

Commission records compiled when land was being sold under the Settled Land Acts in the late nineteenth century, shows that the history of ownership was often by sale, lease or marriage settlement where confiscations and royal grants might have been expected. The author here has laid down most of the parameters used by equity lawyers to achieve the desired results and it is now for historians to build a body of studies of individual families to enable a more considered view of the actual impact of these laws on the beneficial ownership of land.

There is a chapter here on the Irish legal system, 1796–1877 dealing with that great era of reform and change culminating with the Supreme Court of Judicature (Ireland) Act of 1877. Another deals with law in Ireland 1916–1922 written before Mary Kotonouris's book on the Dáil courts appeared in 1994 and this 1972 article is still well worth reading. The recent cataloguing of the Land Settlement papers from the old Land Commission offices by the National Archives will offer historians new opportunities to look at this aspect of law at the foundation of the state now that these collections are accessible. This is not a full list of the contents of this extraordinary work. Historians will find here endless ideas for future research and it should encourage new researchers to see the law as a useful key to unlocking many secrets of the past which have been neglected and ignored for too long. Osborough writes on these topics with an ease which masks his mastery of his subject without which he could not even begin to paint such a vast canvas. He himself points out that this is not a history of law in Ireland and while acknowledging the difficulties of writing legal history he comments that the rewards include 'experiencing excitement – the thrill of discovering something not previously known, something, too, perhaps, not even suspected.' In the practise of his craft, Osborough has justified that claim.

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A.R. HART, *A History of the King's Serjeants at Law in Ireland: Honour rather than Advantage?* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000. Pp. 224. IR£30 hardback)

Under the influence of the Irish Legal History Society there has been something of an upsurge in the history of law and its institutions in Ireland. In this their latest monograph the office of King's Serjeant at Law is scrutinised by A.R. Hart, himself a lawyer. Before the seventeenth century the King's Serjeant was the crown's principal law officer in Ireland and was only gradually supplanted by the Attorney General and Solicitor General. Hart's work is a brisk and workman-like chronological survey of the occupants of the post from the thirteenth century to 1922 when the office ceased. The approach is primarily biographical, focusing on the careers of those who held the post. Parts two and three of the volume comprise succession lists of the office, which improve on those in the *New History of Ireland*, ix, and provide very useful biographical sketches of the office holders. Although the evidence is, inevitably, chronologically uneven Hart has done a thorough job in assembling the material for a history of the individuals who held the office. What is most interesting is the rich vein of material on the profits of office which has been laid bare. Appendix two sets out the income of one early nineteenth-century holder of the office, Thomas Langlois Lefroy who in a very good year could earn up to £3,000 from his legal practice. Given that the Prime Serjeant in the eighteenth century

could net up to £1,200 a year it was clearly an office worth having. The office itself by the end of the eighteenth century had certainly been eclipsed by that of the other law officers but it still provided an important means of dispensing government patronage. In that sense the scales are firmly tipped towards advantage over honour. This is an interesting and informative book which makes a contribution not only to the study of the law but, perhaps more importantly, to the social history of the legal profession in Ireland, a subject which still awaits its historian. Given the enthusiasm displayed by the Irish Legal History Society in its recent range of publications one confidently hopes that a scholar of Hart's calibre is waiting in the wings.

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HIRAM MORGAN (ed.). *Political Ideology in Ireland, 1541-1641* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000. Pp. 264. IR£35 hardback)

The outstanding strength of this collection of ten major essays on Irish ideology in early modern Ireland lies in the fact that each contribution combines rigorous critical textual analysis and an acute sensitivity to the very particular set of historical circumstances within which the selected manuscripts and texts were compiled and understood. The consistently high quality of the scholarship, together with the variety of aspects of ideology explored in unique ways has resulted in a pioneering volume which explores ideology with unprecedented depth and sensitivity. As such it represents an invaluable contribution to our understanding of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Ireland.

The collection is well balanced in terms of the writers selected for study, featuring essays on two prelates, one Catholic, the other Protestant; an Old English tutor and commentator; a planter and poet; two soldiers, and two attorney generals amongst others. Each essay represents a very useful historiographical synthesis on the contribution of individual commentators to the formation of distinctive strands of Irish ideology. The fundamental importance of setting the study of ideology in Ireland within the broader European and British intellectual, political and religious *milieu* is very effectively illustrated throughout the work as a whole.

In his historiographical introduction, Hiram Morgan advocates a concentration of attention on subjects other than Edmund Spenser who has in the past overshadowed less well-known contemporary commentators. Morgan acknowledges the understandably limited remit of the collection in terms of its concentration on texts and manuscripts alone in an honest and realistic appraisal of the contribution of the collection to the mammoth task of presenting a fully integrated view of ideology in Ireland. His essay on Giraldus Cambrensis and the Tudor conquest of Ireland presents a stimulating examination of the manner in which successive sixteenth-century Old and New English commentators used the Welsh chronicler's writings for their own tactical purposes in what they regarded as the final climactic phase of the English conquest.

In the first of his two essays, Vincent Carey presents a rigorous critique of Richard Stanihurst, mounting a sustained challenge to the relevance of the chronicler's colonial paradigm of native and newcomer which he claims limits our understanding of the cultural diversity which characterised sixteenth-century Ireland. Carey presents an