

*PEWS, BENCHES AND SEATS: being a history of the church pew in Wales* by ROGER LEE BROWN, 1998, Gwasg Eglwys Y Trallwng, Welshpool, 76 pp (£3.75) obtainable from Welshpool Vicarage, Powys, SY21 7DP.

This privately published study is a fascinating exploration of a largely forgotten by way of church law. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, pew rights were a valuable form of private property and a mark of much prized social status. Unseemly squabbles over pew rights, like rapacious enforcement of tithes by incumbents unsympathetic to the local culture, were a fertile source of litigation and of propaganda by opponents.

The old law concerned with pews still often applies in England, although this tends to be forgotten, because rights are now rarely if ever claimed, and because pews today are mainly uniform or have been superseded by moveable seats. Nevertheless, squirarchical pews and surviving box pews are important evidence of a vanished social order which can also have considerable aesthetic appeal. As was demonstrated in the leading re-ordering case of *Re St Mary's, Banbury* [1987] Fam 136, [1987] 1 All ER 247, pew rights may be important in hampering re-ordering schemes and may be used today by conservationists as a tool for preventing change.

Roger Brown's study provides an illuminating introduction to the subject of church seating generally, although it is historical and does not stray beyond the borders of Wales. The study explains the evolution of the pew and compares it with other forms of church seating, identifying the nature of the distinctive legal rights to a particular place. There are some important historical insights which deserve wider recognition. Notably, Brown argues that the monopoly of seating in old parish churches by a privileged few was a significant cause for what now seems excessive building of new churches in the nineteenth century.

The manner in which pews were used historically as a means of financing church building and maintenance and even more where they were used to pay for the ministry of a church provides some salutary warnings. Private pews built under faculty and legally attached to property in the parish could take up considerable under-used space in a prime position in a church. Renting of pews was generally illegal in a parish church, although it was possible under the Victorian Church Building Acts as a means of providing finance for a new church. In practice, commercial 'traffic in pews' could be a considerable problem and was an abuse where churchwardens were often responsible in an effort to make up a shortfall in parish income.

In a chapter on 'The Development of Concern', Brown divides objections to the old law on pews into the ascetic, social, ecclesiastical and legal and theological. One of his most bizarre examples of misuse of private pew rights, which would have affronted more than just the ascetic churchgoer and would have been well worthy of Lewis Carroll, was Mrs Crawshay of Llangattock, who not only brought her dogs to church in her pew but had tea served there during the service. Socially, private pew rights reinforced divisions between parishioners and could result in extremely un-Christian behaviour, including physical battles over a seat, resulting in torn clothing and broken woodwork. Ecclesiologically, those who were keenest to come to church could well be left without a seat and driven to nonconformity so as to be able to worship at all. Legally and theologically, the primary right and indeed obligation of parishioners to attend worship was thwarted by inconsistent private property rights.

There is an extensive bibliography, which provides a quarry for readers themselves wishing to pursue wider aspects of church history, particularly in the parishes of Wales. The text deserves a print run which would enable it to be enjoyed widely.

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*WALES AND THE REFORMATION* by GLANMORE WILLIAMS, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1997, xii + 440 pp (reissued in paperback 1999 £14.99) ISBN 0-7083-1415-5.

The history of the Reformation in Wales as recounted here turns out to be singularly uneventful. So far as the evidence shows, the Welsh acquiesced with more or less equanimity at each stage of the process by which the religion of the English Crown's dominions was transformed from the sacrament-centred Catholicism of the late medieval period with its quasi-magical accretions to the austere, word-centred Protestantism of the late sixteenth century. Thus, Henry VIII's theologically orthodox ecclesiastical revolution of 1533 to 1546, the lurch into Protestantism under Edward VI, 1546 to 1553, the Catholic restoration under Queen Mary, 1553 to 1558 and finally the reversion to a somewhat modified form of Edward VI's (ie Cranmer's) Second Prayer Book under Elizabeth, 1559 to 1603, all secured at least outward conformity. Indeed from the 1580s onwards Williams discerns a gradual shift in attitude from simple outward compliance to a more internalised, albeit ideological, commitment to Prayer Book Protestantism, perceived as representing a revival of the pure evangelical Christianity of the ancient British (ie Welsh) Church, and as such owed allegiance in loyalty to the Welsh nation and to its ruling dynasty, the Welsh-British Tudors. By the end of the century Protestantism had come to be regarded as an integral part of the Welsh identity.

Glanmore Williams's account of the Reformation in Wales garners the fruits of a research career devoted to the study of early modern Welsh history, and in particular the study of the Reformation. Clearly presented in unpretentious but elegant English, meticulously documented and coherently organised on a firm chronological framework, this survey is likely, to hold the field as the authoritative account for some time to come. Yet one serious criticism must be registered. The narrative fails to convey, any sense of the remarkable character of the story being unfolded or to address the explanatory problem it presents to the historian. These have to do with the fact that, as noted at the outset, the response of the Welsh to the various forms of religious settlement imposed upon them in the course of the sixteenth century was generally one of at least outward compliance. There were no rebellions, no iconoclastic riots, no lethal power struggles between religious conservatives and radicals, exceedingly few martyrs—no more than three executions took place in Wales in the period of the Marian repression, and just one in the course of Elizabeth's crackdown on Catholic activists. By the same token there were few heroes either, unless that category be extended to include a couple of mild-mannered Protestant *literati* William Salesbury, a layman, and Bishop William Morgan of St David's, who stand out for their contribution towards providing translations of the scriptures and the liturgical texts in Welsh and in this way helping to root the English Reformation in Welsh culture. The point is that civil agitation, violence and political upheaval were the norm wherever the Reformation was introduced throughout Europe, as they were indeed in the Tudors' other two dominions, England and Ireland. The question arises therefore as to why Wales was different. An ancillary question is why the response to the English Reformation in Ireland, like Wales a remote Celtic borderland dominion, should have been so entirely different. There, despite similar conditions in many,