

**CHURCH PEWS, THEIR  
ORIGIN AND  
LEGAL INCIDENTS.  
IN THREE CHAPTERS**

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Church Pews, Their Origin and Legal Incidents. In Three Chapters by John Coke Fowler

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**JOHN COKE FOWLER**

**CHURCH PEWS, THEIR  
ORIGIN AND  
LEGAL INCIDENTS.  
IN THREE CHAPTERS**



**CHURCH PEWS,**  
**THEIR ORIGIN AND LEGAL INCIDENTS,**

WITH  
SOME OBSERVATIONS  
ON THE

43

**PROPRIETY OF ABOLISHING THEM,**

IN THREE CHAPTERS.

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BY

**JOHN COKE FOWLER,**  
OF THE INNER TEMPLE, BARRISTER AT LAW.



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# CHURCH PEWS,

&c.

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## CHAPTER I.

General Importance of the Subject—Object of this Chapter—Derivation of the word "Pew"—Circumstances attending their introduction into the English Church—Practice of the Church before the Reformation—Pews gradually introduced, and for the most part after the Reformation—Quotations from histories, episcopal letters, ancient faculties, and synods, in support of the above position—Conclusions drawn from them—Theory of the introduction and use of church pews as connected with puritanical practices, noticed—Conclusion.

To those who have only been in the habit of attending churches fitted up with close pews, in which the accommodation is still adequate to the population of their respective districts, the subject of this inquiry may perhaps appear to be of the most trifling importance. They have probably never thought at all of the advantages

#### 4      IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT.

or the evils of pews in churches, or if they have, it would perhaps appear to be a matter of too secondary importance compared with the ministrations of the Church, or even the substantial repair of the edifice, to deserve serious consideration. Nevertheless, the subject (never a trifling one) has of late years, for various reasons, been justly claiming the attention of the public more and more. For instance, the necessity of accommodating the largest possible number of persons in the numerous new churches which have been lately built, or are now building, has suggested inquiries into the best method of arranging the greatest number of seats in a certain space. Of late, too, more attention, more taste, and more wealth, have been bestowed upon the architectural beauty of churches; less anxiety about extraordinary personal accommodation has been manifested; and above all, in populous districts it has become painfully obvious, that the Church is grievously hampered in the reception of her flock by the system of close pews.

The origin and history of church pews is indeed a point of secondary importance. For even if pews had been a peculiar feature of English parish-churches, ever since the foundation of them, this would be but a slender argument in their favour, if it can be shown that

they are in fact injurious now to the business and interests of the Church. But, comparatively unimportant as it is, yet in order to make this work more complete than if it were limited to a notice of the legal incidents of pews, and to remove any prejudices that may exist in favour of them, on the score of their supposed antiquity, I will state a few particulars relative to the period and circumstances of their introduction into the English Church.

The word "pew," defined by Dr. Johnson to be "an inclosed seat in a church," is said to be derived from a Dutch word *puye*, or *puy*, which means the front or projecting part of an edifice, or the place at the town-hall where proclamations are published. For instance, "Ter Puye afgeleezen," published at the front of the town-hall<sup>1</sup>. This again is supposed to be derived from the Latin word *podium*, which meant a place in a theatre next the orchestra; and in the amphitheatre next the arena where the emperor, consuls, &c. sat; and also any place extended beyond the wall of a building like a stage or gallery<sup>2</sup>, which last meaning seems to correspond with the Dutch use of the word *puye*. The author of a very able paper

<sup>1</sup> Sewel's Dutch and English Dictionary.

<sup>2</sup> Facciolati.