

## review

INFORMATION & IMAGINATION

### Lucky last

Lawyers Then and Now

Keith Mason

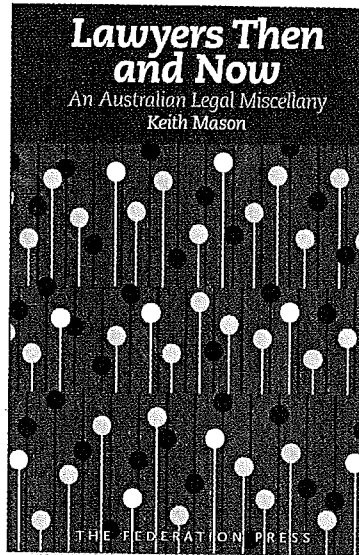
The Federation Press

review by Joseph Sampson

The late Sir Robert Megarry produced three volumes of what may, in retrospect and without disrespect to the great man's other achievements, be thought of as his greatest contributions to law – his magnificent *A Miscellany-at-Law*. While Sir Robert ventured to Australian shores for some of his anecdotes, the fertile fields of the British common law tradition afforded him ample offerings of amusing cases, statutes, and legal personalities to occupy the majority of his books.

Outside of a diverse collection of published reminiscences, legal biographies, scattered law reports, comments by the learned editors in issues of the *Australian Law Journal* and furtive whisperings in the corridors of various chambers, the lighter side of Australian legal culture has thus far gone largely uncollected. With *Lawyers Then and Now* the Hon. Keith Mason has remedied the breach.

Mason's miscellany follows the admirable model of Megarry's, but mines the equally rich but less appreciated records of Australian legal history. For instance, it tells of the story of a convict named Freeman, the second man condemned to hang in the new colony following the British



invasion, whose death sentence was commuted at the foot of the gallows on condition he serve as the colony's hangman. What was the first order of business for the newly minted executioner? To hang the first man slated for execution in Sydney Cove, who'd been sentenced to death two days earlier.

Mason carries the book well, with charming wit and erudition. The more classically inclined will delight in the inclusion of the young Sir Frank Gavan Duffy's irreverent Tennysonian verse "A Dream of Fair Judges" (published under the nom de plume 'Vie Manquée').

Proving the book is not all about

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obscure poetic parody, other highlights include Mason's gleeful exploration of the interesting or unfortunate names of various members of the judiciary, past and present. And readers curious to know which judges in Australia's history literally got away with murder won't be disappointed.

This book exceeds expectations in almost every respect and will delight most lawyers who love the endearing absurdities of the profession. Mason has hinted he may have material sufficient to swell the pages of a sequel – a further collection would be most welcome. □

### Welcome back

Standing in Another Man's Grave

Ian Rankin

Orion

review by Rick Krever

Rebus is back. Following the resignation in 2007 of Detective Inspector Rebus, the slightly soiled hero of Ian Rankin's 'tartan noir' novels, Rankin's work has tended to drift and fans have been unsettled, if not unhappy. Following in the footsteps of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who resurrected Sherlock Holmes from his unknown fate at the bottom of Reichenbach Falls, Rankin has returned to the hero who made him a literary success and, with a possible pending application by Rebus to rejoin the Edinburgh police at the end of the novel, left open the possibility of more in the future.

Rebus is a detective hero in the Chandleresque tradition – slightly flawed, driven by the need to achieve justice rather than an obsession with solving the

WIN

### Snitch

15 double passes to win

Studiocanal and *LSJ* are pleased to offer members 15 in-season double passes to action thriller *Snitch*, rated M, releasing 16 May, which stars Dwayne Johnson as a father who becomes an undercover informant to save his wrongly accused teenage son from a drug cartel. To enter, email postal contact details with the film's title in the subject line to [filloffers@lawsociety.com.au](mailto:filloffers@lawsociety.com.au) by 9 May. For terms and conditions visit [www.lawsociety.com.au/lsoffers](http://www.lawsociety.com.au/lsoffers).

