

***The CCH Macquarie Dictionary of Law — Student Edition, 2nd ed, Sydney: CCH, 1993.***

***The CCH Macquarie Dictionary of Business — Student Edition, Sydney: CCH, 1993.***

Like most people who work with words I have a few dictionaries, although I have never actually counted just how many inhabit my desk. As I have been asked to review two new arrivals, I thought it a good idea to add my lot up. Fourteen. Maybe this is too many, they do take up a lot of space in the book-keep. Pens and other vitals get lost amongst them. But the batch I have does not strike me as overload. Many people rarely get the urge to touch one, let alone come to own a full fourteen. Furthermore, they are each different; politics, history, economics, keywords, law and general. Dictionaries are part of the necessary clutter of the bookish set. They are one of the prized collectibles of the chattering classes. And they look smart.

So dictionaries are a *good*. But there can be too much of any good thing, directories of vocabulary included. So the question arises, why are there so many of them? One theory is explained by that Eastern epigram which asserts *the palest ink is better than the sharpest memory*. Dictionaries are handy memory starters, they are helpful little numbers. Sheer convenience in having words well ordered motivated Roget's inventive labouring over his Thesaurus. But there is a catch to the company of dictionaries. With one skilfully put together, it is easy to lapse into hours of nothing but stalking after cross-references. I have a badly dog-eared lexicon of Modern History which has been an especial devil in that respect. Most of its interesting q.v. trails are now travelled.

There is another theory of the breeding cycles of dictionaries which has nothing to do with the desires of readers. This other speculation is a supply-sider, turning on the motivations of publishers. Take CCH for example. They have made altogether a name for themselves in the dictionary business. With the publication in 1981 of the *Macquarie Dictionary*, itself not a CCH issue, Australian lexicography has come of age. Our courts have recognised the fact. It was to the *Macquarie Dictionary* the High Court turned in *State Chamber of Commerce and Industry v The Commonwealth* (1987) 163 CLR 329 to help settle the meaning of that peculiar Australian entitlement known as the 'fringe benefit'.

Partly riding and partly furthering that swell of attainment is the series of specialist dictionaries now available as joint CCH-Macquarie efforts. Accounting, Employment & Industrial Relations, Business and Law are the four disciplines so far covered. Each looks fashioned for selling in defined markets. One must assume there is some fortune in all of this. After all, the *Macquarie* has sold more than 500,000 copies. Sitting before

me are the *CCH Macquarie Dictionary of Law* (2nd Edition) and the *CCH Dictionary of Business*, each in Student Edition form. How do they thumb?

I should begin with a confession; I always feel a degree of sympathy for any publisher willing to produce a new dictionary in English. For all efforts necessarily stand in the long shadows cast by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. A heavy load to bear — if shadows can be thought substantial. But there is solace. The *OED* will remain a one-off publication, the bare statistics of the first edition confirm the point; ninety years in the making, thirteen volumes including supplement, the beneficiary of perhaps six million voluntary quotation slips. It is a happening which, *ab initio*, will not recur. And even the *OED* has not been without its critics. But against that matchless precedent there is only one refuge for recent entrants. The publisher of any new dictionary must clearly indicate the particular objectives sought to be met by the fresh title. Both of the titles here under review set sensibly modest ambitions, so it is against those which they should be assessed.

So, how well organised are they? Both dictionaries employ the same format and referencing protocols. As they do not purport to be general dictionaries, the entire emphasis is on the definition of referential words. Features common to general dictionaries such as details of grammar, directions on punctuation or labels to alternate usage are not included. This is in line with what is expected of a specialist dictionary. In both *Law* and *Business*, etymology is minimal and something of a curiosity. For example, in *Law* all 'foreign' words are identified as from either Anglo French (AF), Anglo Latin (AL), French (F), Latin (L) or Old French (OF). In a text which is otherwise stripped back, I am not convinced of the value of this. For instance, what is gained by annexing etymology to an entry such as:

**"pur autre vie** for the life of another. See also **estate pur autre vie**. [AF]"

The decision to tag origin on each 'foreign' headword is more curious when *Law* is compared with *Osborn's Concise Law Dictionary*. For while *Osborn's* includes a wealth of historical detail, variant use and illustrative quotation, the editors of that volume have long found it unnecessary to tag origin. Presumably *Osborn's* policy is to treat 'foreign' phrases as forms incorporated into English. Why not also in *Law*? Curiosities of etymology aside, it can be said that synonyms, alternates and related concepts are well cross-referenced in both dictionaries.

It is on the substance of *Law* that I have most doubts. But first, what is good? From the point of view of University teaching, *Law* should be useful to students taking legal subjects as part of a degree other than an LLB. Even set for that group of students, I must add a caution that *Law* stands close to the line of distinction set between a glossary and a true dictionary. That said, I can see value in much of the content of the last eighty four pages; a copy of the Commonwealth Constitution, a full index of

legal abbreviations, Regnal Years and Justices of the High Court. I am less enthusiastic about the twelve pages of 'Popular Australian Case Names'.

I cannot say that *Law* would meet the requirements of LLB study. In my view, a good number of definitions do not stand close scrutiny. For example: **Negligence** omits any mention of *Donoghue v Stevenson*; **Detinue** is unclear on possession, ownership and damages for detention per se; **Copyright** commits the fallacy of 'creative essence', the companion error to that which confuses 'work of literature' with 'literary work'. I also question the relevance of a number of entries: **Unemployment benefit**, **Training guarantee scheme**, **Sinking fund**, **NBFI — non bank financial institution**.

*Law* and *Business* are each aimed at what I would describe as utilitarian readers. In this respect *Business* is much the more successful work. Each is, however, a useful reference work and will be of value to undergraduate students in commercial and business degree courses and to many people who are employed in areas of business and administration that require constant use of legal and technical terms. Having thumbed *Law* and *Business* together, it is clear the format was designed with generalist use as the principal objective. Considered in those terms, it is perhaps not surprising that *Law* does not satisfy the expectations of a legal academic.

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