

we saw this as a professional challenge. Using a facsimile edition of the Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser of 1811, we showed that wages had increased a thousand-fold, but the price of wheat had only tripled. We even quoted an 1811 legal joke:

“A person practising as a Solicitor, a few days since meeting a client for whom he had repeatedly been unsuccessful, cordially took him by the hand, and asked if he had another Suit for him? To which the other with some little acrimony replied, “*Indeed,*

Sir, I have not! You have brought me to my last SUIIT already, and that I intend to keep for my own use.” ■

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Book Review – That Disreputable Firm – the inside story of Slater & Gordon

Bill Madden, Sydney



Bill Madden

“On that hot summer's day I like to think of Bill Slater and his mates racing barefoot through the paddocks of South Yarra...”

So, somewhat romantically for the subject matter, begins this history of law firm Slater & Gordon.

Michael Cannon's book traces the history of Slater & Gordon from its inception, beginning with a quite interesting and detailed depiction of the character and life achievements of the founding partners.

The same style characterises an overview of the life of the firm's early development, the dominant personnel and the times in which they lived, particularly the 40's and 50's.

In what perhaps is a reflection of the fortunes of the firm, there is then something of a gap before the history picks up.

In the eighties, the author begins a review of the major pieces of litigation which the firm has pursued.

For my own part I found the book provided a strong reminder of the breadth and public face of that litigation - Asbestos, HIV, Christian Brothers. Of this recent history, the highlight for me was the final chapter which covers the OK Tedi litigation.

The photographs are a nice touch - a good selection of the members of the firm, clients and some of the early advertisements which the firm has refined over the years. And the index is extraordinarily detailed, in the style of a reference book!

Slater & Gordon has played a prominent if sometimes controversial role in Australian litigation, summed up in Michael Cannon's conclusion :

“...Slater & Gordon has done a great deal of goodhas made mistakes of course.....but has fulfilled the historical

purpose of doing its best for injured people who often have nowhere else to turn.”

Although I found this book interesting, I am unsure of its target audience. I suspect it will be of more interest to other legal practitioners than the general public, and for that reason can recommend it to APLA members. ■

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An unusual conference with clients: John Gordon (centre) meets plaintiffs Rex Dagi (left) and Maun Tepke in Papua New Guinea. – from *That Disreputable Firm*.