

seigniorial decisions as to the betrothal and the choice of spouse . . . are simply not found in the register' (p. 76). This is a good example of the reflective vein which runs through all these articles. Also characteristic of the breadth and humanity of his interests is the chapter (9) on women's life in the age of Chaucer—which draws on the *Canterbury Tales* indeed, but also on the legal evidence of women's role in marriage and the upbringing of children.

In the study of wills the articles in this book are part of a larger enterprise, left incomplete at Sheehan's death. But there is enough here to make a useful harvest of his very deep study of wills and their effect. In the final chapter (16) he considered the conflict or friction between the secular courts which tried to prevent bequest of land away from legal or natural heirs, and the church courts which tried to help good Christian folk to follow their own wishes and interests. It is briefly sketched; and shows how the inclination of landowners to make bequests of land found new outlets within the sphere of the secular courts—most obviously in the development of the use. But as in many chapters in the book, there is a subtler agenda—the question is being asked whether the spiritual or temporal courts produced the more humane justice. Sheehan never quite brings this into the open: he liked to dwell on the wider aspects of his themes, but never forgot the limitation of his sources. At one time the tendency of experts on the medieval common law was to raise a prejudice against the Church courts; many readers of Sheehan may come away with a different perspective—there is little doubt that the influence of papal and episcopal justice (with all its shortcomings)—even of the courts of archdeacons—could have a beneficent effect on the workings of royal and secular justice. But indeed the difference was perhaps often more apparent than real—as has been observed by those of us accustomed to reading the records of the late twelfth century royal court administering advowsons. The court may be presided over by an archbishop and a bishop or two; and evidently in practice royal and ecclesiastical courts were acting together and differing only in the types of record they kept.

We must be very grateful to the editor of this volume and the author of the Introduction, which justly appraises Sheehan's achievement. The editor might have made cross-references more consistent and complete, and it would have helped the reader if he had been told with each chapter where it was originally printed—we have to search acknowledgements and bibliography to find out. And there is no index. But the book is beautifully printed; and our final word must be of thanks to those who made it possible for us to enjoy renewing our acquaintance with a valued friend and justly admired colleague in such comfort, and to such good purpose.

*DIBDIN AND THE ENGLISH ESTABLISHMENT*, E.E.S. SUNDERLAND, with a Foreword by Owen Chadwick, 1995, The Pentland Press Ltd, 109 pp. (£7.50) ISBN 1-85821-304-5.

A review by Judge John Colyer, QC

The author, a retired priest in the American Episcopal Church, a graduate of Harvard Law School and a former assistant Chaplain at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, discloses that this slender volume is the fruit of work and research over a thirty year period. His twenty-five pages of footnotes (which leave only eighty-six pages of text) are a monument to Herculean effort and to the determined penetration of a variety of sources, some not easy to achieve. Unlike George Bernard Shaw ('I hadn't time to prepare a short talk, so I've prepared a long one') this author had time to, and has whittled down his text to a level of condensation and summarisation that makes it difficult for a reader unversed in the subject to evaluate the materials uncovered by the author's researches and to

form the reader's own informed views. In short, the book is too brief. If trebled in length, it could become more digestible and the author could finally decide whether he intended a biography or a study of the several aspects of Dibdin's career—churchman, ecclesiastical lawyer or judge and apologist for establishment. (These are the three chapter headings, which together with the Introduction make up the book. Perhaps there is significance in their uneven length—Churchman eighteen pages, ecclesiastical lawyer and judge forty-nine pages, apologist for establishment twelve pages—perhaps not.)

Your reviewer is not persuaded that a more chronological approach to Dibdin would not make for easier reading and, more importantly, demonstrate the development of the subject's position and *credo*; as it is, the reader has sometimes to jump around in time to pursue a theme in isolation, when a more obviously biographical treatment would enable some of Dibdin's views and achievements more easily to be appreciated by considering them—and him—in the context of all that had happened up to the relevant time. It is a matter of choice and taste, but this reviewer found the book too much an evaluation of the supposedly *different* parts of the man's life work so that its unity is made less obvious. It would be superficial and unjust to suggest that this so deeply researched work does not acknowledge that Dibdin was each of the three chapter headings because he was also the others (and because he was a churchman first and last), but the brevity of the text does not give the author space to explore that inter-relationship fully.

At the end of one's reading of this book, one inevitably has to ask 'what lasting achievement has Dibdin left us—would things be different in the Church of England but for his life work?' I am not sure that I am much better equipped to answer those questions for reading this book—although had I a spare decade to pursue all its 300 citations and footnotes, I certainly should be. If anything, what struck me from this book was the immense debt which we owe to Dibdin for his long and efficient and benevolent administration of the Church's assets—insolvency would have cured or exacerbated many of the Church's problems had it not been for this. Secondly, his sheer longevity in office—twenty-five years as Ecclesiastical Commissioner, thirty-one as Dean of the Arches—meant that in an era of great social, political and ecclesiastical change he was a critical element of conservative continuity in the highest counsels of the church.

Perhaps, Dibdin's real monument was that he helped to hold the Anglican heritage virtually intact and left us in the legal institutions of church and state a real inhibitor of rash changes and a preserver of essentials. I think that is how he would have liked to be remembered, and also that he was almost certainly a much more attractive person in his private life, despite the superficial coldness, than the book suggests. Clearly he was shy, sensitive and godly; difficult to get to know but loyal, wise and with much gravitas. People's views are so often influenced by their personalities that it is a pity that in the book we do not really get to know Dibdin the man—notwithstanding the book's self-imposed limitation that it is a study 'of the *public* life of . . . Dibdin' (my italics). It would also have been kinder and more balanced to omit the witty but catty comment of a vicar, who knew him in retirement that applied Psalm 147 v. 17. One also has an uneasy feeling that the American author has never quite become at home with English legal institutions, for example, where he refers to Sir Lewis' eldest brother as 'a prominent barrister who was President of the Law Society'.