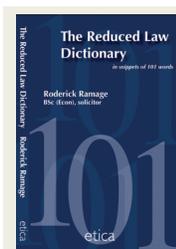


Book reviews



The Reduced Law Dictionary: In Snippets of 101 Words

Author: Roderick Ramage

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Readers of this journal have long been entertained by the “snippets” column, consisting of anecdotes and observations, each one exactly 101 words long, which one finds scattered across the pages from time to time. The author of these pieces is Mr Roderick Ramage.

Someone obviously jabbed Mr Ramage in the ribs recently and told him that he ought to compile a few of them into a book, for that is what he has now done. Naturally he has selected 101 of them. The reason for the fixation with the number 101 is explained at the start of the book, which I will leave readers to learn for themselves. He has given the collection the rather fetching title *The Reduced Law Dictionary*.

For some, but not all, of the snippets Mr Ramage has details of the source at the back of the book. Most of his cited cases come with references too. The snippets themselves are drawn from a very wide range of subject areas, and form an entirely random collection accordingly. Some are succinct points of law, some rather *jejune*, some amuse, while others give cause for regret. For example, No 43 tells us that an attempt was made by Parliament back in the 1930s to do something about the grey squirrel invasion, an effort which we can now say with hindsight was, sadly, largely futile. We also learn in No 38 about elephant farming in Scotland...

Other scattered historical gems include the “brickbat” of Norman French (Mr Ramage prefers “dog French”) of No 49, and an explanation of “deed poll” in No 48.

Then there are the outright controversial. No 92 rails against “Tesco Law”, the opening up of legal services to a much wider range of potential suppliers, including the eponymous supermarket chain. Mr Ramage thinks any such supplier will pay lip service to traditional professional standards but insists that “in reality...directors will continue to perform their company law duty to maximise profits”.

Well in reality they probably will, but another feature of reality is that even in traditional firms nowadays Mr Ramage will find fewer colleagues suffused with the tradition of service than in his youth, and rather more that are suffused with the modern tradition of making money. The steady trail of downfallen greedy

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solicitors through the Solicitors’ Disciplinary Tribunal each year confirms as much. But Mr Ramage is right to draw attention to how the Solicitors’ Code of Conduct will be reconciled with directors’ duties that do not apply to a traditional solicitors’ partnership.

Rather more inflammatory is No 82, where the author tells us that attacks on the Archbishop of Canterbury’s well-known speech about some adoption of Sharia law being “inevitable” was all a misunderstanding; that the Archbishop was only advocating some private law arrangements which might be recognised along with other arbitration agreements.

In fact that was the one thing the Archbishop and his apologists conspicuously failed to understand, particularly when making the inapposite comparison with the Beth Din. It is a fundamental feature of the common law principle of freedom of contract that parties may resolve disputes in a method of their choosing—and if they choose a foreign system of law, recognition of the outcome involves no “accommodation” of that system within English law, still less a “parallel system”. Indeed, in the case of Jewish law procedures, they are expressly stated to be subject to the law of the land. The Archbishop would have done well also to have acknowledged the possibility of private forms of dispute resolution falling foul of English public policy and being unenforceable accordingly.

None of this, however, is necessarily a bad thing in the context of the book, which isn’t purporting to be a political tract or a serious legal textbook but rather an amusing *potpourri*, or an *olla podrida* as Francis Bennion used to call his column

in *Criminal Law & Justice Weekly*. In that respect firing off provocative remarks here and there adds to the interest—as evidenced by the fact that I have just found rather more than 202 words to say about the 202 words of No’s 82 and 92.

Mr Ramage says that he started compiling the snippets as a means of light relief from his day job (he is a solicitor). He can take extra satisfaction from the fact that through the original column and now this book he has often provided light relief for the rest of us as well. NLJ

Review by **James Wilson**

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