

Book review: land law by Mark Davys

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Land Law, by Mark Davys, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 295pp., £22.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-137-28148-7

Few tutors would disagree with Davys' comment that 'land law's reputation as a difficult subject seems to remain undented' (p. xi). The complex nature of land law means that it is often left to be tackled by students in their final year. Even then however, the terminology, which is often archaic, can still fuel students' frustrations; they feel that they almost need to learn another "language", before they can move on to understand and apply some of the subject's key principles.

Davys tackles this issue head on, making no apology for the fact that 'this book remains an introduction; [he] sometimes ha[s] to mention difficult issues only in passing and leave their detailed consideration to others' (p. xi). The text also deals particularly well with the terminology issue. Not only are new terms explained clearly as soon as they are introduced, but the companion site also includes a useful searchable glossary. In addition, the text highlights interchangeable terms which can so often confuse those studying land law (for example on p. 87 in relation to mortgages).

Forming part of the Palgrave Macmillan Law Masters series, it comes as no surprise that the text is written in a very direct manner. Its no-nonsense approach means that it works well as the introductory text that the author intended. However, the book could also equally prove useful as a revision aid for exams. Its user-friendly format and engaging style ensures that it would similarly suit both students who are seeking a reference guide to dip in and out of, and those who are looking for more of a cover to cover experience. The text's logical structure also means that it can easily sit alongside a module by way of recommended reading. It introduces the reader to key land law concepts, before going on to distinguish the different types of estates and interests and explaining how such interests may also be shared, whilst finally covering their acquisition and protection.

Each chapter begins with a flowchart which provides a helpful overview/breakdown of the key topics covered. The student-focussed format goes on to include tables to help identify key comparisons, for example in relation to registered and unregistered land (table 2.2, p. 23), and to provide summaries, for example of the conveyancing process (table 12.1, p. 190).

Of particular interest is the way in which the majority of chapters centre around a particular case example. This helps to draw the reader in, providing them with immediate context to underpin their learning. In addition, despite the book's appealingly small size, it still manages to include reference to past, present and future developments and effects of land law principles, for example within the aptly-named "Leaseholds in context" section (p. 46).

The text not only highlights key land law principles, it also includes practical hints and tips for students seeking to find their way around and answer questions on the subject. For example, it encourages the reader to use diagrams to help them to unpick the facts

of problem questions (p. 48). The text also follows a "define, explain and apply" approach, encouraging the reader to do the same in solving problem-questions.

First published in 1989, and now in its eighth edition, we need to consider how the book compares with its peers? On a spectrum of texts, from the recently released revision aid Haley's *Nutshells Land Law* (2013) to the in-depth, analytical text that is Gray and Gray's *Elements of Land Law* (2008), Davys' text sits happily somewhere in the middle; making it an ideal choice for those seeking a book which combines a practical overview of the subject with an academically rigorous examination of its key legal principles.

As such, probably one of its key competitors is Clarke and Greer's *Land Law* (2012) yet, because of their different approaches, both texts could be (and are) easily recommended on reading lists. Clarke and Greer similarly recognise the need to demystify land law by providing practical context. They too provide flowcharts and summaries to help guide the reader through what can often be perceived as a maze of complex principles. They also identify that land law's often archaic-sounding terminology can be a stumbling block for many students. However, Clarke and Greer's text is more of a one-stop shop in this respect; not only does it highlight definitions within the book's "margin" as it goes along, there is also a full, quick-reference glossary of terms included at the back.

Whilst both texts are supported by online resources, Clarke and Greer have gone one step further and included QR codes to encourage the reader to visit the relevant online resources as they read through the text.

Their text is broken up by the inclusion of extracts from relevant statutes, case summaries and practical examples. Whilst this is clearly designed to encourage a full and applied understanding, some readers may prefer to be directed elsewhere for the detail should they require it.

Clarke and Greer do also include a useful chapter on exam technique. However, they quickly, and quite rightly, caveat this with a word of warning to their readers that different institutions set different exams with different types of questions. Whilst their guidance can therefore only be generic, it still provides a useful reminder of key revision tips. It also highlights key land law principles commonly tested in exams by cross-referencing back to each chapter.

Both the Davys' and the Clarke and Greer's *Land Law* texts have their own merits and both can be readily endorsed as texts suitable for undergraduate study. As with any other subject, the key is for each individual student to find the resources that most appeal to them and that they can engage with. Having this choice available can only help to encourage that.

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