

***Ordering Law. The Architectural and Social History of the English Law Court to 1914*, by Clare Graham. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. 499, 200 illustrations + 4 reconstructed plans. ISBN 0-7546-0787-9. £75 (hardback).**

While the title of this book might suggest that it would be dry reading, the book is in fact interesting and written in a flowing, highly readable style. Based on the author's PhD study, the book covers the development of the law court in England from the eleventh century to 1914. Chapter 1 introduces the trial as having a problem solving function and looks at Winchester Great Hall as an example of one of the earliest court buildings which was continuously used until the twentieth century with changes in the internal layout reflecting changes in court layouts over the centuries. Chapter 2 looks at the characteristics of the legal system prior to the eighteenth century, including the emergence of the assizes which were regional circuits undertaken by judges, barristers and solicitors throughout England. It was in this period that a number of courts emerged that were to provide the basis of the legal system into the twentieth century. These courts include the criminal court and *nisi prius* court that dealt with all other legal business. Quarter Session courts also appeared where Justices of the Peace heard cases between judicial visits. This period was to see the development of an internal court design with the counties required to provide criminal and *nisi prius* courts if they gained the right to have the assizes held in a particular town. Graham focuses in this chapter on the multi-functionality of early court buildings, with courts being housed in castle halls, guild or town halls and county halls. Some buildings were designed to allow markets to be held on the ground floor with the courts above. Chapter 3 considers the eighteenth century which Graham characterises as the period of the sociable court when being seen at court was of importance to the gentry and the judges' visit was accompanied by a social calendar. This period continued to see courts as multi-function buildings, but a change was occurring with plans of courts being published and their construction being seen as major architectural commissions. This multi-functionality was sometimes emphasised by movable court furnishings that allowed the buildings to be used for council meetings, lectures and assemblies. Assizes had become economically and socially important to towns in this period, but with a new emphasis on time and order came a reduction in the joyful and ceremonial aspects associated with court sittings and in the social activities such as balls. Chapter 4 considers the assizes and quarter sessions from the late-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. This period saw an increased formalisation of the court with the role of the barrister growing in relation to the criminal court in particular. This was to be a time of active building and rebuilding of courts with the provision of a range of service rooms to support the staff of the court, improved accommodation for judges and dedicated rooms for witnesses and the jury for example. As in the

previous chapters, this chapter begins with a discussion of the origin of the particular type of court, including some social history. This is followed by a discussion of the internal designs and architectural designs of the court buildings or multi-function buildings demonstrating the physical changes externally and internally for the same period; although sometimes the building examples are discussed over a wider period than that under discussion in the chapter. This can be confusing at times.

Chapter five discusses, in three separate sections, the development of specialised courts to meet the needs of the changing legal system. These courts were the police, county and coroner's courts. The emergence of Police Courts was linked to summary jurisdiction and interestingly the courts were often held in inns or public houses and in private houses. In the later half of the nineteenth century purpose-built police courts began to appear and Graham focuses particularly on London for her examples. County courts were civil courts that saw their role expanded beyond that of dealing with debts as their usefulness became apparent, taking some of the weight of cases from the assizes and quarter sessions from 1846. Coronial courts began to appear after the 1850s with the intention of removing inquests from the informal setting of the public house. Coronial courts often had mortuaries attached although the direct observation of the corpse by the court gradually lessened with time. Chapter 6 discusses symbolic courts and the invention of tradition. Symbolic courts were purpose built courts usually on a grand scale which were often only used when the assizes were held. Reflecting the move to place women within the domestic sphere, courts of this late nineteenth century period began to include ladies' waiting rooms screening women from the court.

The aim of Graham's study as stated in the conclusion was to attempt to establish when, how and why trials came to be housed in purpose-built accommodation and what was architecturally distinctive about that accommodation leading up to 1914. The second part of the aim is clearly achieved, with a lucid and understandable discussion of building design and internal arrangements. The book is lavishly illustrated; drawing on a diverse range of sources it provides an important collection of plans and photographs in an easily accessible form. In this aspect it is useful for comparative studies of English and Australian law courts. However there is no detailed comparative study of the buildings and their plans within the book, which would have been useful and interesting but was probably beyond the scope of the study. However many books dealing with architecture do not provide comparative analysis of the buildings they discuss, and Graham does go further in drawing links between the changes in law, society and the design of buildings.

While the book retains many of the features of a PhD thesis including the appendix which provides details on a county by county basis of the various courts in England, Graham does not provide a theoretical background to her study, beyond that mentioned in her introduction. While not detracting from the book to a large degree, the lack of theoretical context does not allow the reader to trace the line of thought behind the study. Some of the context is provided rather in footnoted

references which would have been useful in the text, particularly as Graham refers to other institutions following similar patterns of development and formalisation without providing an in-text discussion. The title of the book indicates that it considers the social history of the law courts, but in many ways the social history contained in the book is limited. The social history forms a cultural context to the law courts rather than an in depth discussion; for example the book focuses on the development of routes of access through the buildings housing the law courts for the magistrates, solicitors, jury and general public (Chapter 4) but does not consider the role of class and status in the wider society as an explanation for this separation. So in fulfilling the first part of her aim Graham does a reasonable but not totally satisfying job.

Overall this is an interesting book and well worth reading, which provides a good starting point to the extensive history and design of English law courts. In many ways it complements the English Heritage series on architecture of English Hospitals, Workhouses and Prisons.

Works Cited

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***Mapping the Victorian Social Body*, by Pamela K. Gilbert. State U of New York P, 2004. xx + 245, 29 illustrations. ISBN 0-7914-6026-6. US\$21.95 (paper).**

***Gothic Reflections: Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, by Peter K. Garrett. Cornell UP, 2003. xi + 232. ISBN 0-8014-8888-5. US\$19.95 (paper).**

In *Mapping the Victorian Social Body*, Pamela K. Gilbert sets out to track the ways in which medical maps developed during the nineteenth century and how they in turn “produced some of the spatialized discourse of the social body in the period” (23). Building on Mary Poovey’s notion of the social body, Gilbert examines the influence of such maps in sources as diverse as sermons and medical treatises.