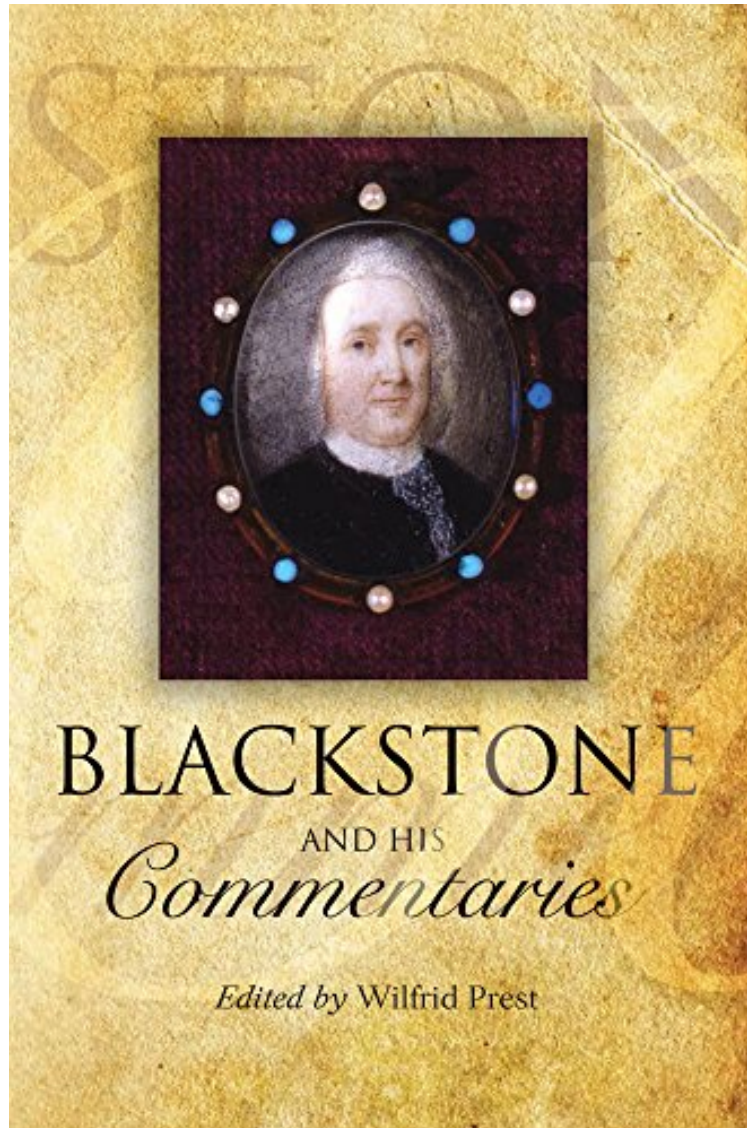


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## Blackstone and his Commentaries: Biography, Law, History

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2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. More Insights into William BlackstoneBy Ronald H. ClarkCurrently, nobody has done more or as much to revive serious scholarly interest in William Blackstone (1723-1770) than Wilfrid Prest of the University of Adelaide. Within the last several years, he has published a splendid and much overdo first-class biography of Blackstone, and followed it up with a volume of Blackstone letters which nicely

complements the biography (I have reviewed both on ). Now Professor Prest is back with this volume which is a collection of essays by various folks discussing Blackstone and his impact from a number of different perspectives. Like any collective undertaking, some essays are stronger than others, but I found nearly all of them not only very well done but quite interesting as well. The book is divided into four sections. The first deals with Blackstone's life and the biographical work that has been done on him. Prest has written a survey essay on the available biographical resources; Carol Matthews in her stimulating essay suggests Blackstone's interest in classic architecture may have impacted on how he structured his "Commentaries." The final two essays in this section deal with Blackstone's friendship with William Buckler and his historical interest in William Prynne (1600-69), the Puritan lawyer, polemicist, and politician. The second section deals with Blackstone's thought, with essays on how Blackstone was overly optimistic in his assessment that judges could be controlled; his rules for interpreting statutes; Blackstone's contrasting views with those of Bentham on the law of marriage; and his support for coverture or the unity of person in the marriage contract. Particularly interesting is an essay on how Blackstone was employed to justify not only the grabbing of New South Wales in Australia from the native peoples, but also to impose a somewhat feudal-like control of land by the crown. The final essay in this section deals with Blackstone and Bentham again having fundamentally different views, this time on the nature of property. The concluding section, dealing with Blackstone's influence, I found to be the most interesting. Here the essays discuss Blackstone's impact in America (a fine essay by Michael Hoeflich); his minimal influence in France and a bit more impact in Germany. The last section, "Sources," has an excellent essay by Morris Cohen on the Blackstone bibliographic resources in print and on the internet. J.H. Baker wraps up the collection with an interesting essay on the "iconography" of Blackstone, i.e., his representations in statuary and painting (including an important statute right here in Washington outside the U.S. District Court). The book also contains some wonderful illustrations and a dazzling section of color plates with various representations of Blackstone. An extensive index is also included. So Prest has established in this volume that Blackstone has had substantially more impact in a wider range of fields than I had thought. It is high time that more sustained and extensive attention be paid to him.

One of the most celebrated works in the Anglo-American legal tradition, William Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765-1769) has recently begun to attract renewed interest from legal and other scholars. The Commentaries no longer dominate legal education as they once did, especially in North America during the century after their first publication. But, they continue to be regularly cited in the judgments of superior courts of review on both sides of the Atlantic, and elsewhere throughout the common-law world. They also provide constitutional, cultural, intellectual, and legal historians with a remarkably comprehensive account of the role of law, lawyers, and the courts in the imperial superpower that was England on the cusp of the Industrial Revolution. The life and character of Blackstone himself, the nature and sources of his jurisprudence as expounded in the Commentaries, and the impact of his great book both within and beyond his native shores, are the main themes of this collection, which is now available in paperback. Individual essays cover: Blackstone's early architectural treatises and their relationship to the Commentaries \* his idiosyncratic book collecting \* his views of the role of judges \* his interpretations on statutes, the law of marriage, the status of wives, natural law, property law, and the legalities of colonization \* the varied reception of the Commentaries in the US and continental Europe. Blackstone's bibliography and iconography also receive attention. Combining the work of both eminent and emerging scholars, this interdisciplinary venture sheds welcome new light on a legal classic and its continued influence. [Subject: Legal History, Biography]

[A] splendid collection . it is remarkable how well the various chapters complement each other. The book repays reading as a whole (Ian Williams Cambridge Law Journal)[An] excellent book . the foundation for any future scholarship on Blackstone and his Commentaries (RB Bernstein The Law and Politics Book )The worth of Blackstone and his Commentaries . is not to be measured by the distinction of the authors of its various chapters although, in this case, it is difficult to imagine a more impressive collection of scholars covering such a broad range of expertise . Happily, the quality of the writing . matches the outstanding reputations of the respective authors (Stephen Keim Hearsay)This is very interesting and useful collection of essays, which show very clearly how, nearly 250 years after the publication of his greatest work, there still remains much to be said about the Commentator. (Michael Lobban Journal of Legal History)While much has been written about the importance of Blackstone's work in the development of the law in the US, these two chapters provide an interesting insight into the influence of his work in continental Europe. This edited collection demonstrates that there is still much to be said, and a great deal that is still unknown, about William Blackstone and his work. (Adam Webster Alternative Law Journal)About the Author Wilfrid Prest, Professor Emeritus in History and Law at the University of Adelaide, is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia.