

Did You Know? An Anglican Glossary

Box Pews

In the earliest days of the English church standing or kneeling was the rule. Open benches were available for the elderly and infirm, but by the time of Elizabeth the box pew became popular.

Dr. Samuel Johnson defined the pew as an “enclosed seat in a church” referring, of course, to the rented box pews. These pews led to many abuses, such as eating or sleeping there during the service. They were subscribed to by the wealthy and sometimes conflicts arose over the right to a pew. John Coke Fowler in 1844 urged the abolition of rented pews in the hope that restoration of open seating would assist in “restoring to the Church of England the noble title of ‘the poor man's Church.’” By the 19th century pews as we know them became popular.



A Victorian family gathered in their box pew.