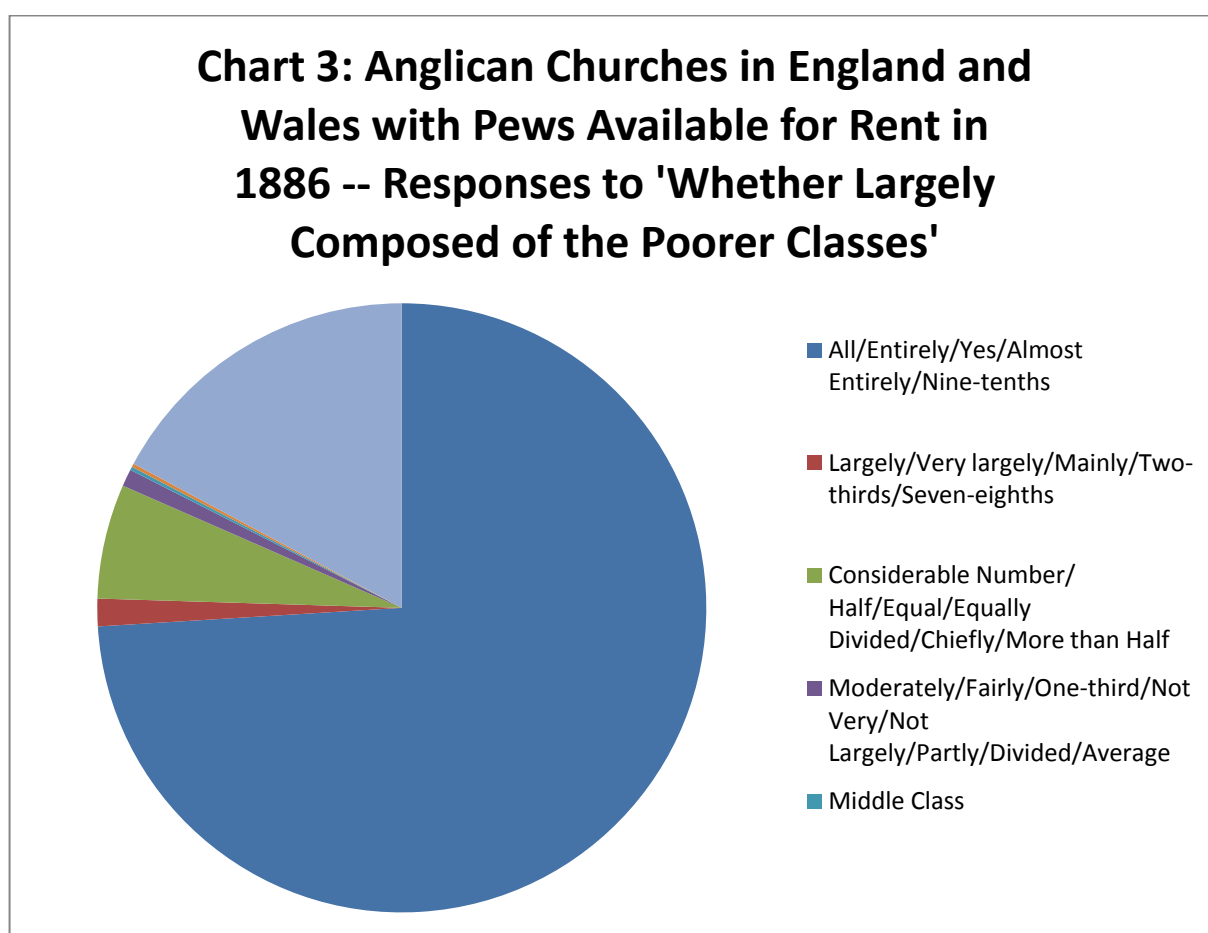
³⁸ Leech, J., *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*, A. Sutton, ed. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Press, 1982), p. 46.

³⁹ BRRO P/StP&J/ChW/3b & P/StP&J/ChW/4a.

⁴⁰ Goodridge, R.M., 'Religion and the City with Reference to Bristol and Marseilles, 1830-1880', p. 161.

⁴¹ Meller, H., *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 81.

And more evidence suggests pew-rents were largely a phenomenon of working-class churches. Of 1,644 churches with pews available for rent in 1886, the vast majority – 1,216, or 74 per cent – in the 1886 Lords’ Select Committee report responded that their congregations were all, almost all, or nine-tenths ‘composed of the Poorer Classes’ for the 1886 Lords’ Select Committee report, while the congregants of a further 24 were at least ‘largely’, ‘mainly’, or ‘two-thirds’ from the ‘Poorer Classes’, and another 110 churches were at least half populated by the poor. Only 292, less than 18 per cent, were not ‘Largely Composed of the Poorer Classes’. The breakdown can be seen in the following chart:



Moreover, most churches built during the *eighteenth* century were ‘for fashionable congregations in the fashionable quarters of towns’ – little provision was made for working people.⁴² Perhaps in consequence, in 1818 the Incorporated Church Building Society was

⁴² Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 200, citing Corfield, P.J., *The Impact of English Towns 1700-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 139.

founded, ‘to help the poorest parishes in both urban and rural areas’⁴³ by making grants on condition that free, unappropriated sittings would be provided, and the Church Building Acts, enacted between 1818 and 1884, similarly intended to provide churches and free sittings where they were most needed.⁴⁴ In Manchester the Anglican response to an early Victorian ‘working class population who lived largely beyond the influence of religion’ was ‘a determined drive to build new churches in unprovided working-class districts.’⁴⁵ These, as shown earlier, were the most likely to rent pews, particularly those built before the 1860s – the new laws explicitly permitted new churches to do so, while making no similar provision for older churches in more prosperous areas. Since about 80 percent were of the working-class, most new churches built in highly populated areas were in or near lower-middle or working-class districts, or would have been accessible to more than one class of congregant; in urban areas several classes might live in relatively close proximity:

Older patterns in which middle and working classes lived in the same vicinity persisted. Just as in the Third World today where high-rise luxury apartments look down on squatter camps, there were localities where slums lay close to the homes and businesses of the rich...⁴⁶

And in those urban areas – the same areas in which it has been demonstrated above that pew-rents were most likely to exist – people often attended churches outside their own parishes:

The Anglican parish system was based on the assumption that parishioners would worship in their own parish churches. In towns, however, it had long been possible for people to walk or ride to a neighbouring church, and some Anglicans, like dissenters, ignored the parochial principle and looked for a church which corresponded with their own religious taste.⁴⁷

Even in a destitute area a church might take in a decent sum for letting its seats. Witnesses at the 1858 House of Lords’ hearings implied that a London dock-side church was ‘so ill

⁴³ Buchanan, A., quoted in <http://www.lambethpalacelibrary.org/news/cpo/pressrelease.html>; <http://www.historicchurches.org.uk/incorporatedchurch.htm>

⁴⁴ Billing, S., *The Laws Relating to Pews in Churches, District Churches, Chapels and Proprietary Chapels: The Rights Incidental Thereto, and the Remedy* (London: W. Benning, 1845), p. 158; <http://www.stlukes-sevenoaks.org.uk/history2.htm>; Bennett, ‘“Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”’, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Hewitt, M., *The Emergence of Stability in the Industrial City: Manchester 1832-67* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), p. 93.

⁴⁶ James, *The Middle Class: A History*, p. 252.

⁴⁷ Rosman, D., *The Evolution of the English Churches, 1500-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 186.

situated that the more respectable class were not disposed to take pews, in consequence of which the clergyman suffered in his income'.⁴⁸ But other testimony reflected that the parish church of St Pancras, located on Euston Road and thus on the edge of Agar Town, an area of 'extreme and almost unmitigated poverty', but also very close to the much more prosperous Bloomsbury, netted about £1,150 in pew-rents that year.⁴⁹

For the other end of the scale, the very poor and the unskilled workers, paying pew-rents would have been unthinkable. Booth's study of London in 1886 concluded that a subsistence income for a 'moderate family' was 18s. to 21s. per week, and Rowntree's study of 1901 York found that merely to keep their heads above water a family of five required 21s. 8d. weekly.⁵⁰ Obviously these would not have taken sittings even for 5s. a year, and although those of slightly higher means might have taken sittings for 2d., as witnesses at the House of Lords' hearings suggested they would,⁵¹ no examples of such low rents have been found. In some places the rents were described as too high; in 1858 the rector of St Clement Danes stated that the worst seats for rent in his church were 10s. each, which this was 'quite above the reach of the poor'.⁵² At St Matthew, Bethnal Green, in 1858, most parishioners were weavers, who when at full employment – which evidently was not very common – earned between 12s. and 15s. a week and paid 2s. 6d. to 3s. per week for a moderate-sized room in which to live.⁵³ These are also unlikely to have been able to afford even the cheapest sittings.

Yet most of those between the upper-middle class and the middle-working class were able to afford *some* sums in pew-rents. At the turn of the twentieth century £500 per year

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 452.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 200, 204.

⁵⁰ Mingay, 'Living Standards', p. 392-393.

⁵¹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into The Deficiency of Means of Spiritual Instruction and Places of Divine Worship in the Metropolis, and in other Populous Districts in England and Wales, especially in the Mining and Manufacturing Districts; and to Consider the Fittest Means of Meeting the Difficulties of the Case; and to Report Thereon to the House; Together With the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: House of Commons, 1858), pp. 40, 58, 419.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

allowed a standard of living on the edge of upper-middle class.⁵⁴ The higher-priced sittings, of £1 10s. to £2 each, were within the range of the more prosperous of the middle-middle class – those who anticipated £300-400 annually. In 1858 the *Times* asked whether £300 was a sufficient income to support a married gentleman;⁵⁵ Such a gentleman, his wife and four children probably could afford six sittings in the middle range of pews, costing a total of perhaps £4 to £5 per year, but seating himself and his family in the better seats at St Michael & All Angels, Sydenham, would have cost him ten guineas annually, or over three percent of his annual £300. This might well have been beyond his means, particularly if he had additional relatives to support.⁵⁶ The lower-middle class would likely have been able to afford 12s. or slightly more per sitting, and the more prosperous of the labour aristocracy, earning £100 a year, could probably have afforded 10s. for each family member in the lower-priced pews. And these people were often inclined to rent sittings; as in any age, the more prosperous tradesmen and professionals ‘tended to behave as a social tail of the upper class’.⁵⁷

Sometimes, though, the rents were set too high for the locals to pay. In 1863 the churchwardens of Christ Church, Highbury Grove, complained to the incumbent of St Mary, Islington, that rents of 33/- per year were ‘very onerous upon those Inhabitants who require several Sittings for their families’,⁵⁸ and indeed even for the middle-middle class such a price might well have been too high. But virtually all Anglican churches had a number of seats for lower rents than this.

Based on all this, the conclusion seems inescapable that congregants renting pews were *generally* of the lower-middle and middle-middle classes, with the elite working class

⁵⁴ Mingay, ‘Living Standards’, p. 395.

⁵⁵ Burnett, *A History of the Cost of Living*, p. 234.

⁵⁶ Bennett, J.C., ‘“Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”’, p. 28.

⁵⁷ Smith, M., *Religion in Industrial Society: Oldham and Saddleworth, 1740-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 25, citing Foster, J.O., *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974), p. 166.

⁵⁸ LMA P83/CTC/10/1-4.

and upper-middle class also strongly represented among those taking rented sittings. If these were the typical pew-renters, then the modest rents asked – often 12s. or less – are not surprising. People of these classes are likely to have lived near the new churches, the ones most likely to charge pew-rents. Whether or not the urban middle-middle, lower-middle and working-class churches were overrepresented among the total pew-renting churches, due to the profusion of pew-renting churches in urban areas and the fact that the working class was the great mass of the population, most of those below the upper-middle class were likely to live close enough to a pew-renting church to attend, if they went at all.

The evidence seems to reflect that typical pew-renters were in these economic classes.

In 1924 Sidney Webb, born in 1859 to a lower-middle class family,⁵⁹ stated that

When I was a lad in London most people paid pew-rents, and they had a pew in church according to the pew-rent they paid. Of course, there were some free seats, in which hardly anyone was ever seen, because it was not considered respectable. The notion really was that you had to pay for your religious service, and you got the religious service you paid for.⁶⁰

Webb was not alone in noticing at that time that those wanting to be considered ‘respectable’ shied away from the free seats. In 1843 Joseph Leech found that ‘the sobriety of my snuff-coloured coat saved [him] from that intensity of gaze to which a well-dressed person in a free seat or an open standing is subjected’. In the following year Leech also observed that

when a man in a sound suit of broadcloth sits on the same bench with the poor in a parish church, the people around, who never think of offering him a pew, are only too ready to invent an unworthy motive for him, and attribute the act to ‘the pride that apes humility,’ the most contemptible pride of all in my opinion.⁶¹

Later, though, as was noted in a 1907 Lords debate, the respectability factor had in some places gone by the wayside – churches whose rent-free seats were just as good as the rented ones might see congregants eschewing rented sittings in favour of the free ones.⁶²

⁵⁹ O’Connor, D.E., *The Basics of Economics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004), p. 98.

⁶⁰ HC Deb 07 May 1924 v. 173 c. 585.

⁶¹ Leech, J., *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*, Sutton, A., ed. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1982), pp. 21, 176.

⁶² HL Deb 22 July 1907 v. 178 c. 1084.

But some pew-renters, perhaps a good-sized minority, were clearly from either the upper-middle class or the labour aristocracy. Lists of pew-renters whose occupations can be ascertained reflect that those of the middle-middle, lower-middle and upper-working classes were, very generally, owners of businesses that were more profitable than those of the ‘penny capitalists’, but much less than those of magnates – *i.e.*, run by people who took an active role in the labour their businesses required and managed the labour of no more than a few others. This may be less than surprising in light of the knowledge that ‘the skilled working class of artisans and tradesmen’ were ‘particularly numerous’ in congregations from 1800 to 1960.⁶³ But their predominance among the list of pew-renters, and the noticeable absence of those working *for* others, such as factory managers, those performing jobs on the railway, and the like, is significant. These small business owners had a ‘strong pride in their craft and its culture’.⁶⁴ Especially in years of profitable harvests, they could likely spare a total of £1 or so per year to rent one or more lower-priced sittings.

Small business owners of the middle-middle and lower-middle class frequently appear on lists of pew-renters from before the start of the period studied up to the turn of the twentieth century. Occupations of pew-renters are listed in the records of St Martin-in-the-Fields from the late 1750s; while many are indecipherable, those which can be determined are two cabinetmakers, a watchmaker, a surgeon, a silversmith, a mercer, a haberdasher, a coachmaker and a glazier.⁶⁵ In 1780, for example, a reedmaker agreed to pay £1 10s. annually to rent a pew in the middle aisle of Wigan Church.⁶⁶ In 1848 at St Mary, Gateshead, a rat-catcher rented four sittings.⁶⁷ The 1881 pew-rent book of St George, Wigan, showing

⁶³ Brown, C.G., *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge 2001), p. 156.

⁶⁴ Crossick, G., *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London 1840-1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 135.

⁶⁵ CWAC F122 & F123.

⁶⁶ WA DD AN/Bundle 1/8.

⁶⁷ DuRO EP/Ga.SM 5/5.

renters from 1880,⁶⁸ has been compared to the 1881 census records and a commercial directory of Lancashire from the same year containing a separate section for Wigan with an alphabetical list of ‘Clergy, Gentry, Professors, Manufacturer’s, Tradesmen, and Principal Householders’.⁶⁹ The documents reflect that the jobs of those renting pews were generally business owners of the lower middle class, with a few indicating the upper working class:

Ironmonger
 Tailor & draper
 Three boot & shoemakers
 Potato dealer
 Flour traveler
 Solicitor’s managing clerk
 Three householders
 Seedsman & florist
 Clerk
 Manufacturer of India rubber, gutta-percher articles & leather; dealer in clothing, etc.,
 & agent for insurance company
 Grocer
 Tobacconist
 Grocer & provision dealer
 Two watchmakers
 Milliner & draper
 Licensed victualler
 Travelling draper
 Chemist
 Traveller
 Governor of workhouse
 Cabinet maker
 Rag & marine store dealer
 Furniture dealer
 ‘Vetenary’ (Veterinary) surgeon
 Two listed as ‘Dr’.

Three pew-owners privately let their sittings to others; those renters whose occupations can be determined from the census and commercial directory records were the traffic manager for the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Company, the wife of a clerk, and the wife of a mining engineer.

The records of Newchurch-in-Rossendale, Lancashire, from 1825 also list the occupations of the pew-renters, similarly showing predominantly lower-middle and middle-middle class positions, with the upper-middle class and labour aristocracy also represented:

⁶⁸ WA DP 28/7/1.

⁶⁹ Worrall’s *Commercial Directory of Lancashire and Adjoining Districts* (Oldham: Worrall’s, 1881).

Fourteen wool manufacturers
Four fullers
Four inn keepers
Two widows
Two yeomen
Two gentleman
Machine maker
Book keeper
Spinster
Stone mason
Shoe maker
Cotton spinner.⁷⁰

Using the descriptions given by Gray, above,⁷¹ the four fullers and the cotton spinner appear to be of the labour aristocracy.

Other churches reflect a somewhat higher class of pew-renters. In 1819 at the Worthing chapel of ease, pews were sold for particular sums of money paid to the incumbent, but also subject to an annual payment to the chapel – the occupations of those paying for such pews up to 1871, with the amounts they initially paid, were generally *upper*-middle class, with some of the middle-middle and lower-middle classes, and one or two of the upper-working class mixed in. The generally higher class of renters here is to be expected since, unlike in almost all other churches, sittings at this Worthing chapel often required a large initial payment. The occupations listed are:

tailor (£27 plus £1 10s. annual rent)
confectioner (£8)
tin man (£17)
a clerk and an auctioneer together (10s.)
two bakers (£10 10s; & £8, respectively)
two clerks (£15; £1)
three grocers (£10; £5; one buying three pews at different times, £5 10s., 10s., & 5s.)
two carpenters (£10 & £6)
architect/surveyor (£1)
doctor of medicine (£1)
brewer (£15)
dealer in china (£6)
two poulterers (£5 & £5 10s.)
plumber/painter (£12 10s.)
jeweller (£2 10s)
collector of taxes (£4 3s. 9d.)
ten gentlemen (£20; £10 and £9 for two pews; £11; £5; £18; £23; £12 12s.; £40, 5s.; £5)

⁷⁰ MALS L75/2/5/4.

⁷¹ Gray, *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, pp. 21-25.

dairyman (£11 10s.)
poulterer (£5 10s)
solicitor (£8)
eight esquires (£13 13s.; £9, £5 5s.; £33 10s.; £8 8s.; £16; £12; £10).⁷²

From 1871 to 1880 the picture is similar:

fifteen gentlemen (three at 5s. each; three at £10 each; two at £8 each; £60; £2; £20; L7 7s.;
£21; £11; £11 11s., respectively)
gentlewoman (£12)
plumber (5s.)
collector of Queen's Taxes (5s.)
bath chair proprietor (£2 2s.)
innkeeper (£10 10s.)
printer/stationer (£5)
three grocers (£5; £3; 5s.)
jeweller (£20)
chemist (£2 10s.)
six solicitors (£7; £13; £10; £18; £4; £18 18s.)
photographer (£1)
widow (£11 11s.)
builder (£3)
Admiral in Her Majesty's Navy (£5)
two solicitor's clerks (£20; £27)
stationer (£7)
plumber (£14)
upholsterer (£18)
solicitor (£5)
three esquires (£20; £25; £10 10s).⁷³

And the same pattern occurred from 1880 onwards:

clerk (£1)
builder's clerk (10s.)
manager of the Worthing Gas Company (£1)
chemist (two pews at £1 each)
music seller (£5)
paperhanger (£1)
cabinet-maker (5s.)
three solicitors (£34, £5; £12 10s, respectively)
esquire (£4 10s.)
two builders (5s.; 10s.)
two spinsters (each £5 in two separate transactions)
job master (£3)
professor of music (£1 10s.)
hotel keeper (£3 10s.)
stationer (£4)
two gentlemen (£2 and £9 9s., respectively).⁷⁴

⁷² LPL, CB 8206, pt. 1B (although only the very first conveyance listed mentions an annual rent, i.e., 'One Shilling for every Twenty Shillings of the said Purchase Money or Sum', the chapel's Pew E had been bought before 1857, but the trustees in that year took possession of the pew due two 'an arrear of the reserved rent due thereon and unpaid, after being lawfully demanded'. The presumption that the sold pews were also subject to rent therefore appears justified).

⁷³ LPL CB 8206, pt. 3.

A higher class rented pews at Bickley Parish, Kent, in 1891 – of the six that can be identified from the paltry information recorded, one was a ‘Barrister Q.C. Solicitor’, and four were in banking, foreign trade or brokering, while one was a retired warehouseman.⁷⁵

More evidence appears from a list of ‘voluntary contributions’ for sittings at Holy Trinity, Wordsley, Kingswinford, from 1847-8, giving renters’ surnames, often their Christian names or initials, and the vicinities of their residences.⁷⁶ Using online census data from 1841 and 1851,⁷⁷ the ages and occupations of 32 reflect mainly the lower-middle class, with several of the labour aristocracy⁷⁸ – a carpenter, a crate maker, two blacksmiths and a glass cutter:

Three iron masters
Two maltsters
Two glassmakers
Two labourers
Two ‘independent’
Two ‘licensed victuallers’
‘Victualler’
Shoemaker
Glazier
Coal Miner Miner Master’
‘Grocer & C’
Carpenter
Farmer
Blacksmith
‘Blacksmith Empl. 5 Men’
Boatman
Flour seller
‘Nailor’
Tailoress
Crate maker
Builder
Organist
Parish clerk
Journeyman glass cutter
Fireman

The youngest was the grocer, 23, and the eldest the tailoress, 71. The average age was 42.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ BLSA PD47D/5/1; ancestry.co.uk.

⁷⁶ DALHC PR/KIN(W)/II/4/2.

⁷⁷ <http://www.1901censusonline.com/>

⁷⁸ Harrison, *Late Victorian Britain, 1875-1901*, p. 75.

⁷⁹ DALHC PR/KIN(W)/11/4/2.

And a 'Seating Book' from 1780 to 1864 of St John, Cirencester, Gloucestershire, reflects a circumstance which seems to fly in the face of the impression that pew-renters were generally of the middle-middle class and higher. The most expensive sittings cost £1, and the occupations of the renters are generally those of the lower-middle class and labour aristocracy: servants, coachmakers, shoemakers, cutlers, bakers, the odd pork butcher and 'cooper's sister', and the like. In 1854 in Seat 4 – evidently a pew since it had eight sittings – most of those listed have the surname 'Date', and their profession is given as 'cheese factor'. Two Date daughters are among those listed. And interestingly, a male Date not only paid for his own sitting and possibly those of children or his wife, but an additional £1 for a seat 'for a barmaid'.⁸⁰ Thomas Hardy is likely to have echoed the thoughts of many Victorians in *Jude the Obscure*, where 'the sexual immorality of the voluptuous Arabella Donn is presumed to be exacerbated by her choice of bar-work'.⁸¹ Had the Date wives and children in Cirencester Church felt themselves to be much above the top of the working class, one wonders whether they would have agreed to share their pew with a someone outside their family whose profession Victorian society would scarcely consider respectable. Letting a barmaid into their pew where she might mingle with their daughters is likely to have been even less acceptable to those considering themselves the 'quality'.

In addition, at St Mary, Windermere, Cumbria, in 1901, the occupations of 22 of the 79 pew-renters listed can be ascertained from the 1901 census records. Small business owners are still represented, but those of higher and lower status are also notable. The occupations listed include four who were clearly of the upper working class – a 'coach body maker', a 'gardener domestic', a lodging housekeeper and a 'machine pattern maker':

Seven 'living on own means'
Two retired schoolmasters
Doctor of medicine

⁸⁰ GA P86/1 CW 4/8.

⁸¹ Liggins, E., 'Her Appearance in Public: Sexual Danger, Urban Space and the Working Woman', in *George Gissing: Voices of the Unclassed*, Ryle, M.H. & Taylor, J.B., eds. (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), p. 37.

‘Hotel Proprietor Pub’
Coach body maker
Bank manager
‘Joiner & Builder’
Clergyman
Retired chemical analyst
‘Solicitor & commissioner’
Solicitor
‘Stockbroker & Insurance Agent’
‘Gardener Domestic’
Machine pattern maker
Lodging housekeeper⁸²

The average age of these renters was 53 – slightly higher than that of Wordsley more than fifty years before. Those ‘living on their own means’ were not necessarily retired; several were in their thirties.

Finally, the same sort of data arises from the records of St Mary, Lewisham, in 1903-4, where 34 separate pew-renters are listed, although the typical renter appears to be of the middle-middle or upper-middle class. Again, though, the labour aristocracy was represented, here by three of the twelve whose occupations could be determined – a grocer’s shopkeeper, a tailor and a butcher. This is not surprising for Lewisham. Late Victorian society experienced a ‘massive demand’ for clerical, *i.e.*, skilled, labour,⁸³ and by 1880 skilled workers were a prominent part of the Lewisham populace. By Edwardian times many Lewisham churches charged pew-rents.⁸⁴ The twelve renters at St Mary were:

Light manufacturer
Civil engineer
Secretary to Public Company
Stock jobber
Ship broker
Shipping forwarding agent
Shipping agent
Grocer’s shopkeeper
Butcher
Tailor
Wife of Brewery Manager
Civil service clerk⁸⁵

⁸² CROK WPR 104/107.

⁸³ Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society*, p. 114.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁸⁵ LLSA SM1/3/80.

In sum, the average occupation of all pew-renters available in this study came from the lower-middle and middle-middle classes, with some of the upper-middle and upper-working classes mixed in. Dillow asks whether pew-rents were ‘a means by which wealth and status could more easily be established than by the workings of the customary system’.⁸⁶ The answer appears to be that pew-rents established neither. Typical pew-renters were of neither very great wealth nor relatively high status.

The Gender of Pew-renters

Much less solid evidence exists regarding the gender of those who rented sittings. Those who actually paid the money is rarely given; in most cases records reveal only the surname of the person who handed over the money, and where first names or ‘Mr’, ‘Mrs’ or ‘Miss’ are given, males predominate, particularly earlier in the period under study, and much less so after the First World War, which caused almost two million British women to be described as ‘Our Surplus Girls’.⁸⁷

Those who actually sat in rented church sittings are likely to have been female, if only because of the predominance of women among churchgoers in the period studied here.⁸⁸ More concrete evidence is provided by the records of St John Baptist, Cirencester, from 1780 to 1864, in which are listed those for whom pew-rents were actually paid. At least as many females as males are listed, including girls.⁸⁹

Later on, particularly in the interwar period, women are even more likely to have sat in rented pews, not only because of the generally greater tendency of females to attend church but also because the women on whom spinsterhood was forced appear to have participated

⁸⁶ Dillow, K.B., *The Social and Ecclesiastical Significance of Church Seating Arrangements and Pew Disputes, 1500-1740* (Oxford University, 1990), p. 107; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 38.

⁸⁷ Nicholson, V., *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 22.

⁸⁸ See e.g. Hempton, D., “‘Popular Religion’ 1800-1986”, in *The British: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices, 1800-1986*, Thomas, T., ed. (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 196.

⁸⁹ GA P86/1 CW 4/8.

more fully in church life, and were therefore more likely to support their churches by renting sittings. Nicholson, who studied in great detail the plight of the many women whose marital possibilities died with the appalling numbers of fatalities in the Great War, notes that at Stoke-on-Trent, ‘The Misses would come to Evensong at St Jude’s...’most faithfully, wearing their sensible hats, their grey or fawn coats, their sensible shoes”.⁹⁰ This course of action was particularly recommended by Noel Streatfield for older spinsters like herself: ‘Go to church regularly even if you don’t feel like it. God understands it’s tough growing old and will help you to be pleasant about it.’⁹¹

The Social Class of Those who *Administered* Pew-rents

Many of those administering pew-rent systems were also often drawn from the lower-middle and middle-middle classes, including small business owners, at least in Kentish London. While in 1858 a solicitor served as churchwarden of Sudbury, for ‘love of the church’,⁹² as did another solicitor in Plumstead in 1852, a banker’s clerk served as a churchwarden in Greenwich in 1874, a soap manufacturer was a churchwarden on and off at the same church for three decades, and a shoemaker served on the vestry.⁹³ At Smeeth Parish, Kent, in 1847, an architect was a churchwarden, and in 1868 a blacksmith served in that capacity.⁹⁴ A wheelwright was a churchwarden in Woolwich in 1855.⁹⁵ At Holy Trinity, Maidstone, as well, from 1848 to 1854 the churchwardens included a hatter, a surgeon, a bookseller, a grocer, a linen draper, and a cornfactor.⁹⁶ These were mainly from the lower-middle and middle-middle classes, and at least the blacksmith and hatter were likely to have

⁹⁰ Nicholson, *Singled Out*, p. 135.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁹² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 377.

⁹³ Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society*, pp. 89, 99, 104.

⁹⁴ CKS P4B/8/2.

⁹⁵ Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society*, p. 100.

⁹⁶ CKS P241A/8/4.

been from the upper working class. 'It seems doubtful that churchwardening was widely regarded as a suitable occupation for a gentleman.'⁹⁷ The pew-renters would likely have been 'at home' with, and close to the social standing of, the typical churchwarden.

Pew-rents Paid for Servants

At the turn of the twentieth century 'a few hundred pounds was the basis for keeping a servant'.⁹⁸ This income was typical of those of the middle-middle class and those above it. Of those servants who sat in rented sittings, the rents were generally paid by their employers, at least where the servants were 'live-in' ones. Sometimes employers paid relatively substantial sums for their servants' sittings; until 1858 the Oxford and Cambridge University Club paid £8 8s. for its employees to use pews at St Philip, Regent Street.⁹⁹ In the early nineteenth century the government paid pew-rent for the holder of the important office of Master of the Horse – this was included in his budget as part of 'Sundry other small expenses'.¹⁰⁰ Generally servants sat near, but behind, their employers, but some exceptions exist; special 'Servants' Pews' were designated at the proprietary Octagon Episcopal Chapel, Bath, in the mid-1860s, in which sittings cost less than a third of the chapel's best seats.¹⁰¹

Social Class and the Choice of Sittings

At least in some churches, renting the *most expensive* pews appears to have been related to status up to mid-Victorian times. But later, the fact of *having* rented sittings, rather than having the best ones or the particular cost of the pews one rented, was evidently the crucial desire; in many churches, as the demand for sittings waned, the desire to have the best

⁹⁷ Knight, F., *The Nineteenth-century Church and English Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 185-6.

⁹⁸ Mingay, 'Living Standards', p. 395.

⁹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxford_and_Cambridge_Club

¹⁰⁰ *The Extraordinary Black Book: An Exposition of Abuses in Church and State*, Wade, J., ed. (London: Effingham Wilson, 1832; reprinted by Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, New York, NY, 1970), p. 236.

¹⁰¹ SRO D\P\ba.mi/4/1/45.

seats closest to the front evidently also waned. At the earlier time, as reflected by the records of St Philip, Maidstone, from 1858-64, congregants changed pews (or were reseated by churchwardens) more often than they could have changed their social status – few congregants sat in the same pew for more than two years at a time. Exceptions include the Cooke family, who sat in pew 31 from 1858-64, and the Oakley family in another from 1864-8.¹⁰² Records sometimes reflect that a family rented seats in more than one pew, or that different family members rented sittings some distance away from each other, most likely from necessity. In the 1937 list of renters at St Paul, Cliftonville, Margate, a Miss G. Watson of 44 Ethelbert Road rented two sittings in pew 3, while a Miss A. Watson, also of 44 Ethelbert Road, rented a single sitting, initially in pew 3 as well. However, the ‘3’ across from Miss A. Watson’s name is crossed out and replaced by a note that her sitting would be in pew 14 – then the ‘14’ is also scored through, and she was assigned a place in pew 9.¹⁰³ Whether this reflects a lack of space in pews 3 and 14, or their desire that they sit apart, cannot of course be ascertained.

But by the late nineteenth or early twentieth century the more desirable pews closer to the front were evidently no longer regarded as an indication of social status: the St Philip, Maidstone, *Pew Rents Account Book* from 1889 to 1922 reveals that at that time, where sittings became vacant closer to the front, the renters of the more remote pews did *not* move forward to the empty, more desirable seats even where the pews they occupied were let at the same rent as the vacant ones. No diagram of pew numbers is available, but this phenomenon is shown by a comparison of the pews over several years. In 1906-7, for example, a block of 10s.-per-sitting pews numbered 4 to 7 with eight sittings each was not full: three sittings among two families were rented in pew 4; two congregants apparently not in the same family occupied pew 5; pew 6 had six sittings rented among three families; and pew 7 had two

¹⁰² CKS P241G/5/A/7; Bennett, ““Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly””, p. 12.

¹⁰³ CCA U3/281/5/A1.

sittings rented, both for members of one family. The next year, despite numerous vacancies, the same families sat in the same pews, with the exception of one of the three families in pew 6, which no longer rented sittings in this block. Whether pew 4 or pew 7 was closer to the altar, and therefore previously more of a status symbol than the other, evidently neither families nor individuals moved forward to fill the almost empty, closer pew. The records are not sufficiently detailed for each year to make many more generalisations, but this pattern continued in pews 4 to 7 until at least 1914-15, and can also be seen from 1906-8 in pews 32 to 35, each rented at 4s. per sitting, and in pews 37 to 40, at 8s. per seat.¹⁰⁴ The records of St Nicholas, Rochester, reflect a similar phenomenon starting in 1894-5.¹⁰⁵ Possibly churchwardens restricted established tenants' movement to closer pews in the hope that vacant seats closer to the front would attract other renters, but this seems unlikely¹⁰⁶ – a note written in April, 1929, by a pew-renter to the churchwardens of St Gabriel, Westminster, stated he would be grateful to be informed should a Miss Rossignol give up her pew, so that he would have 'the opportunity of changing in case I decide that I like her seat better than my own'.¹⁰⁷ Had the question of a pew's attraction been much influenced by its proximity to the chancel, the note's writer would have known immediately which he preferred. By 1950 congregants' wish to have the nearest pews to the altar and pulpit evidently had waned completely. In the vestry minutes of St Katharine's, Bishopston, for example, one member noted a 'general desire to sit toward the back of the Church', which the vicar disliked, pointing out 'the depressing effect of having to talk over an expanse of empty rows'.¹⁰⁸

Pew-renters were also likely to have been those who attended churches regularly. Other than those who had residences in other towns, whose absence from church could be

¹⁰⁴ CKS P241G/5/A/8.

¹⁰⁵ MALSC P306/5/3.

¹⁰⁶ Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 9-10.

¹⁰⁷ CWAC 1436/45/24 (underlining in original).

¹⁰⁸ BRRO P/StK/PCC/1(c).

easily explained by their being away, one would not expect congregants to rent sittings unless they planned to use them frequently, unless they made a gesture of allowing others, including the congregation at large, to use them, or unless they had several residences in different parts of the country and felt that renting sittings was socially required. Renters who did not normally attend church or who went to several different churches or chapels would, by the act of renting but not using pews, show the entire congregation when they were not in church for a particular service. The absence might be covered up fairly quickly if the first lesson rule was used, but especially if the rent-free seats were full or close to being full, the empty space in the rented sittings would be obvious.

The Reasons for Small Business Owners to Rent Pews

Having a place of one's own, in which one could leave one's prayer book or bible and not have to carry it from home to church and back every week, seems likely to be the most obvious catalyst for renting sittings. But another impetus, particularly for the owners of small businesses, also appears likely. Since rentable pews were almost always nearer the altar than rent-free seats and therefore some distance from the main door, as renters took their seats they would be seen by potential customers. The renters were likely to have been known to their fellow congregants, and having churchgoers seeing a small business owner regularly attend church is likely to have been good for business. Visual advertising was common in Victorian times. Before the Underground carried huge numbers of commuters into London each day, the roads leading to the city were choked with traffic, including 'large advertising vans pulled by horses whose very purpose [was] to be seen by as many passers-by as possible'¹⁰⁹. Pew-rents may have conferred respectability, but it is likely they also allowed visual advertising of one's business to local consumers via the respectability of being seen to have paid for a sitting in church, an opportunity which entrepreneurs likely would have welcomed. The many who

¹⁰⁹ Wolmar, C., *The Subterranean Railway: How the London Underground was Built and How it Changed the City Forever* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), p.19.

worked in skilled crafts may have rented sittings hoping to be hired to provide work for the church; Knight notes that in the nineteenth century, ‘All archdeacons agreed that when botching local workmen, as opposed to skilled craftsmen, were employed by churchwardens in the interests of economy, hideous results followed.’¹¹⁰

Pew-rents also would have been a conspicuous sign of how much money one has given the church, but have a unique advantage over the collection plate in that renters can pay in private and might make arrangements with the churchwardens or other collectors to fall behind in the payments and catch up, after the next harvest or pay-day or whenever they expect their finances to be solvent.

Privileges Accorded to Pew-renters

Pew-renters sometimes were given privileges that other congregants did not enjoy. The right to elect their own churchwarden has been mentioned – pew-renters’ churchwardens were accordingly elected at St Mark, Stretford, Manchester,¹¹¹ St Paul, Clapham,¹¹² and several other parishes – at Southborough, Kent, in the 1850s, vestry meetings were:

not vestry meetings in the proper sense of the term, but merely meetings of the incumbent and pew renters of the church, held in pursuance of stat. 1 & 2 W. 5, c. 38, s. 16, for the appointment of churchwardens to manage the church and collect the pew rents.¹¹³

One church, Christ Church, St Pancras, had a churchwarden chosen by the pew-renters as early as 1838.¹¹⁴ At St George, Deal, in the mid-1880s, only pew-renters – and seatholders who did not pay rent, if any – were themselves allowed to decide whether rents should be increased. There, while any communicant could vote, only seatholders were eligible to be elected to the Church Council, where in 1885 a ‘proposal to increase the seat rents was

¹¹⁰ Knight, *The Nineteenth-century Church and English Society*, p. 172.

¹¹¹ MALS L89/1/10/1.

¹¹² LMA P95/PAU1/18.

¹¹³ *Viner v. Churchwardens*, 2 EL. & EL. 9, 15 (1859).

¹¹⁴ LMA P90/CTC/2/166.

negatived without a division'.¹¹⁵ At St Andrew, Deal, a churchwarden 'for the Pew renters' was elected annually from 1855 to 1867; in 1868 and 1869 the same churchwarden was said to act 'on behalf of the pew renters and parishioners', but became the 'parish warden' in 1870 and later 'warden for the parishioners and congregation'.¹¹⁶

Pew-renters' role in church operations was occasionally only an advisory one. The renters at Holy Trinity, Margate, evidently had no actual authority to make alterations, but the incumbent presided over at least one of their meetings in October 1883, asking their opinions of whether the organ should be removed and whether the pulpit and reading desk should be lowered. Also, while the incumbent himself was not in favour of replacing the pews with newer ones, 'it was another matter whether they could not be made more comfortable than they happened to be'. The pew-renters responded by making various recommendations.¹¹⁷

But sometimes more tangible benefits were given. When pew-letting was finally abandoned at Christ Church, Helme, in 1952, the vicar's letter in the parish magazine noted that 'these Pew Rents have always carried the privilege of burial in our churchyard'.¹¹⁸ At St Mary Magdalene, Maidenhead, in 1822, prices were set at 10s. per sitting, although regulations signed by the incumbent, churchwardens and mayor stated that:

It is also hoped that the price affixed to the Sittings can neither be subject to any reasonable objection, nor seriously inconvenience those who in the habit of occupying them, especially as it is intended that the persons thus contributing shall be exempt from all further demand for lighting and warming the chapel.¹¹⁹

The extra privileges sometimes extended to the right to choose church officials other than a churchwarden. In 1825 pew-renters and pew-owners contributing at least £50 to certain churches had the legal right to elect trustees, who would in turn nominate the incumbent.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ CCA U3/67/8/1.

¹¹⁶ CCA U3/271/8/A1.

¹¹⁷ CCA U3/268/6/B/16.

¹¹⁸ WYASW WDP 177/10/1/6, 23 October 1952.

¹¹⁹ BRO D/EX 1625/4/4.

¹²⁰ 5 Geo. IV, c. 103, s. 6 & 7; *Fowler v. Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol*, L.R. 4 C.P. 668, 677 (1869).

In 1851 the ‘Pew and Seat Renters’ of Holy Trinity, Sheerness, elected the church’s organist, who received all the proceeds from the pew-rents,¹²¹ and the pew-renters of St Leonard, Streatham, in 1854 decided not only the salary of the organist but also of the blower and singers, who would also be paid from the pew-rents.¹²² In 1857, the pew-renters of Christ Church, Milton-next-Gravesend, had the power to employ and *sack* the organist.¹²³ And at St Matthias, Richmond, a meeting of the pew-renters in 1896 approved the purchase of a chancel screen with gates and ‘a crucifix and figures of the Virgin Mary and St John’ on top.¹²⁴ At St George, Deal, the Church Council to which only pew-renters (and other seat-holders, if any) dealt with matters such as replacing church windows and approving a special collection for an evening lectureship.¹²⁵ And at St Barnabas, Openshaw, Manchester, the pew-renters had the privilege of auditing the churchwardens’ accounts from 1851 to 1853.¹²⁶

Sometimes, as well, pew-renters also acted as a group. At St Paul, Camden Square, the pew-renters wrote to their vicar in 1864 demanding an explanation for the dismissal of the curate, whom the vicar paid a ‘wretched pittance’ of £30 per year, and who was much more popular than the vicar. The latter turned the pew-renters away with a brief explanation they considered unsatisfactory, and a subsequent appeal to the bishop was unfavourable.¹²⁷ The pew-renters joined for the same purpose at St George, Waterloooville in the late 1840s.¹²⁸ When in 1775 the Liverpool parish church was to have its walls rebuilt, the congregants who paid pew-rents joined forces to oppose any suggestion of removing existing galleries.¹²⁹

¹²¹ CKS P254B/28/1.

¹²² LAD P/S/1/47.

¹²³ MALSC P252C/8/1.

¹²⁴ *Vicar of Richmond v. All Persons Having Interest*, P. 70, 75 (1896).

¹²⁵ CCA U3/67/8/1.

¹²⁶ MALS M389/3.

¹²⁷ *Report of Committee to Pew-renters, St Paul’s Church, Camden Square, N.W.* (London: Waterlow & Sons, 1864), at British Library, 4108.aa.37.

¹²⁸ PMR 626A/1/6/1-2.

¹²⁹ http://www.livpc.co.uk/OLSN_Brief_History.htm

In summary

This chapter has detailed the types of Anglican congregants who generally rented sittings – the lower-middle and middle-middle classes, with those of the upper-middle class and labour aristocracy together forming a significant minority. This is supported both in the class of congregants paying for sittings and in those who managed the practice – the churchwardens. Consequently, renting a pew demonstrated neither high status nor great wealth, as others have suggested. Finally, the owners of small businesses are shown to have been disproportionately high among the lists of pew-renters.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PRIVATE PEW-RENTING

Where the demand for seats exceeded the supply in parish churches, or where a demand or perceived demand for church sittings otherwise existed, Anglican proprietary chapels were sometimes built, and those who owned or had faculties or prescriptions in particular pews in parish churches or chapels of ease might be tempted to rent their sittings to others. This chapter documents the instances of each that have been found in the period under study. The chapter draws heavily on the facts Albert Pomfret used in his 2002 thesis on proprietary chapels, despite that work's relative dearth of significant analysis.

Proprietary Chapels

The first known proprietary chapel was established in 1642, and until 1820 many more were licensed, although only one in the London Diocese was closed.¹ Proprietary chapels had their heyday from about 1800 to 1840, and as many as 200 operated in England in 1824.² The proximity of proprietary chapels, however, did not necessarily take up so much seat-renting business that churches could not let their own pews; the parish church of St Pancras in 1858, for example, took in about £1,150 annually in pew-rents even though three proprietary chapels and other Anglican institutions also held services in the area.³

Little evidence survives of the amounts English proprietary chapels charged for seats. In his study of proprietary chapels Pomfret found no extant pew-rent books at all.⁴ Running such a chapel was evidently no easy feat; in 1871 a Brighton resident noted that proprietary

¹ Pomfret, A., 'An Ethical Evaluation of the Historical Significance of Proprietary Chapels' (unpublished PhD thesis, Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 2002), p. 32.

² Burkill, M., *The Parish System: The Same Yesterday, Today and Forever?* (London: The Latimer Trust, 2005), p. 30, at <http://www.latimertrust.org/download/ls59burkill.pdf>

³ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into The Deficiency of Means of Spiritual Instruction and Places of Divine Worship in the Metropolis, and in other Populous Districts in England and Wales, especially in the Mining and Manufacturing Districts; and to Consider the Fittest Means of Meeting the Difficulties of the Case; and to Report Thereon to the House; Together With the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: House of Commons, 1858), pp. 204-205.

⁴ Pomfret, *An Ethical Evaluation of the Historical Significance of Proprietary Chapels*, p. 59.

chapels ‘are very complicated affairs – it is difficult enough to manage the affairs of one, but I think it would take more than a Bismarck to manage half-a-dozen so as to get harmony and unanimity out of them.’⁵ From the scant data available, the rents charged by proprietary chapels were higher than those of parish churches. At Berkeley Chapel in London in 1797 the Nelthorpe family of Lincolnshire paid £14 3s. 6d. for a pew for eighteen months, and in 1824 the Duke of Portland, living in Welbeck but at least as late as 1810 the ‘lord of the manor of Marylebone’⁶ spent ten guineas on one pew,⁷ although neither of these indicates how many sittings each pew was thought to contain. The right to a pew with 65 years left on its lease was sold in St George, Albemarle Street, London, for 40 guineas in 1846.⁸ In one year Eaton Chapel in London let 997 seats for a total of £1469 10s.⁹

These chapels usually – and sometimes exclusively – relied on pew-rents to pay their expenses and provide profits.¹⁰ The proprietors could be clergymen using such ventures to pay themselves,¹¹ or might be laity who hired churchmen to perform the services, to whom they then paid a salary, usually from the pew-rents. Nevertheless, the motive behind the establishment of each proprietary chapel was generally more honourable than simply profit – many were primarily intended to provide opportunities for evangelical preaching and ministry.¹² In at least one case, a proprietary chapel strictly speaking had no proprietor, at least initially; to finance St Mary, Manchester, various people each subscribed a certain sum

⁵ ESRO PAR 277/6/2/1.

⁶ *Queen v. Vestry of St Marylebone*, 1 Q.B. 771, 772 (1894).

⁷ NAK DDP6/8/2/46/17 & NEL IX/24/62.

⁸ Pomfret, *An Ethical Evaluation of the Historical Significance of Proprietary Chapels*, p. 63.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Burkill, *The Parish System*, p. 31, at <http://www.latimertrust.org/download/ls59burkill.pdf>. Some proprietary chapels also took in money from burial fees – See Langford, P., *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 22.

¹¹ <http://www.regencysociety.co.uk/standrew.html>; Pomfret, *An Ethical Evaluation of the Historical Significance of Proprietary Chapels*, p. 32.

¹² Stock, E., *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, v. 1 (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), pp. 43-44, cited in Burkill, *The Parish System*, p. 30.

under a parliamentary act, built the chapel collectively, and in return had a given number of sittings each with freehold tenure, although pew-rents were also charged.¹³ Queen Square Chapel, Walcot, Bath, had been consecrated despite its proprietary character, and the courts accordingly deemed it 'proprietary with parochial rights', in which the sole proprietor also acted as minister and had a right to the pew-rents only when the rector was not officiating.¹⁴

But regardless of any religious motive behind their establishment, proprietary chapels could not rely on public funds and were consequently located mainly in rich, fashionable areas where parishioners could afford sufficient pew-rents to cover the costs of running them, plus profit to the chapels' owners or investors. The chapels were mainly located in places like Bath, and in London, in Mayfair and Marylebone.¹⁵ In London in the 1850s several proprietary chapels existed 'chiefly for the aristocracy and the wealthy, who come to town for the season', with few or no free sittings,¹⁶ and in Bath in 1767 and later, for example, the Octagonal Chapel catered to 'the wealthy invalids and their friends who were now flocking to Bath in increasing numbers'.¹⁷ By 1800 'doing the rounds of the different services and savouring the quality of the sermons became a favourite Bath occupation'.¹⁸

Proprietary chapels are said to have been 'well pewed [and] well warmed...[which captivated] preachers of the morphine velvet, lavender-kid-glove school of theology...[who] dispensed the most comfortable doctrines'.¹⁹ All Saints, Margaret Street, Marylebone, was 'a centre for Tractarian worship' at which 'a group of Catholic high Anglicans' congregated, for

¹³ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 435.

¹⁴ *Moysey v. Hillcoat*, 2 Hagg. Ecc. 30, 44, 57 (1828).

¹⁵ Pomfret, *An Ethical Evaluation of the Historical Significance of Proprietary Chapels*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), pp.240-1.

¹⁷ Jenkins, W.J., *A History of the Proprietary Chapels of Bath* (unpublished master's thesis, University of Bristol, 1948), p.14, cited in Pomfret, *An Ethical Evaluation of the Historical Significance of Proprietary Chapels*, p. 36.

¹⁸ Girouard, M., *The English Town: A History of Urban Life* (New Haven: Yale University, 1970), p. 81.

¹⁹ Bumpus, T.F., *London Churches Ancient and Modern* (London: T.W. Laurie, 1908), p. 62, quoted in Pomfret, *An Ethical Evaluation of the Historical Significance of Proprietary Chapels*, p. 16.

whom John Keble was a spiritual mentor.²⁰ Most proprietary chapels, though, were low-church and evangelical,²¹ specialising in sermons rather than ritual²² and pervaded by evangelical faith, which can be uncomfortable to Anglicans of higher-church approaches, but since these chapels depended on a steady supply of paying customers, proprietors took great care to satisfy their customers. They sometimes employed preachers (or ‘lecturers’) to preach at morning services and others at afternoon services so as to appeal to the greatest number of customers.²³ While some proprietary chapels, like parish churches, set aside free pews for the poor, the free seats were the least desirable, some of them actually behind the pulpit.²⁴ Other proprietary chapels banned those who paid no pew-rents, even servants in livery.²⁵

But as the Victorian building movement’s new churches appeared and rates of church-going declined, the need for proprietary chapels dwindled,²⁶ and few survived the nineteenth century. Some were consecrated and made into chapels of ease or district churches, among them Stamford Hill Chapel, which became St Thomas, Clapton Common.²⁷ Parliament also contributed to their decline, if unintentionally. The 1824 Church Building Act required that each new proprietary chapel be located in an area with a demonstrable dearth of church seating. Combined with the prerequisite that ten percent of the seats be designated as free, the Act removed some of the financial incentive for such ventures. And since mid-Victorian parish churches were increasingly given evangelical ministers, the low-church preaching common in proprietary chapels could become redundant.

²⁰ Shannon, R., *Gladstone*, v. 1 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1982), p. 114, fn. 1.

²¹ Curl, J.S., *Victorian Churches* (London: Batsford/English Heritage, 1995), p. 63, quoted in Pomfret, *An Ethical Evaluation of the Historical Significance of Proprietary Chapels*, p. 15.

²² Pomfret, *An Ethical Evaluation of the Historical Significance of Proprietary Chapels*, p. 57.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 65.

²⁵ <http://anglicanhistory.org/bios/adwagner.html>

²⁶ Pomfret, *An Ethical Evaluation of the Historical Significance of Proprietary Chapels*, p. 22.

²⁷ LMA P79/TMS/47.

Sittings in Churches Let to Others by Private Parties

Other than proprietary chapels, the direct evidence of private pew-renting – *i.e.*, a private party owning sittings and renting them to others – is relatively rare, although in the 1858 House of Lords hearings it was noted that *all* pews in St Anne, Richmond Street, Liverpool, were private property which the owners were renting to others,²⁸ leading to the suspicion that this occurred to some degree at other churches as well. The few solid examples of private pew-renting generally consist of lessors who owned pews outright or held faculties or prescriptions to them, and who for one reason or other decided to rent them to others rather than using them personally, and of lessees who had rented residences or hotel rooms to which the use of particular pews was an ancillary right.

The pew-rent book from St George, Wigan, in the late nineteenth century, appears to be the most detailed extant record on privately-let sittings.²⁹ The book shows that not only the church itself but twelve separate individuals, including the incumbent, owned or had rights to pews which were rented to congregants. Unfortunately the prices of the private rentals are not listed. Only two owners of pews are actually listed as occupying them.

Other examples can of course be found. In Morpeth Parish, Northumberland, an 1830 notice advised that Mr D. Busby offered various items, including bedsteads, a ‘Mahogany Trap Bird-Cage’, and ‘Two Sittings in Alnwick Church, in Pews No. 7 & 8, to be let or sold.’³⁰ At Yeovil Parish Church, Somerset, pews had been sold at least as far back as 1600, many to families for their own use, but some to speculators, including non-parishioners. These then let the pews or parts of them to other individuals and paid the churchwardens a small commission, from 8d. to 1s. 4d., for each sitting privately rented.³¹ In 1792 at Christ

²⁸ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), pp. ix, 454.

²⁹ WA DP/28/7/1.

³⁰ NCS ZMD 167/10/131.

³¹ Hancock, G., *The Pew Question: A Case Decided at Yeovil, in the Diocese of Bath and Wells, and County of Somerset* (London: Hope, 1853), p. 16.

Church, Tynemouth, some former parishioners who had bought seats but were by then living far off were said to be letting their sittings ‘for the highest Rent they can procure’.³² Some owners of pews let to others were said to be dissenters owning no property in the parish.³³ In the early 1850s at St Swithun, East Retford, Nottinghamshire, a dissenter was found to be renting pews he owned to others, at least one of whom lived outside the parish; the archdeacon considered this fatal to the dissenter’s claim to be able to retain his right to the seats after the anticipated re-pewing.³⁴ A church’s rector, who of course need not have been the incumbent, sometimes owned the seats in the chancel and might rent them out, as occurred at the Old Windsor Church, Berkshire, from at least 1828 to 1858. After the incumbent’s death a solicitor bought those pews and intended to continue letting the sittings.³⁵

The records of one planned church, after selling its future pews to pay for the building, seemed miffed when the buyers, finding renting the sittings to others a lucrative business, did not donate or bequeath the pews back to the church. In 1816 the proposed St Andrew, Clifton, offered its pews in three different classes – first class pews were sold for £70, and 72 were purchased for that sum; second class pews cost £40, and 18 brought that amount; third class pews were £30; nine were sold at that price.³⁶ The pews evidently held their value well; in September 1858 one pew was re-sold for £75.³⁷ Evidently realising this, in 1862 the churchwardens sent a rather peevish circular letter to its congregants implying that the original purchasers some 46 years earlier should have given the pews back so that the church could make a profit on them, rather than the buyers doing the same:

³² NCS EP/52/A/338.

³³ ‘Testimony’, *The Church of the People; and the People’s Magazine*, May 1857-December 1858 (London: Kent & Co. 1859), p. 505.

³⁴ Hawkrige, B., *The Right to Pews in Churches: Report of the Proceedings on the Petition for a Faculty to Re-Pew the Parish Church of East Retford, in the County of Nottinghamshire* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1853), p. 14.

³⁵ ORO DIOC/1/C/5/1298.

³⁶ BRRO P/StA/ChW/8/5.

³⁷ BRRO P/StA/ChW/10/9/26(c).

It might reasonably have been supposed, that some of the Pews, after they had served the purpose of the original Subscribers, would have been voluntarily surrendered as a free-will offering for the benefit of the Parishioners, or at least, that the owners, after receiving five per cent. on their outlay, would have handed over any balance for the maintenance of the sacred edifice, but such, unfortunately, has not as yet been the case...

The churchwardens thus proposed that pew owners tithe ten per cent of the sittings' rental to the church, and that those owners actually using the pews tithe the same percentage of 'what would probably be the rental of such a pew in such a situation'.³⁸ This suggestion evidently brought *some* money to the church, and while ascertaining how much is impossible, some forty years later the sum was small. A note in the Annual Report and Accounts for 1900 reflects that £5 4s. was contributed by 'non-resident owners of pews, and others', for church expenses, and in 1901, £6 5s.; from the same source, 1903, £3 15s.³⁹ In 1901 St Andrew started a trust fund in order to buy back privately-held pews with some of the money due from renting its own pews; the vicar received the rest of the seat-rent total as part of his stipend, so as the number of sittings the church could rent increased, so did the amount the vicar took home. The trust fund was evidently more successful than the plea that congregants gift their lucrative property – four years later 44 pews had been purchased from their owners and 19 other pews had simply been presented to the church, and four years later still the vicar received 'the whole of' the pew-rents.⁴⁰

A few scraps of evidence provide further details of private pew-renting. An account book, 'probably of the Batt Family', notes that in 1866 Thos. Batt received 'of Mr. Thos Hill Sexton of Shrivenham on Behalf of Mr May Gardener to Lord Barington the sum of Ten shillings for one years Pew Rent Belonging to me in the Shrivenham Church Gallary Due Christmas 1865'. On 14 February 1867, another 10s. were 'Received as Above one years pew Rent due Cristmas [sic] 1866'.⁴¹ Mottram Parish Church, Chester, was built in

³⁸ BRRO P/StA/ChW/10/9/26(c).

³⁹ BRRO P/StA/PR/1(a).

⁴⁰ BRRO P/StA/ChW/10/8 & P/StA/PR/1(c).

⁴¹ BRO D/EX 142/F/3.

approximately 1250 A.D.,⁴² and at various times until at least the late 1860s, the successive Earls of Stamford and Warrington, ‘lords of the manor of Staley’, let the pews they owned in the church to other congregants.⁴³ Various congregants rented pews owned by the Duke of Somerset in the chancel of a church in Totnes, Devon, paying him sums similar to those charged by churchwardens in other churches, at least from 1846 to 1885 and from 1905 to 1908.⁴⁴ In 1821 a lady bequeathed the income from her pew-rents in the (Anglican) Chapel of St John the Baptist, Deritend in Birmingham to clothe impoverished widows.⁴⁵ To the best of the knowledge of a Sheffield vicar from 1851 to 1873, some ladies’ income there was derived almost exclusively from renting out pews bequeathed them by their fathers.⁴⁶ And in 1858 the pews of St Anne, Richmond Street, Liverpool, were all privately owned, some of which were let by the owners.⁴⁷ As occurred before the period under study, some pews were let by innkeepers for the use of their tenants. In St Mary the Virgin, Walkhampton, Devon, the church’s seating plan of 1860 shows two seats reserved for ‘Church House Inn’ and two others for another ‘inn’; although it is not certain pew-rents were charged in the church at that time,⁴⁸ these were likely rented or at least appropriated.

In short, the extent of private pew-renting in the period 1800 to 1960 is impossible to ascertain. But it is likely to have been relatively rare; the percentage of privately-owned pews appears small, particularly later in Victorian times when churchgoing was less popular than earlier, and when migration to and within towns was more common than before – in such circumstances pew ownership was likely to have been forgotten or otherwise abandoned.

⁴² <http://www.hollingsworthfamily.net/mottram.htm>

⁴³ *Chapman v. Jones*, L.R. 4 Ex. 273, 274 (1869).

⁴⁴ DRO B/E/S/16/1-41.

⁴⁵ Pinches, S., ‘Women as Objects and Agents of Charity in Eighteenth-Century Birmingham’, in *Women and Urban Life in Eighteenth Century England: On the Town*, Sweet, R., & Lane, P., eds. (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), pp. 65-85, p. 78.

⁴⁶ Wickham, E.R., *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London: Lutterworth, 1957), p. 143.

⁴⁷ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. ix.

⁴⁸ <http://www.dartmoorpress.clara.net/WalknChurch.html>

Only a few churches have been found in which more than a few sittings were privately owned by the 1820s. Sheffield churches were exceptions; many pews in the city churches were owned outright by private parties, which often were transferred either with freeholds or by legacy. St James, Sheffield, erected in 1788, netted £3,000 from selling £50 shares, which gave each purchaser a freehold inheritance in one or more of the new church's pews.⁴⁹ Some forty years later, though, the church's vestry doubted the legality of such ownership.⁵⁰

No definite evidence of *dealing* in pews for profit was found in this study outside proprietary chapels and Yeovil, although such financial speculation is likely to have occurred elsewhere. In the Sheffield parish church Pew 69, which seated six, was sold for £105 in 1817 and for £115 two years later, a profit of over nine percent, although it fetched only £100 in 1847.⁵¹ Yet pew sales after about 1860 appear to have been rare, perhaps because of the numbers of new churches in which pew ownership was most uncommon. In the 1886 study by the House of Lords, only 118 churches in the UK answered that their seats had *ever* been sold or, if never sold, were eligible to be sold.⁵²

But where privately-owned pews existed, the practice of renting them to others appears to have been unremarkable at the time, and was often regarded as legal. In the early 1870s memoranda of the Smyth Family of Heath, Yorkshire, reflect an entry that 'Two occupiers of Pews in Wakefield Church are greatly in arrear with their rents and refuse to pay – should [we] try to recover at law.'⁵³ At Rastrick, near Halifax, from at least 1799 to 1802 some tenants paid rent for their houses plus extra money specifically for pews at Rastrick Chapel; one tenant paid rent for a house plus three shillings for a single sitting.⁵⁴ One

⁴⁹ Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, p. 48.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁵¹ *Sheffield Telegraph*, 8 August 1907, quoted in Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, p. 43.

⁵² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Parish Churches Bill* (London: Henry Hansard & Son, 1886), p. 70-74.

⁵³ WYASW C547/2/2/4.

⁵⁴ WYASK DD/T/R/b/34.

wonders, though, whether renting the sittings was optional. At the parish church of Thames Ditton from 1822 to 1826, a Lady Sullivan bought a pew in the gallery, but then moved out of the parish and received £5 per year rent from a new occupant of that pew until the courts disapproved the transaction as standing ‘on no legal foundation’. Lady Sullivan had no faculty or prescription to the pew, so even though she had purchased it, when she moved away the pew reverted to the churchwardens to reallocate.⁵⁵ A related example occurred at a chapel of ease in Oldham, Lancashire, where a congregant who thought he had purchased a pew under a private parliamentary act of 1824⁵⁶ – but had actually acquired only a devisable right to it during divine service – let the pew’s sittings, mainly but not exclusively to local residents, at 10s. to 15s. per annum, *i.e.*, rates comparable to pews rented from churches at the time.⁵⁷ A parallel occurred at St Mark, Liverpool, during Victoria’s reign.⁵⁸

Private pew-renting could incur the wrath of church officials, who sometimes believed their churches should get the revenue rather than the individuals owning the sittings. In 1906 a Mr A. Upcott wrote to the churchwardens of St Andrew, Cullompton, Devon, to say that for many years he and a Miss Mortimore had annually paid a guinea each to rent sittings belonging to John Blackmore. Mr Upcott’s letter noted that ‘Church authorities have always objected to this – thinking that sum should be paid for church expenses in general.’⁵⁹ St Andrew’s churchwardens are likely to have been even more annoyed seven years later, when a solicitor rented the middle pew in the chancel from a Mr W.B. Salter, for two pounds a year. This arrangement lasted until at least 1920.⁶⁰ Private pew-letting also had evidently been going on at St Mary Magdalene, Taunton, in the eighteenth century, to the disgust of the

⁵⁵ *Wyllie v. Mott*, 1 Hagg. Ecc. 28, 31, 33-4 (1828).

⁵⁶ 5 Geo. IV c. lxiv.

⁵⁷ *Hinde v. Chorlton*, L.R. 2 C.P. 104 (1866).

⁵⁸ *Brumfitt v. Roberts*, L.R. 5 C.P. 224 (1870).

⁵⁹ DRO 1723M/B1.

⁶⁰ DRO 1723M/B2.

vestry, which resolved in 1792 that ‘to correct former abuses’, ‘if any person shall hereafter let a sitting for any pecuniary advantage or emolument whatsoever such sitting shall immediately revert to the Churchwardens for the use of the Parish’.⁶¹ Another instance occurred at St Mark, Cheetham, Manchester, in 1855.⁶² In an 1886 debate in the Lords, the Bishop of Peterborough claimed that ‘pew rents often contributed to the income, not of the clergyman, but to that of the rich pew-owner’.⁶³

Whether more than a few congregants who had rented church sittings subsequently sublet them to others is unknown. At the House of Lords hearings in 1858, in response to a question from the Bishop of Exeter, the Archdeacon of Middlesex who was also vicar of Kensington testified that he had never heard of congregants sub-letting allocated pews.⁶⁴ But the question would likely not have been asked him if the Bishop of Exeter had not at least suspected, if not known, that instances of such subletting had indeed occurred. Although the courts refused to sanction such a practice, several such instances have been found. In 1857 at Holy Trinity, Poulton Le Sands, Lancashire, for example, a legal opinion noted that according to the consecration deed subscribers were supposed to pay pew-rent, but that, due to the incumbent’s ignorance of the provision, ‘no payment has been made nor Rent Charge assessed’. The subscribers had taken advantage of their situation, however, by selling or letting the pews they were allocated. The opinion stated that this practice was ‘utterly illegal – the Commission gave them no power of so doing – and if it did, the Commission would have been, so far, illegal...’⁶⁵

One example has been found of successful legal action taken to recover a trifling payment for a privately-rented pew – as late as the 1920s the officials of Bearsted Parish,

⁶¹ SRO D\P\tau/7/1/1.

⁶² MALS M387/2/13/4.

⁶³ HL Deb 16 March 1886 v. 303 c. 923.

⁶⁴ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 215.

⁶⁵ LaRO PR 3274/4/5.

Kent, had to pay rent for pews for which some laity held a prescription. The church used those pews for the choir, and the vicar and churchwardens were required to pay one shilling per year to the holders of the prescription. Despite the size of this obligation, the holder of the prescription took the matter seriously enough to refer non-payment to their solicitors in London, who wrote several letters to the vicar and recovered from him the shilling due for 1926.⁶⁶ In 1841 at St Leonard, Hythe, the churchwardens also paid a shilling a year to the owner of a private vault in return for the use of pews situated over the vault.⁶⁷

Private pew-letting, moreover, is likely to have been even more subject to market forces than the practice was in parish churches and chapels of ease. Loyalty to the church, charity, indulgences, or other motives leading congregants to pay pew-rents when the demand was less than optimal is unlikely to have been felt towards the mere individual offering seats for rent.

In summary

This chapter has detailed the existence and the comparative rarity of proprietary chapels and private pew-renting. Due to the laws requiring that preference be given to parishioners over outsiders, these may have filled a need by permitting congregants to rent pews regardless of their status. Where a parish was oddly shaped, some residents in its outer reaches may well found it more convenient to attend a proprietary chapel in another parish or rent sittings from a private individual at a different parish's church or chapel of ease, rather than to travel longer distances to their own parish church. Moreover, those who wished comfortable pews and low-church doctrines were likely to have been particularly attracted to proprietary chapels, while such establishments lasted.

⁶⁶ CKS P/18/6/5.

⁶⁷ CCA U3/282/8/A2.

CHAPTER NINE

INFORMAL PEW-RENTING

This chapter addresses the question of pew-renting, not in the formal sense in which churches generally charged for sittings, but how it existed informally. This may have been more ubiquitous than official rents, but due to its casual nature, few records give its details.

Pew-openers

In some churches pew-openers, sextons and sidesmen (who here shall be collectively referred to simply as pew-openers) were indispensable in choosing seats for congregants who had not been allocated pews – St Philip, Clerkenwell, in 1858 employed five pew-openers to ‘prevent the confusion that would arise from strangers occupying sittings let to others’.¹ St Mary, Lewisham, paid its five pew-openers £30 each in 1854.² The pew-openers were generally women and often elderly;³ St George, Hanover Square, Westminster, had five pew-openers in 1894, all of whom were female and whose average age was 62, although four of them had filled that role for over twenty years.⁴ Some were assigned other duties besides that indicated by their title – the Chief Pew Opener of St Margaret, Lee, in 1838 was ‘to attend the Clergyman upon all occasions during Divine Services, and at Christenings’ and to clean the church on Saturdays. The deputy pew-openers were only expected to work on Sundays.⁵ The position could be quite lucrative, particularly if those filling the role were only required to do so on Sundays and to let visitors into the church on weekdays. They could, if able, take other

¹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into The Deficiency of Means of Spiritual Instruction and Places of Divine Worship in the Metropolis, and in other Populous Districts in England and Wales, especially in the Mining and Manufacturing Districts; and to Consider the Fittest Means of Meeting the Difficulties of the Case; and to Report Thereon to the House; Together With the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: House of Commons, 1858), p. 511.

² LLSA SM/1/3/2.

³ Ottaway, S., *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 88; Collins, W., *Basil* (New York: Dover Publications, 1980; first published 1862), p. 96 (‘The pew-opener smiled and curtsied...’).

⁴ CWAC C762k.

⁵ LLSA A78/18M/B1/4.

types of work for the rest of each week, which might be unskilled labour. The ‘other means of livelihood’ of four of the five pew-openers of St George, Hanover, in 1894 were ‘washing the surplices’, a day’s charing occasionally’, ‘Washing or sewing that I can get to do’ and ‘needlewoman’. The fifth – the youngest at 54 – was a housewife.⁶

The pew-openers’ role continued after locking pews disappeared. In 1903 Bertrand Russell observed that points under mathematical principles ‘do not assign positions to each other, as though they were each other’s pew-openers’.⁷ Particularly in larger churches, to perform their duties they would have needed an in-depth knowledge or a handy chart of pew-owners, renters and holders, with the places that each was to occupy. Pew-openers were paid by their churches but also expected to receive tips from those they escorted to seats, particularly where locking pews had to be opened. Since the prices charged for rented pews were low, the tips – if given every time the congregants attended church – could total far more than formal rents. The Octagon Episcopal Chapel, Bath, in the 1860s anticipated that congregants appearing intermittently would offer tips, but issued a notice trying to discourage the practice, emphasising that ‘It is expected that those who habitually attend the Chapel will provide themselves with Sittings; *and that no money be offered to the Attendants for an occasional accommodation.*’⁸ Even though some pew-openers were discouraged from or even forbidden to accept tips, they may well have done so anyway. During the House of Lords’ 1858 hearings the minister of All Saints, Poplar, would not venture to say whether the pew-openers of his church ‘have sufficient virtue to resist a gratuity offered’.⁹

This was likely to have been an understatement. Gratuities in some places *were* offered as a matter of course. In 1838 the Chief Pew Opener at St Margaret, Lee, was:

⁶ CWAC C762k.

⁷ Russell, B., *The Principles of Mathematics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1938; first published 1903), p. 453.

⁸ SRO D\P\ba.mi/4/1/45 (emphasis in original).

⁹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 212.

to be allowed to take a fee when gratuitously offered, by any occupants of Pews at Christmas, or by persons applying to view the Church on week days, but on no account to claim the same as a legal right – she is allowed the same privileges when attending Marriages, Christenings and Funerals.

St Margaret's deputy pew-openers were also allowed to take tips 'as may be offered by any occupant at Christmas', but also with the proviso that they were 'on no account to claim it as a legal right'.¹⁰ The family of the Duke of Portland, living at Welbeck in 1822, paid a guinea for a Christmas box for the pew-opener at Marylebone Church, and also bought a box for the pew-opener at Berkeley Chapel, an Anglican proprietary chapel in London. And a guinea was the highest amount the family spent for a Christmas box to any of those listed – the one for the House of Lords' porter cost only 5 shillings, and those given the newspaper deliverer and the dustman set them back only half-a-crown each.¹¹

The Absence of Formal Pew-rent

Where no formal pew-rent was levied but where tips were expected, a calculated guess can be made that the biggest tippers had the nicest seats. Pew-openers were said to be 'all piety and curtsies when the proper time arrives', although they also rumoured to spread gossip about which congregants had not paid their pew-rents despite an ability to pay.¹² Whether the popular image of the pew-opener was an exaggeration or not, the impression of greediness was widespread. By 1902 part of the human hand had acquired a slang name of 'pew-opener's muscle' – Sir Benjamin Brodie described this as a 'muscle in the palm of the hand... "because it helps to contract and hollow the palm for the reception of a gratuity"'.¹³ Just before a service at Bristol Cathedral in 1843, Joseph Leech encountered a pew-opener, a 'little white-headed ruddy faced man, in drab smalls and long gaiters' who 'flitted restlessly

¹⁰ LLSA A78/18M/B1/4.

¹¹ NAK DDP6/8/2/46/17.

¹² 'Too Soon', *Chambers Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, v. XVII, no. 455 (20 September 1862), p. 177-180, p. 178.

¹³ *Slang and its Analogues, Past and Present: A Dictionary Historical and Comparative of the Heterodox Speech of All Classes of Society for More than Three Hundred Years*, v. 5, Farmer, J.S. & Henley, W.E., eds. (London: Poulter, 1902), p. 180.

about, and eyed each person that entered, opening a pew for some, but seemingly profoundly ignorant that others were equally in want of accommodation'. Leech was quickly given a pew when he let the pew-opener see him moving his hand to suggest a tip was imminent:

enlightened by some sleight of palmistry which I saw pass before him and a person who was preferred before me, I inserted my forefinger and thumb with a certain cabalistic sign into my waistcoat pocket, and presently a pew door stood invitingly open, as though I had said, 'Sesame.'¹⁴

Leech then took his seat, 'to take the full benefit of a twelve pennyworth of prayers'.¹⁵ Had he attended the Cathedral's services regularly – say forty Sundays each year – his £2 per annum would have exceeded the vast majority of formal pew-rents. Congregants would, of course, have tipped pew-openers for opening doors, but not on a per-seat basis; the tip would be not only for the congregant offering it but for all others in his family, regardless of how many there were. If a congregant tipped pew-openers a total of £2 annually for himself and his wife, the sum would be about the same as renting two sittings. But sometimes a shilling per service was insufficient. At St Martin-in-the-Fields in the 1850s, half-a-crown was expected to be offered the pew-openers to be shown into the best pews and a shilling or sixpence for lesser ones.¹⁶

These sums given in tips initially seem exorbitant for the time in question, but compared to the amounts given via collections for which the donor received nothing in return, they were evidently were not particularly high. At All Saints, Clifton, the offertory in 1870 netted the church a total of 40,761 coins (plus 183 assorted cheques and banknotes). Of the coins, over 44 per cent – 18,018 – were sixpences, shillings, florins, half-crowns, crowns, half-sovereigns and sovereigns. All Saints admittedly was situated in a wealthy area, but even so, few of the other coins were farthings, of which only 606 were given. The denomination most often given was sixpence, and a total of 9,736 groats and threepenny-bits were also

¹⁴ Leech, J., *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*, Sutton, A., ed. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1982), pp. 3-4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁶ McMaster, J., *A Short History of the Royal Parish of St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, W.C.* (London: G. Holder, 1916), p. 143.

donated.¹⁷ The generosity of congregants who gave shillings at the offertory, and particularly those who gave half-sovereigns or sovereigns, strongly indicates that tipping a pew-opener a shilling or even half-a-crown for a decent sitting for the same service would not be beyond their means. And the denomination of the coins of course does not include those who gave more than one coin at the offertory at any given service, *e.g.*, a congregant who donated, say, fourteen pence in the form of two groats and two threepenny-bits. How frequent such multiple offerings were made is lost to history.

Later the practice of tipping disappeared, and not only because pew-openers' role became redundant with the increasing disfavour of pew-rents and because of the decline in attendance resulting in decent sittings for all congregants. Tipping church officials was itself thought unseemly, at least in some quarters – in 1942 at St Matthew, Moorfields, the PCC finance committee felt that

the Christian Church should set an example by paying its officials a living wage and that it would be better for the Sexton to receive a definite wage of, say, £3 per week, rather than that he should have to rely on various fees and gratuities.

The committee agreed that the sexton would be paid that sum, with the proviso that if, “for any reason, the job ceased to be a full-time one, this wage would have to be revised.”¹⁸

In summary

This chapter has noted the role of the pew-openers and other church officials in charging tips, which constitutes an informal pew-rent. Unlike formal pew-rents, of course, the money tipped did not go to the church or the vicar's stipend, but was destined for the pew-openers' pockets. Congregants who tipped in this manner would generally have expected special favours for their money, and almost certainly received them.

Additionally, where pew-openers or sidesmen existed, the first lesson rule's success necessarily depended in large measure on those officials' attitudes and expectations. What

¹⁷ BRRO P/ASC/ChW/1(g).

¹⁸ BRRO P/St.MM/PCC/1(d).

was formally ordered may have been informally ignored where pew-openers expected tips the poor could not afford before they were shown into open seats. Those unable or unwilling to tip pew-openers may well have been directed to lesser pews when better seats were open. The rule could also cause disputes where renters were absent for many weeks in a row and another family of congregants habitually filled their seats – when the renters eventually appeared, the new occupants might then assume their own right to the same pews, to the consternation of the renters. This occurred in the 1850s at a church in Manchester.¹⁹

¹⁹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 430.

CHAPTER TEN

THE DEBATE ON THE PROPRIETY OF PEW-RENTING

This chapter documents the arguments made in favour of pew-renting and the apparently more common and louder complaints raised against it. The effects, or lack of them, of this public debate are also detailed.

In Early Days

Up to about 1830 complaints about pew-rents were raised only sporadically.¹ In 1798 a 'Free Church' movement was initiated in Bath in the hopes of doing away with, or at least limiting, seat-letting.² But the Victorian era, with its burgeoning literacy and faster methods of spreading the printed word, saw perhaps a greater degree of public controversy about virtually every issue imaginable than did any earlier time in history. And in light of the newfound easy dissemination of protesting views, a long tradition of complaint about church funding and an audience only too eager to listen, objections to pew-renting came thick and fast. Since the practice had come into its own under the Church Building Acts and other laws, much published writing appeared concerning both the appropriateness and efficacy of pew-renting. The growing popularity of Ritualism, as well, allowed churchmen to confront controversial issues with less likelihood of complaint that they were stepping on others' toes.³

Just before Victoria's accession – at about the same time that the Church Building Acts tacitly acknowledged that pew-letting was profitable – a chorus of voices began to be raised condemning the practice; the Tractarians' appearance in particular helped fuel the debate, since their criticism added an official air to lay voices in opposition to seat-letting.⁴ Beginning in the 1830s the Tractarians initially criticised the practice due both to their

¹ Bennett, J.C., "'Take thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly': The Practice of Pew-renting in Kentish Anglican Churches" (unpublished MTh dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2006), p. 40.

² <http://www.holytrinitybath.org.uk/History/HT%20History1.html>

³ Burns, A., *The Diocesan Revival in the Church of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 53.

⁴ Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", pp. 40-41.

conclusion that pew-renting kept ‘impoverished human bodies’ from attending⁵ and their belief that each church was entirely hallowed ground, for which no payment by congregants was appropriate⁶ – that, as in apostolic times, ‘all might be assured that they belonged to the one true Church of Christ whose teachings and whose devotional exercises were the same in all places.’⁷ Renting out parts of churches, argued John Mason Neale to the Cambridge Camden Society, was ‘a kind of simony’.⁸ Similarly, in 1902 a letter written about St John, Penge, Bromley, stated that the church’s pews ‘are not only uncomfortable and inconvenient (in consequence of the difficulty of keeping clean) but with the doors they create a sense of proprietorship which is quite contrary to the general feeling of what a Church should be’.⁹ Some Tractarians described pew-renting as ‘an intrusion of human pride’ into ‘God’s house,’¹⁰ and Keble himself is said to have rented a sitting at St Peter, Bournemouth, ‘but as he had a great dislike to pew-rents he never used it, and told the clerk to regard it as free’.¹¹

In the second half of the nineteenth century opponents of pew-letting became more organised and more vocal. The London Free and Open Churches Association, begun in 1866, published pamphlets advocating the abolition of pew-rents.¹²

⁵ Green, S.J.D., *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 154; Reed, J.S., *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), p. 137.

⁶ Keble, J., *The Rich and the Poor One in Christ: A Sermon Preached in S. Peter's Church, Sudbury, August 3, 1858; Being the Commemoration of the Free Opening and Restoration of the Church* (London: J.T. Hayes, 1858).

⁷ Bowers, G.H., *Open Churches with Endowments, Preferable to Pew Rents: A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral and Parish Church of Manchester, on Sunday, December 2nd, 1855* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1855), p. 13.

⁸ Neale, J.M., *The History of Pews: Being the Substance of a Paper Read Before the Cambridge Camden Society on Monday, November 22, 1841*, 3d ed. (Cambridge: Stevenson, 1843), p. viii.

⁹ BLSA P409/3/8.

¹⁰ Palliser, D.M., Clark, P. & Daunt, M., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, v. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 793.

¹¹ ‘Literary Notes on Bournemouth’, *The Graphic* (21 February 1885).

¹² Rodes, R. E., Jr., *Law and Modernization in the Church of England: Charles II to the Welfare State* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. 230.

Details of the debate can be gleaned from Episcopal visitation returns from the 1870s onward, as well as pamphlets distributed at the time, and letters and directives from those in authority. The analysis below divides the opinions into those of, first, the bishops, second, the parish clergy, and third, the laity, the last separated into congregants and others.

The Ordinaries' Attitude Toward Pew-renting

The bishops' attitudes toward pew-renting was mixed, but in general the evidence reflects that High-Church ordinaries decried the practice while Low-Church ones supported it. Archibald Campbell Tait, while Archbishop of Canterbury from 1868 to 1882, seems to have been very much in favour of pew-rents. A 'representative of Low-Church views',¹³ Tait recommended that St John, Sevenoaks, let seats in a new aisle to pay the cost of building it.¹⁴ On approving a new district church Tait 'assented, so far as it lay with him, to a scale of pew rents and the appropriation of free sittings',¹⁵ and tried to persuade the Commissioners to reverse a decision 'adverse to the creation of a charge upon the Pew rents'.¹⁶

In 1880, also, Tait was called on to referee a dispute over a charge of deception in Dartford Parish Church. There a tablet stated that 'The Incorporated Society for Building the Churches – granted £50 A.D. 1877 towards Reseating and Restoring this Church. All the Seats are for the Free Use of the Parishioners according to Law.' The tablet had been hung 'in the Porch behind the Western Door' and thus 'practically out of sight'. The complainant alleged that despite the tablet's clear language, 'all the sittings in the Nave are charged 15/- per sitting: the South Aisle 7/6 per sitting'.¹⁷ The Archbishop requested a reply from church officials, whose letter claimed that the notice 'is too unsightly to be hung in a prominent place

¹³ *A Religious Encyclopaedia: Or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology*, v. 3, Schaff, P, ed. (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), p. 2292; Jalland, P., *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 128.

¹⁴ LPL F. TEMPLE 15 ff. 196-197.

¹⁵ LPL TAIT 172 ff. 106-107.

¹⁶ LPL TAIT 172 f. 108.

¹⁷ LPL TAIT 259 ff. 260-261 (underlining in original).

upon the Church Wall’, and that the pew-rents were ‘voluntary’ and authorised by the desire of the ‘parishioners, repeatedly expressed in Vestry & elsewhere, that Church Expenses should be met by a Voluntary Subscription upon certain of the sittings’.¹⁸ Although the notice was in blatant disregard of the facts, the Archbishop’s chaplain wrote to the complainant saying that Tait did ‘not consider, after giving full attention to the case, that he is called upon to interfere with the arrangements which he understands the Churchwarden to have made’.¹⁹ The *Free and Open Church Advocate* soon afterward noted the discrepancy between the tablet’s declaration and the true circumstances.²⁰

John Jackson, Bishop of London from 1869 to 1885, openly defended pew-renting, and was ‘known for his low church views’,²¹ although he has also been described as a broad churchman.²² The London Free and Open Church Association quoted Jackson as having retorted that the Church never belonged to the poor and ‘never will’; he was said to have justified pew-rents by concluding that ‘there seems nothing either unfair on those who pay, or derogatory to him who receives, in throwing the weightiest portion of the charge on those who have accepted an exceptional advantage’.²³ In 1870 Jackson wrote to the National Association for Freedom of Worship, provoking a response saying the writer was ‘wholly at a loss to know on what grounds your Lordship has made so serious imputations against all who advocate the scriptural system of Free Churches and the Offertory’.²⁴ In the next year the Association’s correspondence to Jackson became more pointed – the same official wrote that:

¹⁸ LPL TAIT 259 ff. 262-263.

¹⁹ LPL TAIT 259 ff. 264-265.

²⁰ ‘Dartford’, *The Free and Open Church Advocate*, 1 March 1880; LPL TAIT 259 f. 268.

²¹ Blackmore, H., *The Beginning of Women’s Ministry: The Revival of the Deaconess in the Nineteenth-century Church of England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), p. 57, fn .2.

²² Taylor, S., *From Cranmer to Davidson: A Church of England Miscellany* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1999), p. 358.

²³ London Free and Open Church Association, “*The Parochial System,*” and *Free and Open Churches* (Oxford: James Parker & Co., 1872), pp. 7, 19; Bennett, ““Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly””, p. 43.

²⁴ LPL FP JACKSON 22 ff.285-287.

I cannot but think that on consideration you will regret having for the second time thrown out what seemed to be a sneer, & what has been felt to be a calumny, against the promoters of the Scriptural System of free churches & the Offertory.²⁵

Edward White Benson, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1883 to 1896, also approved of letting the *best* church seats but once recommended that more sittings be rent-free,²⁶ and ruled in favour of Edward King, Bishop of Lincoln, who was accused of ritualism. Benson is best deemed Broad Church; he claimed to be ‘neither High, nor Low, nor Broad Church, though I hear myself consigned by turns to all – as often to one as to another,’ he ‘adopted the principle of “elasticity,” which exasperated many of his colleagues’.²⁷

The High-Church²⁸ Charles James Blomfield, Bishop of London 1828-1856, was moderately in favour of letting sittings. Blomfield introduced legislation in the Lords regarding pew-rents, but its object was to give legal effect to the pew-renting that already existed in eighteenth-century churches.²⁹ To resolve a dispute in Fulham in 1842, Blomfield instructed the dean and church officials ‘to frame a scale of pew rents to be submitted to me for my approval, in order to obviate all future disputes on that head’.³⁰ On the other hand, in 1844 he wrote that ‘I cannot permit any differences to be made between those [sittings] which are let and those which are free...’³¹ When facing a complicated quarrel in 1850, Blomfield urged the avoidance of litigation if possible, since it might mean ‘the taking of any pew rents will turn out to be illegal’.³² And in the same year Blomfield urged that pew-rents in one church be raised to match those of another nearby, but that more rent-free seats be provided.³³

²⁵ LPL FP JACKSON 22 ff. 294-298.

²⁶ LPL BENSON 111 f. 373. and 33 f. 3.

²⁷ Chapman, M.D., ‘Edward White Benson’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, v. 5, Matthew, H.C.G. & Harrison, B., eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 173-178, p. 176.

²⁸ *A Memoir of Charles James Blomfield, D.D., Bishop of London, with Selections from his Correspondence*, Blomfield, A., ed. (London: John Murray, 1863), p. 15; Ellens, J.P., *Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism* (State College, Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 2008), p. 107.

²⁹ HL Deb 03 April 1854 v. 132 c. 309-20.

³⁰ LPL FP BLOMFIELD 32, f. 43.

³¹ LPL FP BLOMFIELD 42, ff. 340-341.

³² LPL FP BLOMFIELD 49, ff. 169-170.

Earlier Lord George Murray, Bishop of Rochester from 1825 to 1860, was of such a high-church persuasion that he refused to consecrate burial grounds which had no wall dividing the parts set aside for Anglicans from those for Dissenters.³⁴ In 1841 Murray's archdeacon, in a pamphlet written for churchwardens, stated that any 'practice of letting pews in a Parish Church for rent is illegal; and though applied to defray the Church Rate, is always to be avoided.'³⁵

Finally, Lord Arthur Charles Harvey, Bishop of Bath and Wells from 1869 to 1894, was described as a 'ripe scholar' and 'a liberal prelate, being able to sympathise with both members of the High and Low Church party'.³⁶ He wrote in 1896, 'I regret very much to find that the illegal practice of letting the pews prevails at South Petherton',³⁷ Somerset. William Magee, who from 1868 to 1891 was Bishop of Peterborough, strongly recommended to the House of Lords that pew-rents be abolished.³⁸

These opinions were all expressed in the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century even some low-church clergy appear to have begun doubting the propriety of seat-letting. Randall Thomas Davidson, who held the see of Canterbury from 1903 to 1928, has been described both as low-church³⁹ and broad-church.⁴⁰ Davidson was 'very sympathetic' to a 1907 plan to abolish pew-rents at St Andrew, Stockwell, and 'of course...ready to fall in

³³ LPL FP BLOMFIELD 42, ff. 381-382.

³⁴ *The Letters of Queen Victoria: A Selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence Between the Years 1837 and 1861*, v. 3, Benson, A.C. & Esher, V., eds. (London: John Murray, 1908), p. 417.

³⁵ King, W., *Instructions to Churchwardens and Observations on the Duties of their Office* (Dartford: Dunkin & Son, 1841), p. 16.

³⁶ Davies, C.M., *Orthodox London, or Phases of Religious Life in the Church of England* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1875), p. 392.

³⁷ SRO D\P\pet.s/7/2/1.

³⁸ Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, p. 48; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 43.

³⁹ Simpson, J.B., *The Hundredth Archbishop of Canterbury* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 28.

⁴⁰ Cross, C., *The Liberals in Power (1905-1914)* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1963), p. 39.

with any wise and well-considered scheme' for this.⁴¹ Even so, Davidson appears to have been unwilling to take an *active* role in ending seat-letting – his secretary wrote to one of St Andrew's churchwardens that the Archbishop

considers such arrangements as those affecting pew rents are Diocesan matters, and although he, as Patron, is perfectly willing to give any consent that is necessary he desires that the real responsibility should rest with the Vicar and Churchwardens of St. Andrew's and the Bishop of the Diocese, subject of course to such control as the Ecclesiastical Commissioners may exercise in order to secure that all is done in strict accordance with the law.⁴²

Twentieth century High-churchmen persisted in their opposition. Charles Gore, a 'leading figure in the High Church movement' and from 1905 to 1911 the first Bishop of Birmingham, evidently expended some energy toward abolishing the letting of seats, writing in 1910 that pew-rents are 'in poor parishes to-day nothing else than a disaster: they hinder the attendance; and ... bring in very little income to the Incumbent'.⁴³

The Parish Clergy's Attitude toward Pew-renting

Objections to pew-renting from those who generally received at least a part of the money – the parish clergy – were not new in the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ In 1815 the Rev. Richard Yates, perhaps stating the obvious, claimed that proprietary chapels were more interested in increasing their pew-rent revenues than in providing for the religious needs of the poor.⁴⁵ Canterbury Diocese's visitation returns from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were most often completed and signed by incumbents. In each visitation from 1872 to 1889, the parish clergy were asked whether any desire had 'been expressed to have all the sittings free and unappropriated?', and up to 1902 several incumbents wrote their thoughts on the topic despite the absence of such a question. In 1872, most of Canterbury

⁴¹ LPL DAVIDSON 136 f. 45-47.

⁴² LPL DAVIDSON 136 f. 48.

⁴³ LPL DAVIDSON 166 ff. 69-70.

⁴⁴ See *e.g.* NDRO 1843A/PW 135 from 1743, in which the vicar of Northam Parish, Devon, consented to pew-renting only as a *pro hac vice tantum* measure to raise funds to repair his church's ceiling.

⁴⁵ Norman, E.R., *Church and Society in England, 1770-1970: A Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 53.

Diocese's parish clergy whose churches rented sittings did not express an opinion, although three declared they were against the practice and one stated his wishes had been overruled by the renters and churchwardens. The clergyman of Sidcup, Kent, wrote in an 1889 return that:

The abolition of pew rents in such churches as ours only means the loss of all offerings from irregular church people, and from constant absentees like my parishioners, half of whom are at the seaside for 8 or 10 Sundays in the year.⁴⁶

Those of other pew-letting churches sometimes put in the returns that they personally approved of the practice and that their congregants would all be upset were it abolished. One incumbent wrote that only a single congregant had expressed a desire to have all sittings free and unappropriated, and the incumbent described that congregant as 'a notorious improver of every thing and every body except his own affairs or himself'.⁴⁷ Some clergymen opposed to the practice could be as emphatic, answering the question of whether seats were let by writing, 'Certainly not', 'None, thankfully', 'I hope that they never will be let', and most vehemently, 'There will never be Pew-rents where J. W. Eboworth [the incumbent and signer of the return] has the power to hinder such abomination'.⁴⁸ Overall the visitation returns indicate little attitudinal change from 1872 to 1902 among the parish clergy, although, as with the bishops, the opinions expressed were rather less acerbic later in the period than before. At least one very high-church vicar, the Rev. Nevile Birkmyre of St Simon, Bristol, who used incense, in 1885 expressed his 'willingness to give up the Pew Rents on condition of the seats in the church being free and unappropriated', at least where 'the vestry do pledge itself to endeavour to mke up the loss incurred by him'.⁴⁹

Incumbents faced a difficult choice where they opposed the practice but depended on the income it brought them. One incumbent's return in 1872 stated he was the only one who had spoken against letting pews, and then 'only privately. I would gladly, if I could, give up

⁴⁶ LPL VG3/8c.

⁴⁷ LPL VG3/4a.

⁴⁸ *E.g.*, LPL VG3/5c & VG 3/7b.

⁴⁹ BRRO P/St.Sim/HM/2 & P/St.Sim/V/1.

all the pew rents & live on the offertory, though I know that I would sustain a great pecuniary loss'.⁵⁰ An 1885 return from Holy Trinity, Cranbrook indicated the incumbent caused the practice to decline, writing that, 'I have been willing to sacrifice Pew rents' to bring about free and unappropriated seating, and 'as pews have fallen vacant I have not relet but put them at the disposal of the poor'.⁵¹ And in 1870 the vicar of Newton-le-Willows, Lancashire, declared himself 'particularly anxious to do away with pew-renting in any church'. In his own church, the total to be gleaned from seat-letting was set by the consecration deed at £24 6s. Deeming the phrase 'free and open' contrary to a weekly offertory as well as to letting pews, the vicar was nevertheless unwilling to surrender that sum, which supplemented his salary of 'only £126 per annum besides, and a mere trifle from fees'. He accordingly sought financial contributions, asking among others the Duke of Newcastle-upon-Tyne to 'pardon the great liberty I take in earnestly soliciting a small donation', with 'small' doubly underlined, though he hoped to raise £400 to be matched by another £400 from the Commissioners.⁵² Even where an incumbent loudly protested the practice, pew-renting might well continue; in an 1880 visitation return from Boughton Monchelsea, Kent, the clergyman wrote that 'One hundred & fifty-two sittings are now let for money...The proceeding is illegal, without authority, & in spite of my repeated remonstrances & proposals to try & abet the offertory'.⁵³

Several incumbents wrote that they should like to see the system abolished, but only if an endowment could be provided in lieu. One, of St Michael & All Angels, Folkestone, believed pew-renting was preferable to the offertory. In his 1885 return he wrote that he should much prefer that, as at Holy Trinity, New York, Every other row of Seats was free – one row paid, other free. This would prevent the begging constantly from the pulpit necessary for a free Church, which does so much harm to the Ministry'.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ LPL VG3/4a-d.

⁵¹ LPL VG3/7c.

⁵² NAK DD4P/72/10.

⁵³ LPL VG3/6a.

⁵⁴ LPL VG3/7b.

At a 1934 Parochial Church Council meeting at Christ Church, Ramsgate, a Mr Perry stated he had believed for a long time that pew-renting was wrong in principle, ‘but the question of Church Finance weighed heavily with him, hence he had been of the opinion that the time for their abolition was not yet come’. The vicar had convinced him that the ‘spiritual’ need should prevail, and the two advocated that another revenue system be found. Early in 1935 the Council voted to abolish rents, from which £94 was lost, although acts of Communion increased by 84 to 3,788’.⁵⁵ While all this sounds magnanimous, the vicar was not so altruistic as it might on the surface appear: in the three years preceding abolition the pew-rents had not gone to him, but had been used for ‘Parochial needs’; at least one member of the Council voiced his support for ending pew-rents due to his ‘experience of certain other parishes where Pew-rents had been abolished...[and] the Church collections had been very considerably increased’; and the sum of £94 raised from pew-renting in 1934 was down considerably from the total from 1915-16 of £272 1s. 3d. By 1936 the financial deficit had indeed been abolished, and ‘there had been notable advance on the Spiritual side’.⁵⁶

Finally, in 1866 the Reverend J. Sydney Boucher argued against pew-letting on two grounds: that the minister’s income in a pew-renting church is dependent on a minority of his congregants, and that those who pay for sittings consider that in so doing they have discharged their practical duties to their churches. He advocated, though, that the practice should be abolished gradually, something most opponents of pew-rents did not consider.⁵⁷

Concluding that letting seats was equivalent to selling indulgences, Boucher wrote that

In a word, the Pew-system was introduced into England by the Puritans two centuries ago, when we degenerated into a ‘sitting-to-hear’ nation. It is only fitting, therefore, that now, when we are notably becoming more of a ‘kneeling-to-pray’ people than heretofore, the whole system of Pew-rents and Appropriation should be utterly swept away.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ CCA P315C U3/226/8/4.

⁵⁶ CCA U3/226/5/A3.

⁵⁷ Boucher, J.S., *39 Articles on Pew-Rents, Appropriation, and the Weekly Offertory* (London: Church Press Company, 1866), p. 16-20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

In sum, the evidence indicates that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the attitudes of the parish clergy toward pew-renting were mixed, although seat-letting most often occurred in those churches whose incumbents favoured it and did not exist where incumbents opposed it. Some clergymen who argued against the practice were, due to financial necessity, forced to let it continue.

The Attitudes of Congregants

In 1885 the churchwardens of St John, Chester, sent out a survey to its 'seat-holders and regular attendants' regarding proposals to dispense with pew-renting and to create a 'guarantee fund' for which contributions could be made to the vicar's stipend should the offertory net insufficient money. The surviving returns are mixed, but those who preferred to pay for sittings indicated that, should pew-renting be abolished in their churches, they would generally be *unwilling* to donate the same sum to the guarantee fund. This comports with the suggestion of an author in 1832 who objected to pew-rents as an unthinkable charge for congregants to pay, given that they had already contributed to new churches through Exchequer Bills, and some had also paid tithes.⁵⁹ The churchwardens later announced that they 'regret that the response to their appeal is not sufficient to warrant them in reporting in favour of the establishment of a "Free and Open" Church'.⁶⁰ And in 1861 the Reverend Alfred Willis of St Mark, Gillingham, stated that most of his parishioners preferred paying pew-rents, with offertories a few times per year.⁶¹

Few congregants evidently opposed pew-renting, or at least few offended by its principle or practice made their feelings known. In a few churches incumbents believed their congregants actively *wanted* pew-letting. At Benenden, Kent, where sittings were apparently appropriated without fees in 1876, the visitation return of that year states that 'Several poor

⁵⁹ *The Extraordinary Black Book*, p. 51.

⁶⁰ CCALSS P51/7/43 & P51/7/48

⁶¹ *Chatham News*, April 1861, quoted in www.stmarkschurchgillingham.co.uk/historylong.htm; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 43.

people have told me that they wished they could pay a trifle for their sittings.’⁶² At Holy Trinity, Folkestone, where some pews, but evidently less than half, were let in 1876, the visitation return of that year answered that ‘desires have been often expressed to have *most* of the sittings let and appropriated’.⁶³ The same feeling appears in several other returns as well, including an 1880 one from St George the Martyr, Deal, whose clergyman disliked his church’s letting of seats and remarked incredulously that ‘It is considered respectable to hold a sitting!’⁶⁴ But only in one return among all those from 1872 to 1902 – that from St Saviour, Tonbridge in 1876 – was any mention made of *organised* opposition to seat-letting: a desire to have the seats free and open was said to have been expressed ‘By a local secretary of the Free and Open Church Association and a Petition...’⁶⁵

Some opinions were expressed in 1858 at House of Lords hearings regarding church seating. The testimony must, though, be read with some suspicion, since the questions were often leading ones, suggesting the expected answers, and the witnesses likely knew the questions beforehand. At some points the testimony given is contradictory. The incumbent of St Matthew, Bethnal Green, for example, first testified that all sittings in his church were ‘quite free’, but a few minutes later stated that the church had ‘a scale of payment from 6d. a quarter to 10s.: several poor men pay 6d. a quarter, which enables them to recognise a place in the church as their own’ – thus testifying unequivocally that the pews were ‘free’ in neither the ‘rent-free’ nor the ‘unallocated’ sense.⁶⁶ At the hearings, though, several clergy – including the incumbent of St Matthew, Bethnal Green, the vicar of Bradford, the rector of the

⁶² LPL VG3/5a.

⁶³ LPL VG3/5b.

⁶⁴ LPL VG3/6a.

⁶⁵ LPL VG3/5c.

⁶⁶ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into The Deficiency of Means of Spiritual Instruction and Places of Divine Worship in the Metropolis, and in other Populous Districts in England and Wales, especially in the Mining and Manufacturing Districts; and to Consider the Fittest Means of Meeting the Difficulties of the Case; and to Report Thereon to the House; Together With the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: House of Commons, 1858), pp. 38, 40.

Lambeth parish church, and the Honorary Secretary of the London Diocesan Church Building Society – testified the poor would rather pay very small fees for pew-rents, even if the cheapest pews cost only 2d. or 6d. a quarter, since they would then be allocated pews and have ‘a place in the church as their own’.⁶⁷ The rector of St George-the-Martyr, Southwark, thought that paying a nominal rent gave poor congregants the feeling of a ‘right’ to the pew they rented, which would not arise from allocation without payment.⁶⁸ Most working-class Victorians could certainly pay such a pittance as 2d. per quarter; in the mid-nineteenth century even the poor could afford ‘the halfpenny or penny a week’ it cost to join a burial society.⁶⁹ And at the same time, when pubs were shut at least one London barber would sell ‘a medicinal nip of spiced rum or brandy for 3d’.⁷⁰

As early as the 1830s, in some churches – among them St Martin, Windermere, Cumberland – protest against pew-rents took the form of simple refusal to pay on the ground the rent was illegal – a sort of ‘sue and be damned’ approach. The churchwardens duly pursued legal action, but the courts upheld the protestors’ rights to occupy seats without payment.⁷¹ In late Victorian times legal challenges to pew-renting became more common, either in the form of direct litigation instigated by opponents, or again simply by refusal to pay. At St James, Tunbridge Wells, this behaviour was widespread although the desire for free and unappropriated seats was generally not stated openly – in response to ‘Has any desire been expressed to have all the sittings free and unappropriated?’ the clergyman completing the 1880 visitation return wrote, ‘On the part of only a very few – though a great many act upon that principle by habitually appropriating seats without paying for them.’⁷²

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 58, 419.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-7.

⁶⁹ Crossick, G., *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London 1840-1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 175.

⁷⁰ Picard, L., *Victorian London: The Life of a City 1840-1870* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), p. 283.

⁷¹ CROK WPR 61/1/3/8.

⁷² LPL VG3/6c.

As to ‘voluntary’ pew-rents, during an 1860 debate in the Commons, Spencer Walpole protested the concept:

The hon. Member for Berkshire (Mr. Walter) said he did not see any hardship in putting a rent on pews, because no person need pay such rent unless he chose. Need not pay it! Why, the effect of this arrangement would be simply to send down a message to every parish in the kingdom, that A B or C D, who had been accustomed to go to a particular pew all his lifetime, must pay rent for it in future, or he could not come to church.⁷³

Even so, those wishing to avail themselves of their common-law right to a church seat may have been forced to pay where inadequate rent-free sittings were available. A letter from a resident in Kew to a peer in 1834 noted that:

The principle of pew rents has been accepted in the Church of England only from necessity; it entrenches in the independence of the Minister in respect of his Congregation, and approaches to the Voluntary System in his bearings; which Voluntary System has never yet succeeded.⁷⁴

The same sort of feeling occurred at Northchapel, Sussex, in 1871, after and due to the abolition of church rate.⁷⁵ But in 1861 the pew-holders of St Mary, Stalham, Norfolk, ‘on account of the predominance of Dissenters in the parish’, ‘it being impossible to collect church-rates to meet the usual annual expenses attendant on the services of the church’, imposed on themselves ‘a voluntary rent of 5/- per annum for each Pew’. Although the vicar had noted that 24 out of 28 ‘occupiers of Pews were agreeable to this movement’, the new pew-rent was said to have been unanimously imposed by and on all the pew-holders, and was described in the local newspaper as ‘voluntary’, although the pew-holders’ resolution included the requirement that

all who object to pay this rent be required to give up their Pew, & occupy the Free Seats; also that on all occasions, when the Church is used for special purposes, as on a Confirmation Day &c – the Pew-holders agree to give up their Pews for that day’.

These pew-rents were charged at least until 1900.⁷⁶

⁷³ HC Deb 28 March 1860 v. 157 c. 1465.

⁷⁴ NAK HO 44/49.

⁷⁵ WSRO Par/142/12/2.

⁷⁶ NRO PD 262/85.

A few wealthier congregants were willing to spend their own money to stop instances of pew-renting. The Marquis of Westminster, for example, purchased £1,000 of stock in 1868 and assigned the interest to be paid to the vicar of St John, Chester, in lieu of pew rents for sixteen pews in the church, which were then to be marked 'free'.⁷⁷ And in 1888 the courts upheld a bequest of £14,000 made by Elizabeth Randell, a parishioner of Holy Trinity, Hawley, Hampshire, so long as the church's incumbents would 'permit all the sittings in the said district church to be occupied free of all claims for pew-rents', and should this be violated, the £14,000 would be withdrawn by falling into her residue.⁷⁸

Some congregants, though, may have actually chosen rent-free seats over closer, rented ones; in farther-off, otherwise undesirable pews they might get away with behaviour generally unsuitable for church. Victorian newspapers reported disapprovingly of congregants 'staring in church, and bowing and curtsying to one another during services, and for giggling or for arriving late',⁷⁹ as well as for 'flirting and whispering'.⁸⁰ A preference for the last rows is well-known to schoolchildren, and in Victorian times the same principle applied in church.⁸¹ Both fun and slumber could of course continue in high pews whose interiors could not be seen from outside; the high walls of private pews were made specifically for privacy, or so the incumbent of St George's-in-the-East testified in 1858 – these were popularly known as 'sleeping boxes'.⁸² But as noted earlier, later in the nineteenth century these were largely removed.

⁷⁷ CCALSS P51/7/37.

⁷⁸ *In Re Randell (Randell v. Dixon)*, L.R. 38 Ch.D. 213 (1888).

⁷⁹ *The Spectator*, quoted in Earle, P., *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 65.

⁸⁰ *The Guardian*, quoted in Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 65.

⁸¹ Fowler, J.C., *Church Pews, Their Origin and Legal Incidents, with Some Observations on the Propriety of Abolishing Them* (London: Rivington, 1844), p. 77.

⁸² *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 162; 'High Church Pew-Renting' (unsigned letter), *The Church of the People; and the People's Magazine*, May 1857-December 1858 (London: Kent & Co. 1859), p. 339.

Overall, then, the laity who attended church seem to have been pleased with pew-renting, but perhaps only insofar as the effect was seat allocation. If the opinions of the clergy as expressed in the visitation returns are to be trusted, then either few congregants disliked pew-renting or few spoke their minds on the subject.

The Attitudes of Others

Some members of Parliament voiced their feelings regarding pew-renting. Those who disliked the practice naturally tried to get it abolished – among them was Robert Peel, while Prime Minister in the 1840s.⁸³

In 1837, in the midst of all the legislation, some members of Parliament showed that they viewed pew-renting as anything but temporary. Thomas Spring Rice, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, spoke to the Commons on the subject of church rates. The Chancellor noted that in the parish of St James – presumably Westminster – and many others the pew-rents were sufficient to pay church expenses, and that church rates had not been attempted. But he opposed a plan to *substitute* pew-rents for rate, which he implied would constitute ‘a vicious settlement of the question’ by shutting the poor out of church. The Chancellor nevertheless proposed that rate be abolished and that churches be financed by both a more profitable management of leases of church property *and* a more widespread pew-rent system.⁸⁴

Curiously, the Chancellor also put forward a plan to have pew-rents administered by committees elected by the pew-renters themselves, under the auspices of the bishop and Commissioners, and with the committees ‘enabled to take care that these pew-rents shall not be collected in the parish, unless upon the condition that free sittings shall be provided for the poor on a scale more liberal than the present’.⁸⁵ Sir Edward Knatchbull raised the interesting

⁸³ Ellens, J.P., *Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism: The Church Rate Conflict in England and Wales, 1832-1868* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 86; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 42.

⁸⁴ HC Deb 03 March 1837 v. 36, c 1220 & 1252.

⁸⁵ HC Deb 03 March 1837 v. 36, cc 1229-30.

question of whether, under the Chancellor's plan, congregants who could not properly be described as 'poor' would have to pay for their sittings, and thus whether pew-rents would be so widespread that the majority would *have* to rent sittings if they wanted to attend church. The Chancellor left this difficulty to be solved, though, by 'arrangement between the respective parties themselves and the clergyman or bishop'.⁸⁶ Eventually the plan 'was carried by so small a majority that' it was abandoned.⁸⁷ But enthusiasm for pew-renting among some members of Parliament continued. Several more times before compulsory church rate was abolished in 1868, the Commons debated the possibility of replacing rates, either wholly or partially, with pew-rents; in 1842 a proposal along these lines was made with the proviso that, unless the incumbent owned the pews, the incumbent and churchwardens could set the prices. The suggestion was defeated by a ratio of more than two to one.⁸⁸

Many others in Parliament disliked pew-renting. In 1863 a member of the Commons successfully opposed a clause of a bill on the ground that it 'would give a sanction to the odious and improper system of pew rents'; his proposal to omit the offending passage was approved by a vote of 59 to 11.⁸⁹ On the other hand, in 1851 an unsuccessful bill in the Commons proposed the implementation of pew-letting in *all* churches built since 1800, similar to the one Blomfield sponsored in the Lords. One member opined that pew-rents 'taxed the people for going to church'.⁹⁰ In the Commons in 1865 it was said that many methods of church finance, including bazaars, were unpopular, and that pew-renting might be perpetuated as the least of all evils.⁹¹ Yet another voice in the Commons stated that he found among the general public a belief 'that the principle of raising any funds at all from pew rents

⁸⁶ HC Deb 03 March 1837 v. 36, cc 1268-69.

⁸⁷ HC Deb 26 May 1853 v. 127 c. 579.

⁸⁸ HC Deb 16 June 1842 v. 63 c. 1620, 1637.

⁸⁹ HC Deb 25 June 1863 v. 171 cc 1493-4.

⁹⁰ HC Deb 24 June 1851 v. 117 c. 1159.

⁹¹ HC Deb 10 May 1865 v. 179 c. 93.

was generally admitted to be objectionable'.⁹² But a supporter, in response to the rejected 1851 plan to let pews in all nineteenth-century churches, stated his belief that such a measure

was ardently desired by the working clergy, who believed that it would give them the independence they had sought, and which was so necessary to the discharge of their spiritual duties. The Bill removed many obstacles in the way of endowing churches...⁹³

And many Victorians, particularly before the late nineteenth century, were also said to support pew-letting – they liked the old ways and wished to preserve the visible class separation the practice supposedly entailed.⁹⁴

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the complaint most often heard about pew-renting was that the practice kept the poor away from church – generally these argued that the destitute were so offended by the system of seat-letting that they refused to attend church.⁹⁵ This objection was largely made not by the alleged victims, but by those of higher social standing ostensibly on behalf of the poor. According to the Vicar of Bradford in the mid-nineteenth century, 'it hurts [the] feelings [of the poor] of independence to sit in the aisles of the new district churches where other people pay'.⁹⁶ In the late eighteenth century similar objections had been made to nobles who, when attending the theatre, 'expected the audience to rise as they entered'.⁹⁷ Others noted that many of the working class were migratory, and would hardly be inclined to apply for seats or pay pew-rents in a church from which they would probably quickly move away.⁹⁸ A variety of opinions on this particular subject were expressed at the 1858 House of Lords hearings. A bank director testified that a change from pew-rents to offertories, entailing 'each contributing according to

⁹² HC Deb 24 June 1851 v. 117 c. 1163.

⁹³ HC Deb 24 June 1851 v. 117 c. 1161.

⁹⁴ Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p. 138; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 43.

⁹⁵ 'A Layman', *The Pew System and the Injuries Inflicted Thereby on All Degrees of Men in the Church* (Liverpool: Benson & Mallett, 1860), p. 7; Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, p. 153; *Free and Open Churches: and the Weekly Offertory* (London: G. J. Palmer, 1871), p. 32.

⁹⁶ Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, p. 116.

⁹⁷ Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*, p. 527.

⁹⁸ Stuart, E., *The Pew System and the Injuries Which It Inflicts on the Church of England* (London: Bell and Daldy, ?1860), pp. 39-40; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 42.

his means', would prevent the poor from feeling they were the victims of discrimination.⁹⁹ Both the incumbent of St Clement Danes in the Strand and the coroner of Manchester believed that the poor currently absented themselves, but would come to church if pew-rents were abandoned.¹⁰⁰ In 1865 Henry Clark, writing for the London Association for Promoting Freedom of Public Worship, alleged that in a 500-resident street in London, only one attended church or chapel.¹⁰¹ This, though, is unlikely to be accurate unless the street in question was populated by the *very* poor, since otherwise no demand for rented sittings would have existed.

A recent writer similarly argues that assigning of pews by social status, charging rents, and 'the language and religious tone set by their social superiors emphasised the inferiority of the working population, many of whom were becoming less ready to accept humiliating social distinctions'.¹⁰² But another recent theorist concludes that the poor were not offended,

any more, one supposes than the twentieth-century sports fan devotes much conscious attention to the class implications of bleachers and luxury boxes...From the nineteenth-century perspective, the potential for social disgrace rested not on the poor, but on any persons of means who would have sat in pews less expensive than their social station indicated they could afford'.¹⁰³

And Victorian writers pointed out that some parishes had no truly poor parishioners.¹⁰⁴ But in any event, Sir James M'Garel-Hogg told the House of Commons in 1882 that pew-rents were responsible for the very existence of a number of churches;

it would not be possible to prevent persons who wished to endow and build churches from levying pew rents. [Sir James] could say of many of the churches with which he had been connected that, had pew rents not been established, it would have been simply impossible for those churches to have been in existence.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 116, 435.

¹⁰¹ Clark, H., *Sunday Schools and the Pew System: An Address Delivered at a Public Meeting of the Gloucester and Bristol Diocesan Branch of the National Association for Promoting Freedom of Worship, held at the Town Hall, Cheltenham, on December 26th, 1865* (London: The Association, 1865), p. 20; Bennett, "'Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly'", p. 40.

¹⁰² Brown, R., *Church and State in Modern Britain, 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 473.

¹⁰³ Cashdollar, C., *A Spiritual Home: Life in British and American Reformed Congregations, 1830-1915* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), pp. 169-70.

¹⁰⁴ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1886), p. 287.

¹⁰⁵ HC Deb 21 March 1882 v. 267 cc 1553-4.

On the other side Horace Mann, of the 1851 religious census, blamed pew-rents for an alleged mass absence of the poor from church.¹⁰⁶ It was argued that renters might not attend church, leaving their sittings empty throughout services,¹⁰⁷ and that other congregants might be denied the empty spaces.¹⁰⁸ But where the ‘first lesson rule’ was used, this objection was unrealistic.

Also, just as some argued that tithing had no basis in the New Testament,¹⁰⁹ pew-rent opponents frequently cited biblical passages, most often James II:1-4,¹¹⁰ as authority for seating the poor as advantageously as those who could afford to pay pew-rent.¹¹¹ According to one writer, ‘Napoleon declared seat rents to be contrary to the spirit of Jesus and fatal to religion among the poor’, and some critics also accused pew-renting churches of having become commercial enterprises.¹¹² Others elaborated on the danger that pew-rents caused feelings of hostility to clerical greediness. Pew-renting caused some parishioners to suspect financial motives when their clergymen visited – when one incumbent called on a particular parishioner he was told he was merely ‘looking after his pew-rents’.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁷ Clark, *Sunday Schools and the Pew System*, pp. 22-3; *Address of the General Committee on the Pew System to the Clergy and Laity of the Church of England* (Manchester: Cave & Sever, 1860), pp. 3, 7; Stuart, *The Pew System and the Injuries Which It Inflicts on the Church of England*, p. 20; *Free and Open Churches: and the Weekly Offertory*, p. 19 (telling of an incident in which a couple renting a pew would not allow another parishioner to sit with them despite the availability of seats there).

¹⁰⁸ ‘A Layman’, *The Pew System and the Injuries Inflicted Thereby on All Degrees of Men in the Church*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ Evans, E.J., *The Contentious Tithe: The Tithe Problem and English Agriculture, 1750-1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 82.

¹¹⁰ Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 41; James II:1-4 (KJV) –

1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

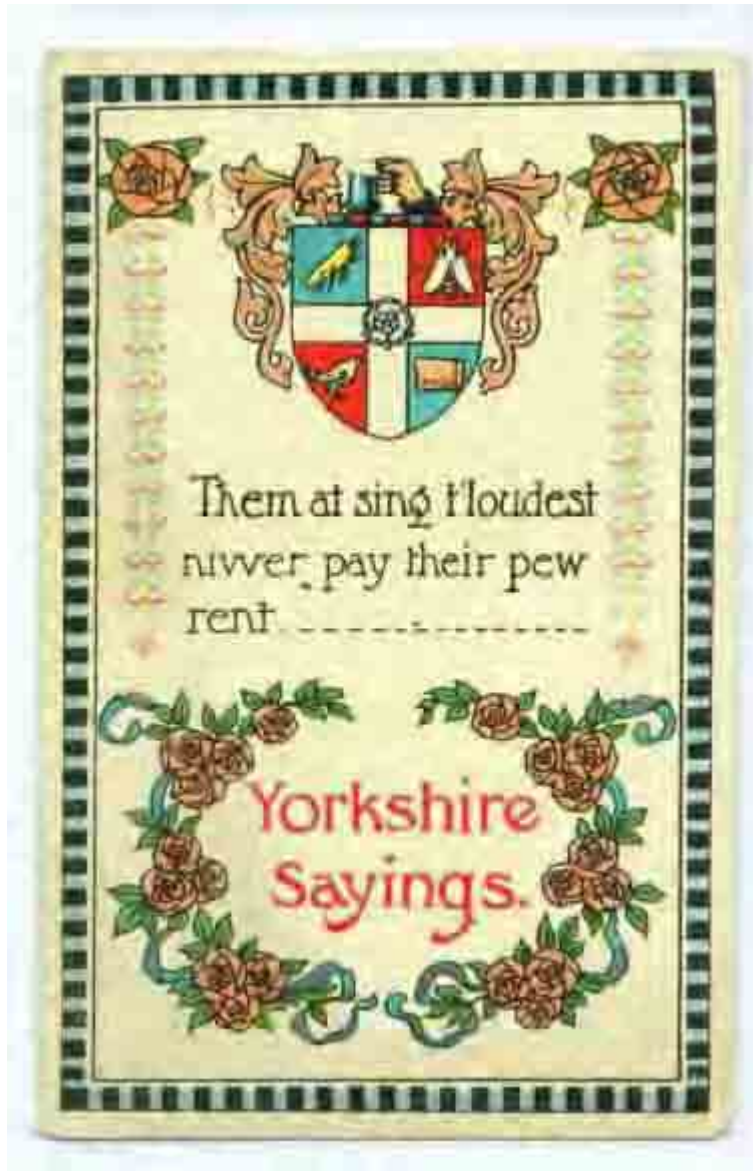
4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

¹¹¹ Wodehouse, Rev. Canon., *A Sermon, Preached in St. Nicholas’ Chapel, King’s Lynn, on Sunday, Feb. 27th. 1853* (King’s Lynn: Thew and Son, 1853), p. 3.

¹¹² Tiplady, T., *Pew-Rents and the Evil They Have Done* (London: The Sign of the Cross, no date), p. 7; Jones, J.S., *A Letter to Sir Roundell Palmer, Knt., Her Majesty’s Attorney General on the Provisions of the Bill as to Pews and Pew Rents* (Liverpool: W.C. Grimley, 1864), p. 11; ‘A Layman’, *The Pew System and the Injuries Which It Inflicts on the Church of England*, pp. 46-7; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 41.

¹¹³ Wickham, E.R., *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London: Lutterworth, 1957), p. 116; *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords*, p. 609.

At times opponents of pew-rents made snide comments suggesting a link between deep religious feeling and a failure to pay pew-rent; the postcard below is from just after the turn of the twentieth century.¹¹⁴



The English journalist and poet Barry Pain, who lived from 1864 to 1928, similarly wrote:

Not understood? Take me hence! Take me yonder!
Take me away to the land of my rest –
There where the Ganges and other gees wander,
And uncles and antelopes act for the best,
And all things are mixed and run into each other
In a violet twilight of virtues and sins,
With the church-spires below you and no one to show you
Where the curate leaves off and the pew-rent begins!¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 42.

In 1886 the creative terms given to pew-renting, such as ‘seat-subscription’, were noted. In a report of a Church Conference at Wakefield, J. Theodore Dodd likened this to someone not permitted to sell drink giving it away, while taking money for it under the table – ‘the magistrates would have no difficulty in treating the transaction as an illegal sale’.¹¹⁶

In many instances protests and defenses were actually about seat *allocation*; the payment was peripheral. It was contended that without class separation the better-off would absent themselves, and the Church would lose respectability thereby.¹¹⁷ But several supporters argued that open seating would mean the rich would be exposed to the odours of the poor, and that the well-dressed might have their garments soiled by close proximity with the literally unwashed.¹¹⁸ At first glance this is unreasonable – in an age when manure was everywhere one walked and clothes and bodies were not so often or so thoroughly washed as today, one might imagine that unpleasant odours were ubiquitous. But some could not only tell the occupation of another, but even distinguish among agricultural workers, by smell:

The odours of work clung to the garments of workers: to move from stable to cow-house ‘was to enter another world altogether. Instead of the strong ammoniated smell of the stable, one became conscious of a pervading essence of meadows; the laxative quality of green grass in semi-fluid manure, and sweet smelling milk.’ Builders had the scent of lime, carpenters of wood, saddlers and shoemakers of leather and wax.¹¹⁹

And in 1872 a member of the Commons spoke of enclosed pews as ‘almost the only protection a Churchman had’ while attending divine service.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Barry Pain, quoted in Johnson, B., ‘The Lion’s Mouth: A Chair of Nonsense’, in Harper’s Magazine, v. 141 (1920, June), pp. 138-131, p. 130.

¹¹⁶ Dodd, J.T., ‘Parish Churches Bill’, in *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Wakefield*, Dunkley, C., ed. (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1886), pp. 430-437, p. 433.

¹¹⁷ Stuart, *The Pew System and the Injuries Which It Inflicts on the Church of England*, p. 32.

¹¹⁸ Billing, S., *The Laws Relating to Pews in Churches, District Churches, Chapels and Proprietary Chapels: The Rights Incidental Thereto, and the Remedy* (London: W. Benning, 1845), pp. xxvii-xxviii; Herford, E., *Pew Rents Fatal to the National Church* (Nottingham: National Association for Freedom of Worship, 1871), p. 9; Bennett, “Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”, p. 43.

¹¹⁹ Reay, B., *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 35, quoting Rose, W., *Good Neighbours* (Bideford: Green Books, 1988), pp. 14, 17, 35, 37-8, 43-4.

¹²⁰ HC Deb 16 July 1872 v. 212 cc1292-93.

On the other hand, perhaps the most interesting concept that emerged from the 1858 Lords' hearings is the evident unpopularity of introducing pew-rents in a church that had previously existed without them, and the apparent tolerance of pew-renting when done from a new church's inception. In 1858 the rector of Clerkenwell stated that parishioners as a whole generally resisted pew-rents when *existing* parish churches proposed them – this 'would be considered an innovation'; 'the cry outside would be of "pew rents", and we should have it marked on all the dead walls, and we should never hear the end of it'.¹²¹ Such a sentiment is understandable – once regular congregants had established via formal or informal allocation who would sit where, free of charge, asking for payment would cause animosity. But the rector noted that a new church could charge pew-rent if it did so from its inception; 'the poor would like that system in a new church', and it would produce a 'considerable income'.¹²² In 1837 Sir Robert Peel noted, and in much the same terms as did Lord John Russell in 1854, that those in rural parishes, lacking any strictly legal rights to their sittings, might 'be driven from those pews which they looked upon as a species of freehold to which they were entitled, without any payment, [which] would create in their minds a strong feeling of disgust'.¹²³

Those who defended pew-renting were, though, measurably less acerbic than those on the other side. At Christ Church, Preston, the letting of seats in 1906-7 produced £221 16s. 7d., of which the vicar was paid £130. Only a very small number of sittings there were free and unappropriated. Despite a one-third drop in revenue to only £140 five years later, a memorandum from an unsigned 'Meeting of Church Officers' stated a belief that:

there is more to be said for the system of pew-rents than many will allow –
 (a) a [sic] excellent system financially
 (b) it stands for family religion.

Nevertheless, the officers urged that many more seats be freed. Some two months later the officers noted that while some of pews were completely unappropriated, 'the Committee is

¹²¹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 541.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 540-1.

¹²³ HC Deb 03 March 1837 v. 36, c. 1278-79; HC Deb 21 June 1854 v. 134 c. 472.

not prep^d at present to declare these free – they think it is better to mark them as ‘Unapp^d’ – & thus to retain the power of letting them if opport^y offers’. A letter to the vicar, apparently from the bishop’s representative, approved but cautioned that ‘seatholders would be disturbed if half of the pews they rent were declared free. I do not think that this ought to be done’.¹²⁴

In 1889 Lucius Fry, the vicar of St James, Upper Edmonton – a pew-renting church – published a pamphlet in favour of the practice. Fry believed that congregants liked the straightforward, businesslike method of letting sittings – ‘the people know exactly how much they are expected to give’, and they get a privilege in return, which ‘saves the clergyman from being placed under any obligation to them’. Fry acknowledged that under a pew-renting system congregants tended to contribute ‘not so much according to their means, as according to the size of their family’, and so congregants should be encouraged to contribute offerings as well. The argument that letting sittings divided the rich from the poor, he said, was correct in that such a system only ‘recognises the fact that there *is* a distinction’. Fry also claimed that many pew-rented churches were very well attended, and therefore the practice did *not* keep people away from church, as claimed.¹²⁵

And at St Andrew, Deal, the writers of the parish magazine just after the turn of the twentieth century stated they ‘cannot say that speaking generally, the principle of paid sittings meets with our approval’. They nevertheless noted that

if the taking of a seat represents a desire to link oneself definitely to the Church, and is a proclamation that one intends to be a regular worshipper, and so one would wish always to find a place awaiting one, then that is well.

They then listed seven new seatholders who had recently taken a total of 21 sittings. These were likely rented, since pew-letting persisted at the church until at least 1924.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ LaRO, P2952/5/39.

¹²⁵ Fry, L.G., *The Righteousness of Pew Rents* (London: John Kensit, 1889), pp. 9, 11.

¹²⁶ CCA U3/271/28/2 & U3/271/5/D2.

Another reason given in favour of pew-rents was that many clergy depended on this source as a vital part of their income.¹²⁷ As noted earlier, this was largely true; in perhaps the majority of pew-renting churches at least part of the revenue was directed to the incumbent.

Analysis

Pew-rents self-evidently discriminated against those who could not pay. The idea that they kept the poor from attending church, though, is less easy to sustain. Up to about 1881, the percentage of worshippers in Sheffield's Anglican churches was increasing,¹²⁸ and at least until 1851 many other areas experienced the same.¹²⁹ Even in the 1870s at evening services at St Stephen, Sheffield, a commentator found it 'impossible to gain admittance...men and women, boys and girls, waited patiently while the stream of fashion and respectability flowed past them.'¹³⁰ Wickham noted that 'a few Sheffield churches abolished the rents, although there is no evidence that they were thronged with the poor as a result'.¹³¹ And in one village, Nailsworth in Gloucestershire, pew-rents were instituted in order to give the poor a place to worship. A resolution there in 1794 enacted pew-letting, initially via subscriptions, to build a chapel of ease to accommodate poorer families:

the Inhabitants of Nailsworth are almost deprived of the benefit of attending Divine Worship according to the Establishment, owing to the distance from, and the bad roads to the surrounding Churches. Nailsworth is a large populous Village, situated in the Parishes of Avening and Horsley, and inhabited chiefly by people employed in different branches of Clothing Manufacture – most of them with large families – consequently rendered so poor that it is entirely out of their power (of themselves) to raise a sum sufficient for the erecting of a small Chapel.¹³²

The subscribers for the chapel – St George Episcopal Chapel of Ease – subsequently resolved that:

¹²⁷ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. xix.

¹²⁸ Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, p. 141.

¹²⁹ Crockett, A., *Variations in Churchgoing Rates in England in 1851: Supply-Side Deficiency or Demand-Led Decline?* University of Oxford Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History, No. 36 (Oxford: Nuffield College, 2000), p. 7.

¹³⁰ Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, p. 145.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹³² GA P223 CW 4/1.

the Seats or Pews which from time to time be erected in the said intended Chapel shall be vested in the Chapel wardens for the time being and shall be let and set by them or the majority of them from time to time and the Rents and profits thereof be applied for the use and benefit of the Curate for the time being...¹³³

Overall, the surmise that pew-renting kept the poor away from church appeared to have empirical support, but only if the stumbling block was the *paying* of the rent asked for sittings when free seats were unavailable. If the poor were offended by the *principle* of seat-letting, they rarely showed it by shunning church entirely. St George, Sheffield, consecrated in 1825, was advertised to have ‘upwards of a thousand free seats for those who are unable to take paid sittings’. According to a speaker at a public meeting regarding church rates, the number of congregants at St George quickly passed all other Sheffield churches.¹³⁴ At St Mary, Sheffield, another ‘flourishing’ church, the rent-free seats were all filled.¹³⁵ And the perpetual curate of St Peter, Stepney, testified similarly before the Lords in 1858 that although pew-rents existed at his church, the unrented sittings were *full* during services.¹³⁶ On the other hand, St Philip, Sheffield, experienced no such crowds; consecrated only three years after St George, above, St Philip had 800 rent-free sittings, but ‘the free seats are too often thinly tenanted. To what shall we attribute this indifference to divine ordinance?’¹³⁷ The honorary secretary of the London Diocesan Church Building Society, the rectors of the Lambeth and Clerkenwell parish churches, and another incumbent all testified in 1858 that in their experience the poor were *not* offended by having to take cost-free sittings.¹³⁸

Where both rent-free and rented pews were readily available, and particularly where the first lesson rule operated, the likelihood that poorer parishioners would be offended is slim – anyone who turned up might easily be seated in a very convenient place. The destitute

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, pp. 77-78.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹³⁶ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), p. 69.

¹³⁷ Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, p. 87.

¹³⁸ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), pp. 455, 468, 538.

probably felt more than slightly snubbed only in churches in which they were forced to sit in remote galleries and corners while obviously better, rented seats were vacant *and* off-limits – and in such an event the attitudes of the church officials toward the poor, rather than pew-rents, were most likely to blame.¹³⁹ Of course, some churches in wealthy parishes did not require many rent-free pews – St Mark, Broomhill, a ‘good’ congregation in ‘a commercial as well as a religious sense’, had only thirty-five sittings set aside for the poor, which ‘were probably all that were required’.¹⁴⁰

The complaint that the genteel might be discomfited by the proximity of the unwashed seems justified, particularly in the mid-Victorian period and later when people realised the importance of cleanliness and hygiene. But in this the seat allocation inherent in pew-renting, rather than pew-renting itself, was responsible. Moreover, if the theory is correct that working-class church-going had diminished considerably by the end of the nineteenth century, and if pew-rents were necessary earlier because lower-class congregants smelled, they would have been unnecessary by the end of the nineteenth century in many churches when, due to the decline of attendance, congregants would rarely have to sit close to those whose odours offended them. But pew-rents clearly persisted longer in many churches. The argument that pew-rents tempted congregants with ostentation, while offertories did not,¹⁴¹ also actually aims at seat-allocation, rather than pew-renting.¹⁴² In some cases pews were rented so that the renters could gain some fame, or at least attention; some parish churches put donors’ names and their gifts on large boards for all to see.¹⁴³ In these cases, or if small business owners used their rented sittings as advertising, the argument regarding ostentation seems justified.

¹³⁹ Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 44.

¹⁴⁰ Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, p. 144.

¹⁴¹ *Free and Open Churches: and the Weekly Offertory*, p. 34.

¹⁴² Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 45.

¹⁴³ Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class*, p. 156.

At times before 1869 pew-rents were advocated because they would be preferable to continuing church rate.¹⁴⁴ This would have been more democratic, but in the eyes of most contemporaries it was not an ideal solution. Another proponent believed that abolition would ‘increase the obstacles to Church extension and cramp and limit future church building’.¹⁴⁵

Finally, at St Paul, Chichester, in 1880 the vicar combined criticism of pew-rents as contrary to Scripture with the happy thought that replacing renting with the offertory system would net more revenue.¹⁴⁶ This impression had earlier been raised in the 1858 Lords hearings, by one so unlikely as the coroner of Manchester, and elsewhere by others.¹⁴⁷ Pew-rents at Smeeth Parish, Kent, netted over £23 in 1885 and 1895, but when they fell to less than £16 in 1898 and less than £15 the next year, a monthly collection was substituted in 1901.¹⁴⁸

Interestingly, the argument that the offertory would bring in more money appears confirmed by an 1869 study made by the Chester Diocesan Open Church Association.¹⁴⁹ At St George, Deal, the total receipts from pew-rents dropped considerably from 1901 to 1919, but the total revenue from *all* sources rose considerably in that time.¹⁵⁰ Yet the idea that churches abandoning pew-rents would *necessarily* bring in more via the offertory seems optimistic. In 1874 St Leonard, Hythe, gave up allocating seats in the hope of taking in more in collections than it did via church rate, but five years afterwards the incumbent protested that collections netted less than expected:

¹⁴⁴ Sachs, W.L., *The Transformation of Anglicanism from State Church to Global Communion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 85; Arnold-Baker, C., *The Companion to British History*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 305.

¹⁴⁵ ESRO PAR 277/6/2/1.

¹⁴⁶ WSRO Par/43/6/3.

¹⁴⁷ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords*, (1858), pp. xix, 412; Inglis, K.S., *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 51; *Address of the General Committee on the Pew System to the Clergy and Laity of the Church of England*, p. 2; Incorporated Free and Open Church Association, *Does It Pay?* (London: The Association, 1885), p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ London Free and Open Church Association, *The Financial, Numerical, and General Experience of Free and Unappropriated Churches* (London: The Association, 1869), pp. 5-9; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 44.

¹⁵⁰ CCA U3/67/5/3.

It is painful to know that many well-to-do people persistently refuse Sunday after Sunday to give one farthing, though occupying regularly seats in a Church warmed and lighted at the charge of others. Were they residing in other Towns near this they would have to pay £4 or £5, or it may be even £7 for their Pew in Church, but here because they are not compelled to pay anything for the same privilege, but it is in a manner left to their honor to contribute through the Offertory, they habitually refuse to do so.¹⁵¹

Moreover, those arguing to replace pew-rents with the offertory abandoned – perhaps inadvertently – the argument that churches should not act as commercial ventures. In advocating offertories as a means of producing greater revenue than pew-rents, they intrinsically appealed to church officials’ pecuniary interests.¹⁵² Similarly, citation of the legal principle that every parishioner had a right to a seat in the parish church should have caused difficulties for pew-rent opponents. Those who argued that all seats should be free and open – *i.e.*, that first-comers to each service should have their choice of sittings – meant that parishioners might be denied their right to seats if they arrived after non-parishioners had filled the pews. Whether this occurred to many of those making this claim is lost to history.

A question still to be asked here is *why* pew-renting caused such offense among some people. Some reasons have been touched upon earlier, such as that allocation and by extension pew-rents caused dissension when several congregants each wanted the same sitting, and that the practice did not provide a steady income for incumbents. But these are relatively minor matters. The most plausible answer appears to be that the idea contradicted the growing Victorian fashion of egalitarianism. The Anglican Church was thought by some to be a hindrance to the achievement of equality.¹⁵³ Tractarians in particular espoused a belief of ‘equality of Victoria’s two nations before God’, and found pew-rents a particularly egregious symbol of imparity – ‘the insinuation of material rank into the edifice of spiritual equality’.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ CCA U3/282/5/F1.

¹⁵² Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, pp. 44-45.

¹⁵³ Parsons, G., *Religion in Victorian Britain: Interprétations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 75.

¹⁵⁴ Skinner, S.A., *Tractarians and the ‘Condition of England’: The Social and Political Thought of the Oxford Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), pp. 139, 168, 175.

In summary

This chapter reflects that the Victorian debate on pew-renting was lively and often emotional, with supporters and critics voicing many reasons for their positions. Due to the nineteenth-century legislation, pew-letting – while initially envisioned to be a temporary solution to the cost of building new churches – was so vital to paying the salaries of ministers and clerks and to finance the upkeep of church fabric and other needs that it could not be abandoned regardless of complaints of its supposedly negative effects. Particularly among the clergy, twentieth-century opinions regarding pew-renting were expressed with less hostility than before. The opposition had little *direct* effect on the practice itself, since pew-renting continued at most churches long after the storm of protest had reached a crescendo. On the other hand, one may reasonably speculate that the criticism served to educate some congregants that the law proscribed the rents paid or the manner in which they were charged. Accordingly, many such congregants may well have been empowered to successfully protest the practice, leading to its abolition in many further churches which might have continued letting their seats further into the twentieth century, and possibly keeping other churches from instituting the practice. This conclusion is strengthened by the data from both Kent and Bristol, above, showing the dearth of pew-renting churches opened in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE DEMISE OF PEW-RENTING

This chapter delves into the times at which various churches stopped renting sittings, details the manner and means by which pew-renting became obsolete, and explores the reasons and methods – both implicit and explicit – for suspending the practice, although one church in the British Isles continues to rent pews for a very small sum. The chapter also notes the dearth of churches consecrated in the twentieth century that rented pews, *i.e.*, that the vast majority of those letting sittings after 1900 were churches consecrated before that date.

The Time Period in Which Pew-renting Largely Ended

In 1898 Mr. Edmund Boulnois, a member of the Commons, stated that, ‘as everybody knows, the system of paying pew rents is gradually disappearing in this country, and it is a vanishing quantity’.¹ In the same debate Sir J. Brunner claimed that ‘members of the Church of England, who get the whole and entire benefit of these churches, have got out of the habit of paying pew rents’.² At least one pew-rent opponent claimed that in late Victorian times pew-rents brought in ‘less and less’ each year.³ And in 1905 a barrister noted that, evidently no more than two years before,

...letting of seats outside the law was practised in several churches of new parishes in London to the knowledge of the bishop and other ecclesiastical authorities, though in the greater number of new parish churches in South London there was no letting of seats...⁴

But this study indicates these opinions were unrealistic, at least in regard to Kent and Bristol, where many churches continued renting sittings well into the twentieth century. In 1925 the *Guardian* reported that £144,000 was taken annually in pew-rents – although this figure may have included dissenting chapels – and that in the dioceses of London, Southwark, Chester,

¹ HC Deb 14 July 1898 v. 61 c. 903.

² HC Deb 14 July 1898 v. 61 c. 904-5.

³ Tiplady, T., *Pew-Rents and the Evil They Have Done* (London: The Sign of the Cross, no date), p. 6.

⁴ *Wolfe v. Clerk*, 1 K.B. 439, 442 (1905).

Manchester and Liverpool a total of 473 Anglican churches rented sittings.⁵ Even in January 1927 the *Free and Open Church Advocate* reported that ‘The Committee have to report another year’s useful work...Among the churches freed from pew rents during the past year are the following’ – and eleven Anglican churches are named.⁶

Table 1, above, reflects that a large minority of Kentish pew-renting churches were found in this study to have continued the practice after the First World War, and in a recent study of Staffordshire churches John Tomlinson also found that pew-renting ‘lingered on until the 1950s...’⁷ However, few Kentish churches were found to have *instituted* seat-letting after the turn of the twentieth century, although as late as 1920 a new system of pew-renting where none had previously existed was suggested at St Mary, Kippington, Kent, and St Luke, Sevenoaks.⁸ Some churches began letting sittings in late Victorian times; the Ecclesiastical Commissioners approved a scale of pew-rents in 1891 for St Paul, Harringay. These examples are, however, the exception rather than the rule – most pew-renting churches appear to have initiated the practice in the 1870s or earlier. And in 1911 the officials at St Andrew, Clifton, Bristol, were so sufficiently convinced that pew-renting would continue there that they ordered a new book in which to record the receipts.⁹ In light of the predominantly urban nature of pew-renting, the paucity of new pew-renting churches in the twentieth century is not surprising. Many urban churches lost touch with their potential congregants after Victoria’s reign, largely because people were moving from inner-city areas to the suburbs.¹⁰

⁵ M.C.G., ‘Five Minute Talks to Councillors: The Pew-Rents Report’, *The Guardian Supplement*, 27 February 1925.

⁶ *Free and Open Church Advocate*, v. 5, no. 40 (January 1927), p. 473.

⁷ Tomlinson, J.W.B., ‘From Parson to Professional: The Changing Ministry of the Anglican Clergy in Staffordshire, 1830-1960’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2008), p. 187.

⁸ CKS P330D/8/3.

⁹ BRRO P/StA/ChW/10/6.

¹⁰ Walford, R., *The Growth of “New London in Suburban Middlesex (1918-1945) and the Response of the Church of England* (Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), p. 374.

References to churches renting pews in the *second* half of the twentieth century are not common, but not especially rare. As late as 1959 a ‘normal’ process of eliminating pew-rents was still in effect, although by 1955 most churches in Kentish London still doing so had only ‘a very few’ rented sittings.¹¹ From late Victorian times until the 1960s, *virtually* all churches stopped charging pew-rents,¹² although they may have retained seat allocation. One instance of pew-rents in the British Isles continued at least until 2008: at the parish church on the Channel Island of Sark, where landowners rent gated pews at 2p per year.¹³

The Reasons for the Demise of Pew-renting

This study indicates that pew-rents were less likely to be abolished abruptly than to ‘peter out’, to dwindle so far that the cost and trouble of administering them was not worth the diminishing profit, and because other forms of revenue were thought to be more lucrative. Put another way, just as pew-renting was adopted because it was financially expedient, provided it was done with sufficient business acumen, the practice was abandoned because it was later thought to be less profitable than other fund-raising methods.¹⁴

Many churchwardens’ accounts confirm the decline in pew-rent revenue until the practice’s evident discontinuance. And in a 1943 letter from the Parochial Church Council of St Andrew, Ashton-on-Ribble, Lancashire, mentioned that ‘the letting of the Pews and the collection of the rents was not either so easy or productive as in former days’ and ‘consequently the Vicar could not budget on the basis of a fairly regular and fixed income’.¹⁵ At St Augustine, Grove Park, Kent, pew-rents brought in over £100 for the half-year ending at Michaelmas before and after the Great War, until they fell to under £97 semi-annually in

¹¹ LLSA A78/18M/A9/7.

¹² Norman, E.R., *Church and Society in England, 1770-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 162.

¹³ ‘After 400 Years, Lord of Sark Faces Battle with 21st Century Knights’, *Guardian* (April 2008), home pages, pp. 3, 10.

¹⁴ Bennett, J.C., ‘“Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”: The Practice of Pew-renting at Kentish Anglican Churches’ (unpublished MTh dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2006), p. 31.

¹⁵ LaRO P3279/4/6/3.

1923. The only subsequent half-year ending at Michaelmas which netted more than £100 was in 1927; in the 1930s they fell to about £70 for each such half-year. Then in 1941 only £11 5s. was taken, and the pew-rent book's pages after that are blank.¹⁶

The drop in church attendance can be attributed to one or more of many factors. One appears to have been the stigma of rent-free sittings. The Victorian obsession with respectability kept those who desired that label from anything smacking of 'dependence', lest they 'be confused with the unrespectable'.¹⁷ Table 8 therefore gives total pew-rent receipts at six Kentish Anglican churches from the late nineteenth century to part-way through the twentieth. These six were chosen because their records were clear, sufficiently detailed and well-kept. Although their pew-rent receipts are not available in every year from 1800-1960, the totals allow some analysis of trends. Where a church's accounting system was not based on a January-to-December year, receipts are listed for the accounting year with the most months, *i.e.*, an accounting year from Easter 1900 to Easter 1901 is listed as 1900. No record of pew-rents could be found for any of these churches after the final year listed here; the analysis below presumes pew-rents ended at each church at that time or shortly thereafter, but since these churches' financial records were abundantly detailed for subsequent years, this presumption seems justified.¹⁸

Table 8 indicates that in any few years from mid-Victorian times onwards, pew-rent revenue in any church might decline to a fraction of its former total. *Why* it declined, therefore, is not dependent on a feeling of outrage or disinterest that can be said to characterise a particular era or generation. In some churches in Table 8 the total receipts do not dwindle away slowly at what appears to be the *very* end of pew-renting; there is a significant drop between the last few years in which rents were recorded and the final one or

¹⁶ LLSA A79/13 A4/2.

¹⁷ Crossick, G., *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London 1840-1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 136.

¹⁸ Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", pp. 31, 48.

TABLE 8 – Pew-rent Receipts, 1858-1934, from Six Kentish Anglican Churches

Year	St Paul, Maidstone ¹⁹ £ s. d.	St Philip, Maidstone ²⁰ £ s. d.	St George, Deal ²¹ £ s. d.	St Nicholas, Rochester ²² £ s. d.	Christ Church, Folkestone ²³ £ s. d.	Christ Church, Ramsgate ²⁴ £ s. d.
1858		51 5 9½				
1859		48 18 8				
1860		59 2 6	231 7 0			
1861		69 10 0	234 15 0			
1862		69 0 0	248 2 6	177 15 6		
1863		63 7 6	238 14 0			
1864		63 6 0	232 4 6			
1865		62 0 6	236 0 6			
1866		70 18 0				
1867		58 18 0				

1871				161 12 0		

1876	134 1 4					
1877	122 4 8			148 2 0		
1878	134 13 0					
1879	122 4 8					
1880	126 19 6			146 18 0		
1881	113 16 8					
1882	105 17 10			142 15 0		
1883	116 17 0					
1884	116 3 4					
1885	114 14 0		216 11 6	135 11 0	565 5 7	
1886	109 18 4				597 17 8	
1887	61 8 0				587 5 6	
1888					571 5 9	
1889		87 12 0		127 7 6	561 3 0	
1890					540 1 7	
1891			189 13 0	130 3 6	592 7 4	
1892				130 1 9	584 13 2	
1893				134 3 6	556 17 6	
1894				135 6 0	535 10 7	
1895				131 16 0	541 7 0	385 6 6
1896			259 9 0	140 1 6	529 8 10	
1897				138 4 0		
1898				136 11 0		
1899	83 4 0			131 14 6	564 18 6	
1900				122 3 6	552 9 6	
1901				115 9 6	538 3 7	386 0 2
1902			227 14 6	113 10 0	542 7 9	
1903				109 9 6	539 0 0	
1904				100 13 6	549 15 3	
1905				89 18 0	556 16 9	344 18 1
1906				91 3 0	553 3 6	

¹⁹ CKS P241F/5/1; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", pp. 58-59.

²⁰ CKS P241G/5/A/7; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", pp. 58-59.

²¹ CCA U3/67/5/3; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", pp. 58-59.

²² MALSC P306/5/2; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", pp. 58-59.

²³ CCA U3/217/3/1; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", pp. 58-59.

²⁴ CCA U3/226/5/6 & U3/226/5/8; Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", pp. 58-59.

1907					91	1	0	545	11	3						
1908					85	1	0	491	14	7						
1909					76	8	0	472	17	3						
1910					68	6	6	467	6	4						
1911								455	3	11						
1912				149	4	0	59	4	6	484	19	10				
1913		42	10	0	139	19	0	57	16	6	479	11	3			
1914					123	13	6	56	11	6	433	16	3			
1915					120	16	0				410	6	0			
1916		38	7	0	109	19	0				300	0	3			
1917		29	0	0	104	0	0				357	6	3	165	5	5
1918					87	1	6				258	16	9	124	4	0
1919					107	11	9				253	8	9	168	18	10
1920		36	4	0							288	10	11			
1921											229	10	10			
1922											278	1	4			
1923											266	10	7	113	10	9
1924		39	14	6							296	13	10			
1925											264	12	10	160	15	3
1926											191	5	3			
1927		28	1	0							129	7	9	169	9	9
1928											244	11	8			
1929														159	6	3
1930														133	16	4
1931																
1932														105	3	0
1933																
1934														80	9	0

two. The total pew-rent revenue at Christ Church, Ramsgate – the last church in Table 8 – fluctuated from about £175 per annum for 1929 to 1931 to just over £165 for 1932, then rose to over £208 in 1933, then fell drastically to £94 in 1934 and a paltry £5 10s. in 1935. Nothing resembling pew-rents is recorded after that.²⁵ And the records of St George, Deal, and Christ Church, Folkestone, both in Table 8, reflect that dwindling sums increased significantly in the very last year of their administration.²⁶ The reason can only be speculated: on hearing that pew-rents would probably be discontinued, congregants may have taken seats that year because they liked seat *allocation*, and feared that aspect might disappear along with pew-letting. Alternatively, defaulting renters may have felt responsible for the elimination of rents and paid past-due sums when they otherwise might not have done so.²⁷

²⁵ CCA U3/226/5/F1 & U3/226/5/5/1

²⁶ Bennett, ““Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly””, pp. 32, 48, 58.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

An unusual phenomenon, though, occurred at St Margaret, Lee, where in the mid-1920s many more sittings were rented that had not been let, or were not available, a few years before. Evidently a market existed for these; although prices were virtually unchanged, pew-rent revenue in the year 1921-2 was £286 3s., but jumped to £511 17s. in 1927. But the totals also receded quickly – in 1935 the grand sum was back down to £394 1s.²⁸ At Christ Church, Luton, seat-letting declined in the 1870s, when ‘many of these rents were not levied; & the inconvenience of appropriated sittings was so great that they were, to a great extent, extinguished’, although the church still rented pews until at least 1929.²⁹

The fervent opposition to the practice expressed in the visitation returns may have been shared by officials of the new churches, or could well have dissuaded those who might have suggested letting any sittings. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners took a part in discouraging new instances of pew-renting, resolving in 1886 not to sanction any scales of some types of pew-rents ‘unless the proportion of free to rented sittings is at least equal both as regards number and quality’.³⁰ And in at least one case in the twentieth century the Commissioners threatened to partially withhold an endowment to a church that had proposed to let its sittings – in 1903 an official of Christ Church, Fulham, in an interview with the Commissioners’ assistant secretary, was told that ‘if the pew rent system were adopted the Endowment would be diminished in proportion to the amount estimated to be derived from the letting of seats’. The Assistant Secretary thus advised, unofficially, that ‘apart from the desirability of the Pew Rent system, simply from the financial point of view...that we should leave the church free and so qualify for the full endowment’.³¹

The waning of sums realised was not always the reason for pew-rents’ discontinuance, of course. In the mid-twentieth century St Martin, Dover, collected £50 per year for pew-

²⁸ LLSA A78/18M/A9/9.

²⁹ BLARS P135/3/1.

³⁰ HC Deb 17 June 1886 v. 306 c. 1704.

³¹ LMA P77/CTC/46/1.

rents in 1959-63, £70 in 1964, £136 in 1965, £100 per year in 1966-8, and £87 10s. in 1969.³²

No seat-rents are listed after that. And on rare occasions legal pressure caused churches to stop pew-renting. But where renters were willing to pay and churchwardens were willing to rent, critics had to resort to legal action to have any real chance of ending the practice, as was advised in St Nicholas Parish, Newcastle, in 1868. There an opinion emanating from the Doctor's Commons advised opponents of pew-renting to apply for an injunction, adding that:

A representation to the archdeacon, Rural Dean or Bishop might lead to an admonition to the Church Wardens not to persist in the illegal course they are taking which would strengthen your ulterior proceedings.³³

Instituting or threatening legal proceedings could be successful in ending the practice, particularly when the church's dealings were made known outside parish boundaries. One especially glaring example occurred in 1838, where after rearrangement of its seats the Yeovil, Somerset, parish church publicly auctioned off fifteen pews for between £16 and £90 each, as it had done at least back to 1600, not only to parishioners but to private investors who let the seats.³⁴ A public sale such as an auction, especially where private investors are involved, is hardly likely to pass unnoticed by those who object to the sale, and in 1850, a lawyer parishioner of Yeovil successfully demanded to be allocated a seat at no charge, and then helped another do the same. Pew-selling and renting at the church were both discontinued within the year.³⁵ Despite the evidence that most churches stopped letting pews of their own volition when other fund-raising methods promised more success, legal challenges to the practice appear to have increased in late Victorian and Edwardian times.

In at least one church, Holy Trinity, South Heigham, Norfolk, a grant from the Commissioners due to the waning of pew-rents still may not have ended the practice. In 1878 the rector sent a circular letter to the congregation, noting that due to falling profits the

³² CCA U3/287/5/D2.

³³ NCS EP/86/86.

³⁴ Bennett, "Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly", p. 46.

³⁵ Hancock, G., *The Pew Question: A Case Decided at Yeovil, in the Diocese of Bath and Wells, and County of Somerset* (London: Hope, 1853), p. 10.

Ecclesiastical Commissioners had agreed to supplement the living by an annual grant of £100, but that this was ‘not equivalent to the amount derived from the Seat Rents, which at the present time is £192, and might be, if all the sittings were taken, £220 per annum’. The churchwardens therefore proposed a new church fund, out of which ‘all the ordinary expenses of Divine Service will be paid, and the balance will be given to the Rector for the augmentation of his Stipend, and that of the Curate, for which is personally responsible’. One of the three means of raising this money was proposed to be ‘Voluntary Subscriptions, payable quarterly, by those to whom Seats are allotted’.³⁶ At St Margaret, Lee, pew-rents brought in £146 5s. in 1958, but were nevertheless eliminated soon after, when advice was sought on a legal manner of abolition, perhaps because many congregants evidently believed that the practice was ‘now undesirable on many grounds’.³⁷

At least one church now claims that pew-rents were ended due to ‘Christian stewardship’, although this act of apparent goodwill did not occur until 1960.³⁸ But in general pew-rent receipts simply petered out – in the words of the vicar of St James, Upper Edmonton, in 1906, the ‘system of pew rents here will die a natural death before long’ which he considered preferable to ‘trying to kill it suddenly’. In this he may have been prudent, although his prediction of a ‘natural death before long’ was incorrect – in 1937, more than three decades later, the church still let sittings, but revenue for that year was under £5.³⁹

But several reasons, either principally or in combination with each other, may explain the drop in revenue. There the provision of church seating increased dramatically in the nineteenth century, but church-going generally declined.⁴⁰

³⁶ NRO PD 522/58.

³⁷ LLSA A78/18M/A9/7.

³⁸ <http://www.hampsteadparishchurch.org.uk/data/history.html>

³⁹ CERC ECE/7/1/11391, pt. 4.

⁴⁰ Gill, R., ‘Secularization and Census Data’, in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, Bruce, S., ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 90-117, p. 102.

The time and expense of collecting pew-rents is rarely recorded, but where comparatively few congregants rented their sittings and fewer of them paid without being individually called upon to do so, other methods of raising revenue could be viewed as more attractive. Testimony before the House of Lords in 1858 indicated that at St Clement Danes in the late 1850s many congregants refused to pay their pew-rents, but the church did not try to enforce the debts.⁴¹ Certainly not all church officials were particularly sympathetic to defaulters. Regarding another form of revenue, the vicar of St Paul, Canterbury, noted bitterly in his 1851 Religious Census return that ‘the mass of persons refuse to pay their just demands’.⁴² If defaults became acute in a particular church, its officials may have correctly concluded that instituting other forms of revenue production would be more effective than trying to collect the bad debts. In short, pew-rents were not abolished so much as abandoned.

This study therefore supports Green’s conclusion that pew-rents were not ended because they were ‘bad’ but because they were no longer economically viable, since ‘more and more churches were being built at a time when there was less and less hard evidence that there were congregations willing and able to bear the burden of their expense’.⁴³ Another study, of Reformed churches in both England and America, reached much the same conclusion.⁴⁴ Incumbents often disliked the proposals for new churches in the same area as their own, fearing the new supply of sittings would mean less demand for their rented pews.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into The Deficiency of Means of Spiritual Instruction and Places of Divine Worship in the Metropolis, and in other Populous Districts in England and Wales, especially in the Mining and Manufacturing Districts; and to Consider the Fittest Means of Meeting the Difficulties of the Case; and to Report Thereon to the House; Together With the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: House of Commons, 1858), p. 114.

⁴² *Religious Worship in Kent: The Census of 1851*, Roake, M., ed. (Maidstone: Kent Archaeological Society, 1999), p. 244.

⁴³ Green, S.J.D., *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 155-6.

⁴⁴ Cashdollar, C., *A Spiritual Home: Life in British and American Reformed Congregations, 1830-1915* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 171.

⁴⁵ Brown, S.J., *The National Churches of England, Scotland and Ireland 1801-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 70.

The decline in attendance affected the profit to be made via pew-renting. At some point in the later nineteenth century or the first three decades of the twentieth, several individual Kentish churches began to experience a gradual drop in demand. Fewer people rented seats, and those who did so rented fewer seats than before. At St Philip, Maidstone, from 1866 to 1880 the number of seats taken by each renter dropped slightly, from just over two per person to 1.8 each,⁴⁶ and many of the best, closest pews were not let. At Christ Church, Hougham-in-Dover, as the nineteenth century wore on, fewer and fewer seats were rented in each pew – Pew 3, for example, officially had five sittings at 18s. each, but six were rented there in 1869 and 1870, then two until 1878, only one until 1900, and none thereafter.⁴⁷ At Christ Church, Ramsgate, in the 1920s and early 1930s, the number of renters dropped significantly; in 1935 only a few are listed and, as noted earlier, the amount received in that year from this source was negligible.⁴⁸ At St Philip, Maidstone, in 1901-2, 66.5 percent of sittings designated for rental were actually let, but by 1909-10 only 46.4 percent were taken. The number dropped to 40 per cent in 1913-14, and in 1916-17, at the height of the First World War, less than 32 percent. In 1919-20 the total was down to 26 percent.⁴⁹ Interestingly, however, almost immediately thereafter the percentage of available sittings actually rented at St Philip grew – in 1921-22 the total rose again to almost 30 percent, to 31.6 percent in 1924-25, and 33.9 percent in 1927-8, although the *total* revenue fell steadily in those years and nothing is recorded after 1927-8.⁵⁰ In 1960 at St Andrew, Waterloo, Hove, 22 parties rented pews, but apart from one congregant who rented three sittings, each couple rented only two seats and each individual only one.⁵¹ Finally, at St Paul, Cliftonville,

⁴⁶ CKS P241G/5/A/7.

⁴⁷ CCA U3/203/3/3.

⁴⁸ CCA U3/226/5/7.

⁴⁹ CKS P241G/5/A/8.

⁵⁰ CKS P241G/5/A/8 & P241G/5/A/9.

⁵¹ ESRO PAR 392/6/2/1.

Margate, revenue from pew-renting declined to almost nothing; while 297 sittings were rented in 1937, only 123 were let in 1945, and in each of 1966 and 1967 a mere four seats were let. This decline must be tempered by the later absence of three local schools or other groups of at least thirty to whom the church had rented pews in the 1930s, but even so in 1937 the large groups rented a total of only 108 of the 297 sittings.⁵² A lack of renters was explicitly stated as the reason for discontinuance of the system there in 1967, where at the Parochial Church Council meeting, ‘In reply to a further question Mr Samson said that pew rents were being allowed to lapse – there were only four now’.⁵³ Pew-rents were apparently neither paid nor collection attempted there during the height of the Second World War, from 1941 to 1944.⁵⁴

The first lesson rule may also have been partially responsible for the lesser demand for rented sittings. When attendance declined in a church using the rule, non-renters would have been given greater choice among the renters’ unused seats. There may also have been a sense among both renters and non-renters that paying for a prime seat one rarely used, and which others could frequently sit in without payment, made one look less powerful than foolish.⁵⁵ At St John, Preston, a parishioner gave up sittings in 1927 by writing to the church that ‘there is no object in paying for seats we so seldom use’.⁵⁶ Derision was particularly likely where the church was split longitudinally into rented sittings and rent-free ones, as the August 1891 Monthly Paper of the Chester and Liverpool Open Church Association stated:

By the new Parishes Act of 1856, one half of the seats in every church built under the Act must be free. This the Commissioners regarded as a condition fatal to the pew system; and the worst of the matter in their eyes was, that the Act required the free seats to be as well placed as the rented pews. This was usually effected by a longitudinal division of the church. Now, who would be so foolish as to pay for a seat on one side of the aisle when he could get one equally good on the other side for nothing at all?⁵⁷

⁵² CCA U3/281/5/A1.

⁵³ CCA U3/281/8/A8.

⁵⁴ CCA U3/281/8/A1.

⁵⁵ Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, pp. 48-49.

⁵⁶ LaRO PR2845/8/4.

⁵⁷ CERC ECE/7/1/21796.

Rather than drop prices when demand decreased, several churches actively *sought* pew-renters when sittings increasingly became available, a visible difference from the churches which earlier had more potential renters than rentable seats. At St James, Longton, Preston, the rents were lowered in 1863, but a year later they were still ‘to a great extent unlet’.⁵⁸ And in 1912 at Holy Trinity, Dartford, in response to ‘the falling off of income’ from pew-renting, the church council advertised the availability of sittings:

The Chairman [the vicar] suggested that members of the Council should ask their friends to take sittings and also try and get new-comers to do likewise. It was suggested and adopted that a notice should be placed on the Church Door to the effect that all seats were free as soon as the service had commenced, and also that notices should be placed in the pews to inform the Congregation of the price of sittings and requesting them to take some as the Church was not endowed. The Chairman and Mr Dines agreed to word this notice.⁵⁹

Whether pew-letting declined due to a lack of renters, or to existing renters’ refusal to pay, is of course likely to have varied from place to place. But in one church – Smeeth Parish, Kent – the seat-letting was discontinued in 1901 since no one could be found to act as churchwarden, the ‘chief reason’ for which was the ‘difficulty of collecting the seat rents’.⁶⁰

Late payments and nonpayment posed additional problems, which of course cut further into seat-letting profits. St Peter, Southborough, received £118 14s. 6d. in pew-rents for 1838-9, with ‘about £20’ – or more than one-sixth – outstanding, while the churchwardens of St Paul, Maidstone, took pains to include in their accounts lists both of ‘arrears’ and ‘bad debts’ from pew-letting from 1877 to 1882, and 1887, and at St Philip, Maidstone, from the late 1850s to the 1870s, renters more often than not paid erratically, often remitting only the amount due on one quarter-day and nothing for the rest of the year. Fuller and more timely payments were, however, generally made in the 1880s. The option of re-letting pews in the event of default was rarely if ever taken at St Philip – renters evidently were often allowed to stay in their assigned pews and make up deficits later, and where payment never arrived, the

⁵⁸ SSTAS D5676/7/43.

⁵⁹ MALSC P110/8/12.

⁶⁰ CKS P4B/8/2.

church seems to have frequently written off the debts.⁶¹ Suing for the overdue rent was a possibility, but as noted earlier, litigation could cost more than the sum to be recovered, and under the law and past court rulings, no guarantee could be made of success in court.

In rare instances individual churches raised only smallish sums from pew-letting at the best of times, but in at least one even these evidently petered out into extinction – St Andrew, Teynham, a chapel of ease, began letting sittings in 1869, which brought in about £22 that year and £27 the next, in which 78 sittings were let. In 1879 the total dropped to only just over £19, with 47 seats rented. For several decades the totals fluctuated between £15 and £22 annually, until they dropped to about £10 in 1912 and six to seven pounds a year during the Great War. In the mid-1920s revenue fell even further, to a low of £4 2s. 6d in 1925, after which there is no mention of pew-renting.⁶² By contrast, at St Gabriel, Warwick Square, Westminster, in 1928, which rented pews at that time, a lady was ‘anxious to know if she would eventually be able to secure seats at St Gabriel’s’.⁶³

And any worries congregants may have had that occupying rent-free seats would damage their reputations evidently were unfounded later in the period, at least after the First World War. In 1926 at St John, Preston, a Miss Edith Pearson had previously paid for sittings for herself and another, but wrote to the pew-rent collector to relinquish the seats – ‘we get to church so little since we are away so much’, so ‘when we are able go to church we must be shown to seats like so many people are’.⁶⁴ The requirement that rent-free seats be as advantageous as rented ones, as well as the evident lack of demand for very close sittings and the reduced disgrace of the ‘free seats’, removed much of the business acumen that characterised pew-renting throughout most of the nineteenth century.

⁶¹ CKS P371B/8/1; CKS P241F/5/1; CKS P241G/5/A/7; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 49.

⁶² CCA P366C U3/227/4/1.

⁶³ CWAC 1436/45/14.

⁶⁴ LaRO PR2845/8/4.

The Methods of Ending Pew-renting

By the 1850s Parliament had enacted provisions for the abolition of pew-rents – where a church received a permanent endowment the Commissioners and the bishop usually could order that pew-renting be discontinued, although if the revenue was appropriated to another purpose a local act might be necessary.⁶⁵ Many churches sought the views and approval of all concerned before taking this step. At Emmanuel Church, Hampstead, for example, it was thought in 1917 that the proper procedure would consist of five steps:

1. Ascertain the views of the Trustees.
2. Obtain a resolution of the Church Council.
3. Convene a meeting of seat renters and take their views.
4. Convene a meeting of Communicant members of the Church
5. Possibly, obtain the views of the Bishop and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.
6. Take such legal steps as may be necessary.⁶⁶

But other churches seem to have given little thought to investigating the legality of their actions, and still others creatively evaded legal difficulties. In 1864 the officials of St James, Longton, Preston, wanted of an offertory after each service in lieu of pew-rents, but did not believe they could legally accomplish this. They accordingly ordered that

The collector will yearly collect the Pew Rents, giving to each Seat holder a receipt, and then returning the money. This form of collecting Pew Rents must be maintained, as the Rector has no power to abolish them, but by returning the money Pew Rents are in fact given up.

But the possibility the church *might* keep the funds in the future was placed in the notice.⁶⁷

In 1934 at Christchurch, Penge, after a decade in which pew-rent revenue had dropped from over £58 annually to less than half that, the practice was ‘abolished by Resolution of Parochial Church Council’, although at that time pew-rents that had originally been fixed by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners could legally only be abolished ‘by an instrument under the seal of the Commissioners’.⁶⁸ In lieu of the pew-rents the church began a ‘Vicar’s Stipend

⁶⁵ 14 & 15 Vict., c. 97; 19 & 20 Vic. C. 104, sec. 7; ESRO PAR 426/10/2/1.

⁶⁶ LMA P81/EMM/66.

⁶⁷ SSTAS D5676/7/43.

⁶⁸ PWDRO 794/28.

Augmentation Fund'.⁶⁹ In 1928 the vicar and churchwardens of Christ Church, Woodford, Cheshire, merely signed a decree with the bishop's seal to end the pew-rents and substitute collections and offertories.⁷⁰ At Christ Church, Ellesmere, Cheshire, in 1943, the bishop simply declared that sittings would no longer be rented.⁷¹ And at Holy Trinity, Tunbridge Wells, in May 1958, the Parochial Church Council agreed by a majority 'that no further applications for pew-rents should be received'. At a meeting in September 1962 further steps were taken: 'The Vicar reported that there are seven people left who pay pew rents, the total amount being £11-5-0. He suggested abolishing the system,' which was unanimously agreed by the P.C.C. The pew-renters, however, were not unanimous on the point; two months later, The Vicar reported on the abolition of pew rents. All seven seatholders had been written to. One had not replied, one had rebelled, the others had readily consented and would put their money in either the F.W.O [Free Will Offering] or the collection.⁷²

The form of abolition often depended on circumstances peculiar to each church. At Christ Church, St Pancras, pew-renting ended in 1866 when the church was closed for alterations; the church simply did not collect rents when it re-opened.⁷³ At St John, Keswick, Cumberland, a series of letters in 1918 indicates that pew-rents were legally required to be collected, but that the churchwardens simply refused to perform this duty.⁷⁴ At St Paul, Thornaby, Middlesbrough, pew-renting began in 1859, a year after the church was consecrated, but in 1870 the 19 renters suggested abolition, and the vestry unanimously voted to seek the bishop's approval for this.⁷⁵

The Bishop's registrar noted in 1943 that at St Andrew, Ashton-on-Ribble, Lancashire, the Parochial Church Council simply voted not to charge pew-rents any longer,

⁶⁹ BLSA P409B/5/5.

⁷⁰ CCALSS EDP 207/5.

⁷¹ CCALSS P183/6/8.

⁷² CKS P371L/8/6.

⁷³ LMA P90/CTC/2/27.

⁷⁴ CROC PR 167/3.

⁷⁵ TA PR/TT(P)(2)/2/1, PR/TT(P)(2)/9/1, PR/TT(P)(2)/9/2 & PR/TT(P)(2)/9/3.

and that it seemed ‘to be the practice...to get rid of the Incubus of pew rents in this peaceful manner...rather than proceed to obtain the necessary statutory declaration abolishing the pew rents on satisfying the Commissioners that any loss has been made up by the provision of an endowment’.⁷⁶ The incumbent might not lose out, though. In 1959 the secretary of the South London Church Fund advised, ‘Normally when pew rents are eliminated it is on condition that the Parochial Church Council concerned makes good the loss of income to the incumbent’.⁷⁷

And many churches *did* receive an annual grant from the Commissioners in lieu of the revenue they would likely have received from pew-renting, such as was hoped for at St Margaret, Lee, in 1955.⁷⁸ Although it generally occurred in the twentieth century, this means of abolition happened as early as 1855, where St Michael, Stockwell, Lambeth, benefited.⁷⁹ This of course presupposed some current profit from pew-letting – generally the compensation was much smaller than in some recent years, but still a significant sum for the time, often between £40 and £70, where pew-rent revenue had been much higher in previous years. Several churches received a lump sum ‘for the augmentation of the income of the Incumbent’ rather than an annual allowance for that purpose, although the sum could be large, probably to be invested. This occurred at Christ Church, Lee Park, to which the Commissioners granted £1,000 in 1919, simultaneously abolishing pew-rents that totalled £261 in 1916.⁸⁰ Christ Church, Cockermouth, in 1934 received an annual payment of £17 10s. in return for abandoning pew-rents of ‘about £40’ four years earlier; the annual payment was to come from a benefaction of a capital sum of five hundred pounds’ which had been ‘paid over to the said Ecclesiastical Commissioners...in substitution for the said pew rents’.⁸¹

⁷⁶ LaRO P3279/4/6/3.

⁷⁷ LLSA A78/18M/A9/7.

⁷⁸ LLSA A78/18M/A9/7.

⁷⁹ LMA DS/OP/1971/1.

⁸⁰ LMA DS/OP/1919/4.

⁸¹ CROW YPR 38/3/7.

Often the agreements the Commissioners made to implement such a solution took account of the totals recently gleaned from the practice in the particular church; the Commissioners made a grant for roughly the same amount of money on condition that neither pew-renting nor allocation occur in that church in future. This stipulation also occurred for Christ Church, Accrington, Lancashire, in 1919.⁸² At St John, Foord, Kent, the 1917 instrument used to abolish pew-rents was typical, explaining in boilerplate that ‘it is desired that the pews in the said Church...and the seats therein, shall be exempted from rent’. Instead of the £69 netted from pew-letting that year, the Commissioners agreed to provide a stipend to the vicar of £73 a year.⁸³ The grant in lieu of the pew-rents might, though, come with some sort of semantic distinction that made little difference to the end result. In 1959 the Commissioners answered an enquiry from the officials of St Margaret, Lee, by advising that pew-rents could be surrendered under the New Parishes Acts and Church Building Acts Amendment Act of 1869, and that while they ‘would not make a grant to the incumbent if the payment representing pew rents stopped’, they would, ‘of course, accept a direction to pay a recommended sum from the diocesan stipend fund’.⁸⁴

Later the Commissioners’ authority to end pew-rents was removed. The officials of St Barnabas, Blackburn, were advised in 1961 that

The Commissioners no longer have the power to abolish pew rents...So far as I am aware all that is necessary to abolish the rents is a simple resolution of the parochial church council, although it seems that the bishop should be consulted beforehand’.⁸⁵

In some churches no mention of ending pew-rents appears in either vestry or P.C.C. minutes; at St James, Westgate, pew-letting petered out in 1935, but nothing is listed in the minutes.⁸⁶

⁸² LaRO PR 3054/2/17/16.

⁸³ CCA U3/178/6/1.

⁸⁴ LLSA A78/18M/A9/7.

⁸⁵ LaRO PR 3077/2/2.

⁸⁶ CCA U3/279/8/A2.

At some churches the evidence suggests pew-renting died out more slowly than it otherwise would have because those who paid did so more or less voluntarily and continued to do so after most other congregants did not, and the rents disappeared slowly as each of these loyal church-goers either moved away or died. Many of those listed in pew-rent books of the 1930s and later are referred to as ‘Miss’, from which one suspects they were spinsters devoted to their churches who paid pew-rent simply because they wished to do so.⁸⁷ Some of their names appear on pew-rent lists for decades. At St Margaret, Brighton, a book was kept from 1902 to 1910 of ‘Returns of Lettings of Sittings’ showing activity that occurred regarding particular renters who either paid or discontinued their sittings each month or in each two- or three-month period, as well as columns of ‘Discontinued’ at various times, which is unusual in records of this type. The ‘Discontinued’ lists get longer as the years pass, and some of the entries give dates, presumably at which the sittings were given up, but other names are listed as ‘Left Brighton’ or ‘Deceased’, ‘Illness’ or ‘Distance too far’.⁸⁸

The receipts from around the First World War, though, indicate that pew-rents neither contributed to nor reflected a religious ‘watershed’: at many churches charging pew-rents before, during and after the hostilities, the totals dropped during the war, sometimes sharply, which was noted at the time during a debate in the Lords⁸⁹ – but rebounded to near their pre-war levels shortly thereafter, and then began to wane permanently at some later date.

In 1833 some of the pews that had been let in Holy Trinity, Wordsley, Kingswinford, Staffordshire, were declared rent-free, and the rector – to whom pew-rent revenue ultimately was paid – relinquished ‘whatever Rent such Pews may produced, which is to be paid to the Churchwardens for the time being, to go in aid, in the first instance, of the expences of the Alteration, & subsequently, in aid of the current expences of the Church’. But the rector’s

⁸⁷ Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 38.

⁸⁸ ESRO PAR 269/6/1.

⁸⁹ HL Deb 19 February 1919 v. 33 c. 169.

apparent generosity must be viewed in light of the further fact that the rent-free seats had 'hitherto for the most part been unoccupied, & appear to be more than the Population of the neighbourhood will require'. The 'small range of additional Pews' declared rent-free were 'added to those in the Middle & Side Aisles'.⁹⁰ Since existing rent-free seats were not well-used, one wonders if any congregant had recently rented less desirable sittings near them.

In many other churches officials decided to abandon pew-rents, but only when the practice had already waned considerably. At St Paul, Sandgate, only two seats were let in 1909-10,⁹¹ although the matter was discussed as late as 1916, leading to the surmise that the practice had picked up somewhat in the intervening six years.⁹² Nevertheless, the drop in revenue made the church's financial situation 'somewhat critical'. The vicar informed the vestry that the seat-holders were 'nearly unanimous' that sittings should be free, and that 'the majority promised the same sums towards the Clergy Fund as they had been in the habit of paying for pews'. On that basis pew-rents were abandoned. The vicar was then voted £75 quarterly in lieu, apparently temporarily but at least until Easter 1918.⁹³

And suggestions of fund-raising methods to be implemented in lieu of pew-renting often took the form of *giving* by congregants, which would be more profitable and cost much less to administer, although it entailed that former renters would be asked to keep contributing while receiving nothing tangible. The officials of Emmanuel Parish Church, Plymouth, in 1924 proposed starting a fund to augment the vicar's salary or other purposes the P.C.C. might approve. The scheme was phrased in terms of its convenience to potential *givers*:

Once started the fund would afford an opportunity to generous persons to give money in support of the object in view, moreover, it would make it easy for others who, whilst unable to give much during their lifetime, might yet desire to bequeath money by will for the maintenance of the Church in which they have been accustomed to worship.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ DALHC PR/KIN(W) IV/2/2.

⁹¹ CCA U3/227/8/A1.

⁹² CCA U3/227/8/B1.

⁹³ CCA U3/227/8/A1.

⁹⁴ PWDRO 794/28.

In summary

The complaints of pew-rent opponents seem to have had little effect on the system's demise. Many of their arguments were made when the practice was largely profitable, but large numbers of churches retained pew-renting until the First World War or later. If the main causes of pew-letting's demise was shrinking profits, as it appears to be, the criticism had little effect, particularly the claim that the poor eschewed church because of pew-renting; if the poor absented themselves, pew-letting's economic viability would hardly be affected. The practice might have lasted longer had the suggestion made at the 1858 Lords hearings been implemented – that the poor be allowed to rent pews for as little as 2d.⁹⁵ – but the cost of requiring much work for many trifling payments may have made this suggestion cost-prohibitive. At Holy Trinity, Hotwells, in 1844, a lady commented that 'the poor people I'm told, too, are to be allowed to pay half-a-crown each for their sittings in the aisle'.⁹⁶

Disapproval of pew-rents may of course have had a *peripheral* effect in eradicating pew-rents, where complaints were sufficiently widespread to promote discomfort for church officials. For example, outside pressure may have precipitated the tolerant attitude toward defaulting renters at St Philip, Maidstone, in the 1860s and 1870s. If so, and if such benevolence was typical, churchwardens and other officials may have decided against continuing a revenue system whose profits they would partially abandon.

This chapter has detailed the demise and eventual – virtual – cessation of pew-renting in English Anglican churches. This occurred later than has been commonly thought, and was prompted largely by reasons of financial necessity rather than persuasion.

⁹⁵ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords* (1858), pp. 40, 58, 419.

⁹⁶ Leech, J., *Rural Rides of the Bristol Churchgoer*, Sutton, A., ed. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1982), p. 159.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has presented evidence indicating that those involved in pew-renting, particularly renters, were generally of the lower-middle and middle-middle classes rather than the more wealthy. Lists of renters from churches in several parts of England, compared to census and other data of the time the rents existed, bear this out.

The Church Building Acts were intended to provide seating where it was most needed – in the poorer areas of England.¹ These Acts, and the New Parishes Acts, the first of which was enacted in 1843, were intended to put ‘the Church into a state of full efficiency’, including the proper maintenance of the incumbent, at least partially via the renting of sittings.² But these goals, while laudable, were not particularly compatible; legislation which provides amenities to the poor but also expects the poor to pay most of the upkeep is generally unsuccessful. Fortunately for the churches involved, congregants from the upper-middle-class down to the working class elite embraced the concept, keeping the scheme afloat much longer than has usually been recognised.

The mental image of the rich – the upper classes and the upper-middle class – luxuriating in rented pews at the front while the working class were herded and crammed into rent-free, less comfortable sittings at the back, may have been typical in pew-letting churches up to about the 1830s. But this picture is inaccurate after that time, despite the claims of some opponents of the practice. By then the new churches, erected largely in working class areas, were also largely those which engaged in pew-renting. Since they generally served working-class and lower-middle class congregants, those of higher social standing *among those groups* were prone to pay to rent the better seats. Possibly some congregants of lower status than the

¹ Billing, S., *The Laws Relating to Pews in Churches, District Churches, Chapels and Proprietary Chapels: The Rights Incidental Thereto, and the Remedy* (London: W. Benning, 1845), p. 158.

² Stephen, J., *Mr. Serjeant Stephen's New Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 8th ed. (London: Butterworth's, 1880), p. 752.

labour aristocracy were offended, but the debate continues on whether these were prone to attend church in any substantial numbers, particularly by the early twentieth century. The impression of a Nottingham hosiery worker born in 1904 – that ‘if you went to church or chapel you was a snob, and if you went in a pub you was a hail fellow well met’³ – may have been shared by many. And others of the late Victorian and Edwardian working class viewed with ‘great indignation’ any ‘examples of hypocrisy, or any kind of less than perfect behaviour by church-goers or clergy’.⁴

From late Victorian times onwards, though, various parishes experienced a profusion of empty pews and unrented sittings, partially imposed from outside parish boundaries by the excess new ones instigated by the church building movement, and partially from within due to dwindling church attendance. The availability of decent seating for all, and the removal of the stigma of not attending church and not sitting in ‘free’ seats’, removed the main motive for congregants to rent sittings. While churches and their incumbents later may have been able to salvage a fraction of the profits they had made at the zenith of pew-renting, they had to make do with grants for approximately what the system had produced in the years in which profits waned, if they could get such grants.

And while new churches were more likely to have pew-rents, this study has found that the numbers of new churches which charged pew-rents was falling, at least in Bristol, by the 1860s and 1870s. Many of those churches that had systems of pew-rent at that time would continue to finance themselves in this manner so long as pew-rents brought in funds, often for several decades into the twentieth century. Due to the findings of the practice in those of high-church versus those of low-church orientation, it is probably fair to say that the high-church movement had an effect on new churches’ choice of pew-rents or other methods of finance, but also that public concern likely had some such effect, particularly on new churches

³ McLeod, H., ‘New Perspectives on Victorian Class Religion: The Oral Evidence’, *Oral History Journal*, v. 14 (1986), pp. 31-43, p. 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*

built in working-class areas. The *practice* of pew-renting continued, but evidently its *popularity* was waning in the last few decades of the nineteenth century.

In this last observation, pew-rents were surprisingly in decline for a substantial period before the turn of the twentieth century. In many churches they were retained despite any opposition or public disapproval, so long as they remained profitable – some incumbents were found to have lamented the continued practice in their own churches but claimed they could not do without the revenue. The decline in pew-renting's popularity did not translate into stopping the practice until (and unless) the Commissioners stepped in with a grant in order to make good the loss of pew-rent revenue.

The Importance of this Thesis

This study is significant not only because it alters the popular impression of Anglican pew-rents, for which little research has previously been done, but because it has partially validated the hypotheses of S.J.D. Green. Pew-rents were generally acceptable to congregants, as they were in Nonconformist chapels, if the price was low enough that no congregant was excluded because of them. But often they were *not* that low – the 1858 Lords hearings show that some of the lower working classes wished to rent sittings if they could have them at a price such as 2d. per quarter, but very few churches charged such a low price. The cheapest sitting were generally much higher than 8d. per year.

Moreover, the results of this research demonstrate the greater importance of the lower-middle and middle-middle classes in church finance. The question posed by Callum Brown – how the system of pew-renting worked in practice and what its effects were on congregational life⁵ – has been addressed here: in summary, the system was administered with much business acumen and sometimes dishonesty, and prices rarely were dropped to meet demand. The system was generally implemented because of its potential for income – this rationale was

⁵ Brown, C.G., 'The Costs of Pew-renting: Church Management, Church-going and Social Class in Nineteenth-century Glasgow', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, v. 38, n. 3 (July 1987), pp. 347-361, p. 347.

particularly visible when church rate was abolished and other funding was inadequate. The practice was usually abandoned only when administration costs were not met by declining income. Pew-renting affected congregational life by, among other things, permitting those of the middle-middle and lower-middle classes (and less often the upper-middle and upper-working classes) to pay to have seats reserved for them, and perhaps to receive concomitant special privileges. Pew-renting was generally a low-church phenomenon, and for the renters was probably a good form of business advertising. Those relegated to rent-free seats cannot be called cynical if they believed renters had no religious or altruistic motive. Congregational life could also be affected by limiting rented sittings to a small size, particularly when clothing appropriate to the era made congregants considerably wider than today.

Pew-openers also benefited from informal pew-renting in the form of tips, but congregational life would deteriorate via congregants' distrust. Whether accurate or not, the common impression of them suffered by this practice, since a part of the hand was consequently referred to as a 'pew-opener's muscle' for its utility in receiving tips. Also, those individuals who owned pews and privately rented them to others could face the ire of church officials who felt the income should go to the church instead. Some church officials tried to disguise pew-renting as something other than it was, evidently to make the practice more palatable to the large numbers of those who disapproved of it. Since pew-rents were more common in towns than in the countryside and urban areas experienced much Victorian immigration, the impact of urban pew-renting was likely to have been felt more strongly.

Influence on Current Debates in Church History

Between 1886 and 1903 the numbers of congregants in urban areas such as London and Liverpool were dropping, particularly in wealthier areas,⁶ despite an increase in

⁶ McLeod, H., *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), p. 178; Gill, 'Secularization and Census Data', p. 109.

population; a drop in attendance also occurred in rural areas.⁷ Nonconformist chapels siphoned off some formerly Anglican Kentish churchgoers – ‘the period to 1901 is the heyday of nonconformist building in Kent’,⁸ but such defection to nonconformist chapels leading to a loss of pew-rents was not peculiar to late Victorian times. In the early 1830s a writer at the Foundling Hospital Chapel, London, partially blamed falling seat revenue on the ‘Increase of places of Public Worship in the Neighbourhood, to which Strangers may go without expence – more explicitly those of the Methodical Persuasion’.⁹ At Holy Trinity, South Heigham, the rector wrote to his congregants in 1878 that he was ‘informed that the number of the Seat-holders had considerably fallen off on account of the building of the new Church at Eaton, and from other causes’. The pew-rents, which had indeed diminished considerably, would be discontinued, although ‘Voluntary Subscriptions, payable quarterly, by those to whom Seats are allotted’,¹⁰ continued.

Church attendance declined further during the First World War,¹¹ and one church official in 1916 wrote that ‘Undoubtedly the desire for rented seats is everywhere declining’.¹² Although some churches experienced a surprising gain at this time,¹³ that official’s opinion may have been correct during the disruptions of the war. But by 1922 the total number of congregants at Easter Services had recovered slightly,¹⁴ and some churches then realised a *greater* sum from renting sittings, among them St Paul, Beckenham, for three consecutive

⁷ Marrin, A., *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1974), p. 28; Wilkinson, A., *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SPCK, 1978), p. 6; Bennett, J.C., “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’: The Practice of Pew-renting at Kentish Anglican Churches” (unpublished MTh dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2006), p. 47.

⁸ Homan, R., *The Victorian Churches of Kent* (Chichester, Sussex: Phillimore, 1984), p. 2.

⁹ LMA A/FH/M/01/002/322.

¹⁰ NRO PD 522/58.

¹¹ Brown, C.G., ‘A Revisionist Approach to Religious Change’, in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, Bruce, S., ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 31-58, p. 45; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 47.

¹² DALHC P/CRA/3/7/3.

¹³ WYASW WDP 177/5/2.

¹⁴ Wolffe, J., *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 237; Bennett, “‘Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly’”, p. 47.

half-years in 1923 and 1924.¹⁵ Overall church-going grew to an inter-war peak in 1925 in England and Wales. Whether this was due to the return of surviving soldiers and auxiliary war personnel is difficult to determine. But the revival did not last long; church-going again declined steadily from the mid-1920s. Several explanations have been proposed, among them that people of all classes found more enjoyable things to do on Sundays; that urbanisation and sub-urbanisation dissipate the religious pressure of small communities (the secularisation thesis); urban areas had too few churches, while rural areas had too many.¹⁶ Whether the labouring classes were absent due to an all-inclusive estrangement from church, as Norman has written,¹⁷ or whether they still identified with their churches but simply entered them less frequently, as S. C. Williams found in Southwark,¹⁸ neither seat allocation nor pew-rents played a significant part in their attitudes. As Wickham found, ‘a few Sheffield churches abolished the rents, although there is no evidence that they were thronged with the poor as a result’.¹⁹ Since pew-rents continued in some churches well into the twentieth century, it is probably fair to say that they had little effect on the working classes.

Yet a conclusion that pew-renting contributed to secularisation is tenuous at best. Concurrently, church-going, church membership and Sabbatarianism all may be said to affect pew-letting. But the secularisation debate encompasses religious feeling and behaviour in various forms, of which church-going and church membership are only two, and other noted forms of religiosity cannot be rationally associated with pew-letting. Hugh McLeod notes that secularisation may be viewed in three different senses: first, individual religious belief

¹⁵ BLSA P19B/5/5.

¹⁶ Brown, ‘A Revisionist Approach to Religious Change’, pp. 31-58, p. 45; Wilkinson, A. *Dissent or Conform: War, Peace and the English Churches, 1900-1945* (London: SCM, 1986), p. 58; Schweitzer, R., *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt Among British and American Soldiers in the Great War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), p. 261; Bennett, ‘“Take Thy Bill and Sit Down Quickly”’, p. 47; Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, pp. 30-1; Gill, ‘Secularization and Census Data’, p. 102.

¹⁷ Norman, E.R., *Church and Society in England, 1770-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹⁸ Williams, S.C., *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 164.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

and practice, which includes belonging to and participating in the rites of religious entities; second, religion's role in the public sphere; third, the extent to which religion provides a common language through which communication may be expressed and understood.²⁰ Callum Brown notes that Christianity's role in larger society takes five forms: institutional – 'the people's adherence to churches and the practice of worship in religious rites'; intellectual – the influence of religious ideas and beliefs at individual and societal levels; functional – religion's role in civil society; diffusive – 'the role of outreach religion among the people'; and discursive – a higher level of Christian religiosity which concerns its social significance and its role in personal identity.²¹

Pew-renting only fits into the first of McLeod's categories – individual religious belief and practice – and the last of Brown's ones – institutional and discursive Christianity – and in each of these cases only to the extent that letting a pew, either by landlord or renter, is due to some degree of religious impetus. Yet the evidence indicates that religiosity was seldom part of the equation, particularly from the point of view of each individual church. Unless a closer pew is necessary for hearing and seeing the service, or the price is paid in a sincere attempt to help finance the church in question, the renting of a sitting in that church does not in itself display religiosity any more than does mere church-going. And church-going, and with it renting a pew, may depend on various causes of which religiosity is only one. McLeod notes that in the first half of the nineteenth century church-going was a requirement of respectability, as it evidently also was in London in the 1880s and 1890s.²² And respectability as conferred by church-going is only related to religiosity insofar as it contributes to the second and third of McLeod's factors, *i.e.*, the extent to which religion influences public institutions and to which the church-goers who participate in public institutions might use

²⁰ McLeod, H., *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848-1914* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), p. 13.

²¹ Brown, C.G., *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularization 1800-2000* (Routledge: London, 2001), p. 12.

²² McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe*, p. 99, 142.

their church experiences in their public lives, and the degree to which church-going contributes to a common language used by church-goers to express themselves and understand others. With these qualifications in mind, as church-going declined, secularisation grew, but as pew-renting significantly declined after the inter-war peak of church-going in 1925, the letting of pews affected secularisation or desecularisation only very distantly, if at all. If anything, secularisation affected pew-letting by removing, or helping to remove, the market for rented sittings.

McLeod also notes a view called ‘selling God’, which argues that faiths and institutions are inherently in competition with each other, and that secularisation is not inevitable provided religions and ideologies ‘actively and intelligently’ promote themselves.²³ But this also does not particularly concern pew-renting. Since the practice was ended, most often for financial reasons rather than any of the several religious-based attacks made on it, the fact that many churches stopped letting sittings after the First World War indicates nothing about secularising tendencies but merely that the churches pragmatically decided that pew-letting was no longer profitable.

On the other hand, this study provides little support for Callum Brown’s thesis that secularisation was largely a product of the 1960s and later.²⁴ While pew-renting was retained by many churches well into the twentieth century, by the time of the Second World War all but a few had completely dropped the practice. If anything, this study reflects a more gradual process of secularization. A significant number of churches consecrated before 1850, in both Kent and Bristol, rented sittings, but fewer and fewer churches opened after that date did so. The number of new churches in Bristol raising money by letting their seats dropped off in the second half of the nineteenth century, and no new Bristol churches in the twentieth century – and only four in the whole of Kent – were found to have let any seats. This suggests that the

²³ McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe*, p. 9.

²⁴ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, generally.

opponents of the practice, while generally unable to stamp out existing pew-rent arrangements, were more successful in stopping new churches from letting seats.

The decline in pew-renting to some extent follows the decline in church-going, but the correlation is not particularly marked. Gill notes an “almost continuous” decline in church attendance from 1851,²⁵ but the evidence that letting sittings fell in popularity in new churches from the last quarter or so of the nineteenth century onwards indicates a more drastic decline, particularly after 1900. But the decline in pew-rent revenue among existing churches occurred at different churches in different decades, and pew-renting systems were abandoned not directly because of falling attendance but because the total income from those systems fell, *i.e.*, the number of congregants who were *willing* to rent sittings – and not so much the total number of congregants – dropped significantly, often in the space of five years or so. Nor does the evidence particularly indicate a correlation between pew-renting and the high number of people per Anglican church in the central Weald at about 1850²⁶ – while some churches in that area of Kent certainly let sittings, more churches around London were prone to implementing or continuing pew-rent systems.

Finally, this thesis is likely to be important in encouraging further research of pew-renting in nonconformist denominations and perhaps of Victorian church finance in general. The practical workings and effects of pew-rents in Nonconformist churches and chapels may also particularly be an appropriate subject for future enquiry.

²⁵ Gill, R., *The Myth of the Empty Church* (London: SPCK, 1993), p. 10; Gill, R., *The ‘Empty’ Church Revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 8.

²⁶ Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 61, 66.

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Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle

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