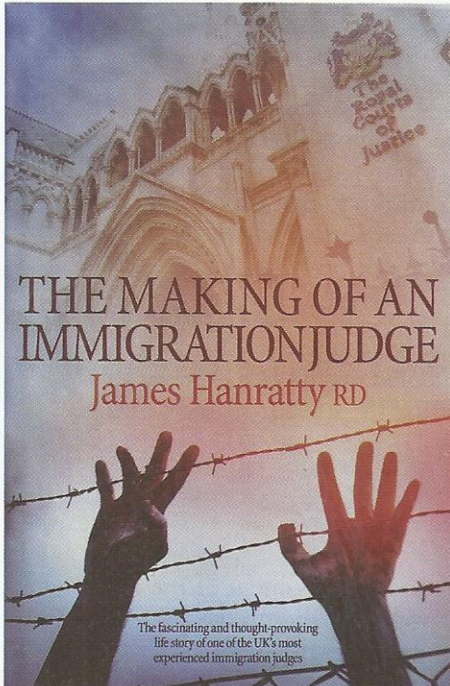


BOOK REVIEWS

The Making of an Immigration Judge

Author James Hanratty RD (OS)

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The book has been described as: ‘The fascinating and thought-provoking life story of one of the UK’s most experienced immigration judges, a man who knows the country’s courtrooms – and the realities of the immigration crisis – inside out.’

The forward is written by Peter Hennessy, Lord Hennessy of Lympshire, Attlee Professor of Contemporary British History at Queen Mary college, University of London. It is worth quoting in full:

‘I first met James Hanratty when he invited me to speak at that great club of his, the Athenaeum, several years ago. From the moment we were introduced I knew him to be a man of passion, faiths and patriotism. This memoir reflects those qualities plentifully. Since then our friendship has blossomed and I have found James to be wonderfully gregarious company; he is certainly never boring and his intellectual curiosity ripples round the room.

James possesses zest, curiosity, optimism and an abundant sense of fairness – exactly the range of qualities and characteristics that are required of an immigration judge. It’s a job for tough yet buoyant lawyers suffused with a generosity of spirit; all the woes of (the)

world and the scams of the world, too, pass through the court rooms in west London near Heathrow Airport.

James also wields a vivid pen. He makes the hidden wiring of Whitehall buzz. The way government departments work is undoubtedly an acquired taste and an arcane pursuit (which I happen to share), but anybody reading James's account of life in the Lord Chancellor's Department will be carried along because of his eye for episode, character and moment.

This book combines the big picture of serious questions facing the UK with the minute particulars, expressed with all the verve and insight you would expect from a man like James. His story of the case involving a Polish veteran of World War II, for example, is beautifully and movingly told – as are many others within these pages.

Given the swirling arguments about immigration, migration, asylum and human rights which continue to disturb our national conversation, this is a book of timeliness and wisdom, and a welcome addition to that conversation. It is also a book of many bonuses. James' account of the last great British imperial handover – that of Hong Kong to China in 1997 – is vividly told from his position as both a participant and observer.

Throughout his book James is loyal and warm towards the many institutions that have shaped him – a very attractive characteristic. These institutions range from Stonyhurst College where he was schooled, to the Royal Naval Reserve, and the legal profession in many of its forms. It is fitting for a Jesuit-reared boy that he should finish with the great prayer of St Ignatius Loyola.'

Having read the book from cover to cover I can vouch for the validity of the above. For example, towards the end of the book, while making it clear how he was intending to vote in the Referendum, the author still manages to provide an admirably clear and – in the circumstances – nicely balanced assessment of the pros and cons of either remaining or withdrawing from the European Union. Had more people had the chance to read the book before 23 June then enlightenment would have been far more prevalent and it is even possible that the outcome of the Referendum might have been different . . .

Although his experiences as an immigration judge might be said to form the 'kernel' of the book, there are topics of similar importance occupying phases of the author's life that are also described in some detail, many of them bringing him into close acquaintance and friendship with a plethora of people in positions of importance and influence. The narrative unfolds in as entertaining a style as the subject matter allows with the author not being afraid to admit errors and mistakes.

The initial 'RD' after the author's name stands for 'Reservel Decoration' – a long-service medal awarded in the Royal Naval Reserve of the United Kingdom to officers with at least fifteen years of active duty. James has long been a member of the Royal Southampton, Royal Hong Kong and Deauville yacht clubs, and in 2013 he was elected to the Royal Yacht Squadron – the most exclusive yacht club in the world. While no mention is made of any of this in Peter Hennessy's foreword references to his experiences at sea occupy a not unsubstantial proportion of the book.