



# CNI

---

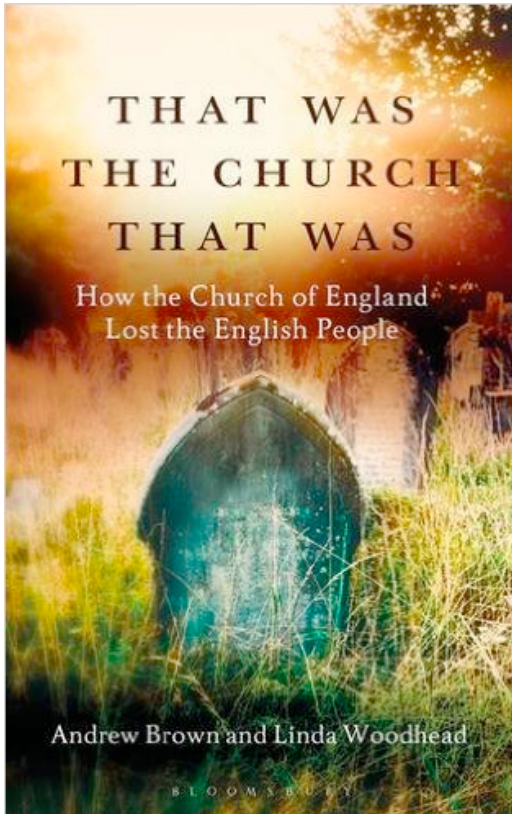
## News Focus

### **Publisher pulls all copies of controversial new book on Church of England**

**A new book examining the decline of the Church England was withdrawn from circulation by one of the U.K.'s leading publishing houses, Bloomsbury Publishing.**

“That Was The Church That Was: How the Church of England Lost the English People” was supposed to be released on Feb. 11.

Religious affairs correspondents from Britain’s leading newspapers were preparing to review the book by Lancaster University professor Linda Woodhead and Andrew Brown, who writes regularly for The Guardian.



Then Bloomsbury issued a statement saying it was recalling all review copies of the book and asking that reviewers “immediately return the copy received.”

Bloomsbury said only that it has received a legal complaint. Asked to clarify, its publicity agent,

Lucy Clayton, said: “I only know that there’s been a legal complaint. I cannot comment further.”

Earlier, Bloomsbury sent copies of the book to religious affairs correspondents with a note describing the book by Brown and Woodhead as a “relentlessly honest” account of the disappearance of the Church of England from the center of public life.

Speculation mounted that the book ‘s publication was pulled because it contains a disputed passage about the sexual activities of various Church of England bishops and other leading lights in the Anglican community.

Writing in the weekly magazine *The Spectator*, Damian Thompson said the book contained rumors and speculation about the sexual identity of key figures in the established church whose membership figures are at an all-time low.

Thompson describes the withdrawn book as “a compendium of (the church’s) most malicious gossip.”

“That Was The Church That Was” tells us something important about English Christianity,

but not what the authors imagine,” Thompson writes. “It is the sort of scandal-obsessed diatribe that dying religious communities — one thinks of the Catholic Church in Italy or Ireland — are too weak and compromised to fend off.”

*Report by Trevor Grudy, Canterbury based correspondent for RNS - Religious News Service.*

## **What’s so dangerous about this book about the Church of England?**

The publishers have asked for all review copies of ‘That Was the Church That Was’ to be returned, Damian Thompson writes in The Spectator.

The decline of the Church of England has been one of the most astonishing trends in modern Britain. The pews of churches in this country are emptying fast. Next week, a book was to be published about this collapse entitled That Was The Church That Was: How the Church of England Lost the English People. But suddenly the publishers, Bloomsbury, decided to pull it. The book, it seemed, was a little too incendiary.

Those reviewing the book received a panicky message: Screen Shot 2016-02-04 at 11.10.59 'Following the receipt of a legal complaint, Bloomsbury are recalling all review copies of this book and ask you to immediately return the copy received...'. Apparently there has been a legal action because of 'a disputed passage about a Christian leader'. It sounded intriguing. But which leader? I have a finished copy of the book in front of me, and it's hard to guess.

Is it the bishop who, we're informed, 'turned out to have had a conviction for cottaging hushed up'? Or the bishop who was the subject of an 'entirely false' rumour that he 'attended gay orgies'? Or the bishop accused of faking his academic qualifications, also described as an 'entirely false' claim? It may be none of the above. We learn something extraordinary (and, perhaps, defamatory) about a member of the Church of England hierarchy on virtually every page. Ostensibly an account of the Church of England's decline over the past 30 years, the book reads more like a compendium of its most malicious gossip.

I speak with some experience. In the early 1990s, as religious affairs correspondent of the

Daily Telegraph, I wrote some awfully spiteful stuff. I wince when I read it today. But even I could not reach the sadistic heights of *That Was The Church That Was*. The authors are Linda Woodhead, a socio-logist of religion, and Andrew Brown, who writes about religion for the Guardian. He lived in Sweden for some years, and parts of this book are as nasty as any Scandinavian thriller.

The best thing in the book is its portrait of Rowan Williams. The former Archbishop of Canterbury emerges as a high-church Welsh mystic who felt more at home in Narnia than in England, where village fetes were more sacred than Holy Communion. We read that he ‘had no glib answers to the problems of human tragedy and suffering’ — or to any problem, for that matter. He expected his bishops to ‘worry at the truth like patient followers of Wittgenstein’. Instead, they kicked him around because they knew he could be bullied.

That became clear when, having encouraged his celibate gay friend Canon Jeffrey John to accept the post of Bishop of Reading, he then forced him to withdraw his acceptance in order to placate homophobic African bishops. The book

quotes an anonymous bishop, who says the Primate of All England fell into a deep depression because he couldn't reconcile this with his self-image as a saint and scholar: 'He couldn't be a shit — and yet he had been one.'

The mischievous treatment of Anglican politics in the style of Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail* is surely the work of Brown rather than the plodding Woodhead. The problem is that, frequently, mischief turns into malice. We're informed that the late Sir Derek Pattinson, for many years secretary general of the General Synod, 'once took a woman journalist to a leather bar for an interview'. This may or may not be true. I won't take the book's word for it, because when it covers the one gay Anglican scandal I do know about, important details are wrong.

In 1989, my friend Canon Brian Brindley, the grandly eccentric vicar of Holy Trinity, Reading, was secretly tape-recorded fantasising about boys by the *News of the World*. The recordings were made in his vicarage — not the Athenaeum Club, as the book claims. Brindley inevitably lost his job. As a result of his harsh treatment by the authorities, we learn, the unnamed right-wing -

Catholic -religious correspondent of the Daily Telegraph, 'also gay', came to 'loathe' the Church of England.

That's news to me (and it is me they are talking about). I didn't loathe the C of E and was touched by the support Brian received from senior clergy after his disgrace. As for the gay thing, it was Brown who casually 'outed' me many years ago.

But if you have a creepy obsession with closeted gays, you really need to get your facts right. A little example: Brian Brindley famously dropped dead in the middle of a dinner party to celebrate his 70th birthday in 2001. 'All the guests were male and — Andrew was told by one of them — all gay,' says the book. I was there and they weren't.

The book blames many of the problems of the Church of England on the 'managerial voodoo' introduced by George Carey. 'Like a cargo cult, [the Church] assumed that if you aped the jargon and waved some of the symbols, success and prestige must naturally follow,' we're told.



I don't know which author came up with this silly analogy, but the more theoretical passages are the work of Linda Woodhead and, it must be said, embarrassingly incoherent. Her academic eminence has always been a bit of mystery. According to her Wikipedia entry, it has been acquired 'without earning a postgraduate academic qualification'.

'That Was The Church That Was' tells us something important about English Christianity, but not what the authors imagine. It is the sort of scandal-obsessed diatribe that dying religious communities — one thinks of the Catholic Church in Italy or Ireland — are too weak and compromised to fend off. For the time being, the Church of England is being protected from this atrocious book by somebody's lawyers. But for how long?