

**Women's Legal Landmarks: Celebrating the History of Women and Law in the UK and Ireland**, edited by Erika Rackley and Rosemary Auchmuty (Oxford, Hart Publishing, 2018, 704 pp., £95 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-7822-5977-0)

2018 was a vintage year of celebrations, commemorating the centenary of some women gaining the right to vote, and their entitlement to stand for parliament. Not to be outdone, 2019 brings yet another historic milestone – the one hundred year anniversary of women's admission to the legal profession. *Women's Legal Landmarks* is a unique and prodigious anthology that honours the legal breakthroughs by, and legal advances for, women.

The weighty tome is the product of the Women's Legal Landmarks Project. Although released to coincide with women's entry to the profession, the scope of the collection is wider, beginning with the Laws of Hywel Da circa 940 and ending with 2018's amendment to the Irish Constitution, which paved the way for abortion reform in Ireland. The 90 plus chapters encompass legal developments in areas including rape, surrogacy, FGM and misogynistic social media harassment, as well as accounts of notable legal women. In total, it records 92 defining moments towards equality and justice, shining a light on some of the lesser known, or previously unrecorded milestones, as well as the more familiar feminist legal victories. The book draws together over 80 contributors ranging from legal academics and practitioners to historians, public servants and activists. This holistic writing team ensures the legal watersheds receive the fitting treatment they deserve. The editors may have labelled this an "eclectic" and "eccentric" collection, but it reads like a rich tapestry, which not only chronicles the impact of law reform on women, but also the legal contribution by women.

As an impatient reader, I often skip the introduction and head straight to the chapters which are most of relevance or interest. In this case I made an exception and was rewarded

with a clear understanding of the full significance of the chapters that followed, including an explanation of why some key developments (such as the Equal Pay Act), do not have their own chapters. My usual approach of rushing to the most interesting parts first proved rather challenging, simply because there were so many noteworthy gems vying for my attention. I was particularly drawn to the chapters on the Match Women's Strike of 1888 (of which I have heard much but know very little detail), the Sex Discrimination Act (playing to my employment law specialism), and the chapter on the ordination of women bishops (out of sheer curiosity to see how well it gelled with the rest of the book). The landmarks are arranged chronologically so more disciplined readers can follow a more conventional approach, if preferred.

The size of the book is formidable but the succinct and discrete chapters enable readers to proceed at a surprising pace. The chapters are concise, drilling down to the pertinent issues and providing socio-political context. At roughly 6 pages each, they are not designed to be exhaustive and, appetite whet, the chapter ends with suggested further reading. Selfishly, I would have liked a smidgeon more detail because the landmarks are so significant, but appreciate this would have made the book far too unwieldy. That said, I felt the segment devoted to Baroness Scotland, the first woman Attorney General, would have been strengthened by including more about the person (as opposed to the posts held), thus bringing it in line with the excellent chapters on Baroness Butler-Sloss and Lady Hale.

Each chapter begins with a synopsis of the landmark, contextual detail, particulars of the landmark including its impact, and the significance for women. This consistent structure allows readers to note themes and crossovers notwithstanding the distinct areas of law. Some chapters reinforced my knowledge about a particular topic whilst others provided new insights into areas about which I knew little, or nothing at all. I found that even where I was familiar with the topic, the feminist angle adopted provided a fresh perspective. In both

instances I found the content both moving and motivating. Legal readers may well be familiar with many of the featured landmarks and lawyers, but it is the fact that they are contained in one text that is both unique and lends a new sense of significance to the subject matter.

In keeping with the book's spirit of inclusivity, the editors stress that it is certainly not intended to be restricted to a legal audience. In terms of law schools, the manuscript is perhaps best suited to gender, sexuality and the law, or legal history modules. Individual chapters will serve as useful wider reading for other units, for example crime, family and employment law. The price of the book reflects the quality and scope of the product but is likely to be too restrictive for the typical student budget. However, the unique and historic nature of this anthology more than merits a place on the shelf of every law library.

This is a very welcome addition to the growing body of feminist legal texts. It complements *Feminist Judgments: From Theory to Practice* (Hart Publishing, 2010), and readers will note that the two books share several of the same contributors. Temptingly, the editors hint at there being room for further volumes and invite readers to pick up the baton.

Whilst *Women's Legal Landmarks* celebrates the progress that has been made in feminist legal history, it is clear that there is still inequality to be tackled. Indeed the book reminds us that on the current trajectory it is expected to take "*somewhere between 150 and 200 years* for there to be parity across the judiciary between women and men judges." I am sure readers will be inspired to take up the call to action.

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