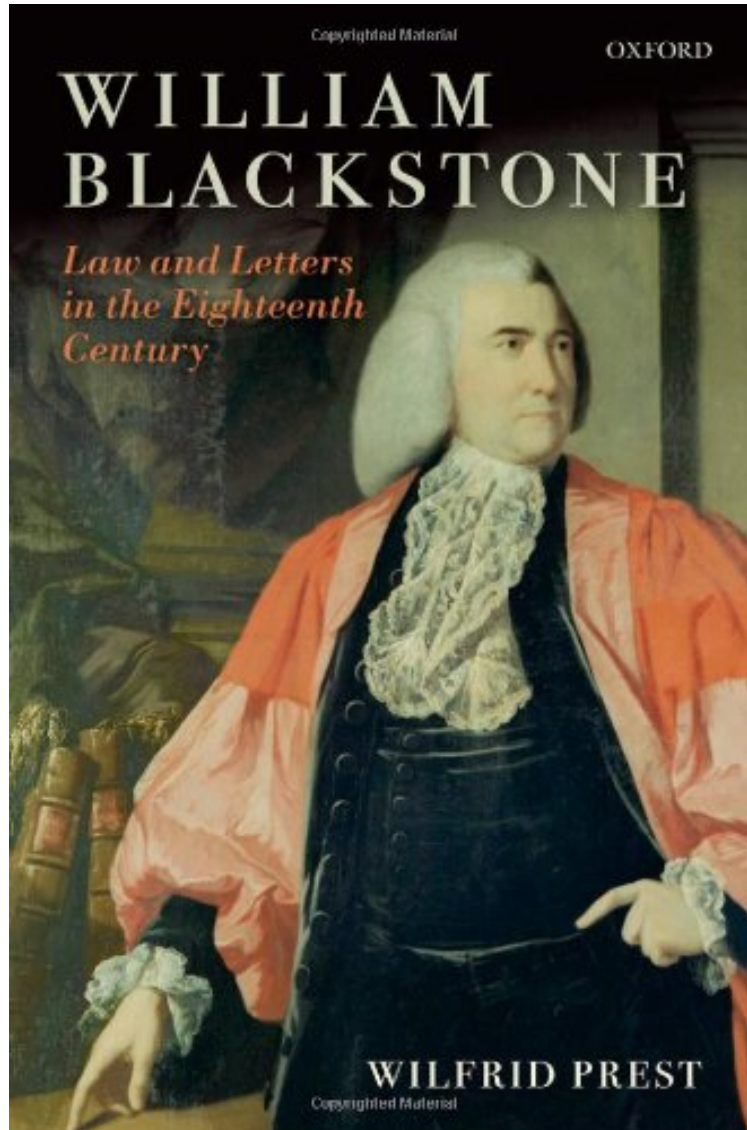


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William Blackstone: Law and Letters in the Eighteenth Century

Wilfrid Prest

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Wilfrid Prest : William Blackstone: Law and Letters in the Eighteenth Century before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised William Blackstone: Law and Letters in the Eighteenth Century:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good Biography of Neglected Author By Teadrinker It's hard to reconstruct a life that is not well documented and Prest did excellent research to provide the first scholarly biography of an important and neglected author. The biography was a challenge because Blackstone's life is not the stuff of dreams or nightmares. 12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. The First Modern Biography of William

Blackstone By Ronald H. Clark While many are aware of Blackstone's "Commentaries on the Laws of England," details of his life (1723-1780) are harder to come by. The last major biography was published in the 1930's, and it is indeed time for a full-scale modern biography which can benefit from intervening historical research and studies on Blackstone. And who better to undertake this mission than Wilfrid Prest, Emeritus at the University of Adelaide, who edited in 2006 the definitive edition of Blackstone's letters for the Selden Society, and who is one of the leading legal historians of 18th Century England, with a score of fine studies to his credit. Prest has sought to do more than just a biography--rather he seeks to relate Blackstone's life to the "law and letters of the 18th Century." However, be advised that this is a biography of Blackstone, not an analysis of the Commentaries. There are many fine such studies (Boorstin, Duncan Kennedy, e.g.); Prest does discuss some facets of the books, but the man is his principal focus. Each chapter chronologically covers a period in Blackstone's life. It is interesting to note his rather broad intellectual interests: poetry; the classics; architecture; fine printing; theology; academic reform of Oxford University; and translations. Prest traces his advancement from a classical education at Charterhouse, to Pembroke College at Oxford, a fellowship at All Souls, and admission to the Middle Temple as a barrister. While Prest carefully discusses Blackstone's not overwhelming career at the bar, I found his deep and continuing involvement in reform efforts at Oxford to be more interesting, especially his heroic efforts to salvage the Oxford University Press. Of course in 1758 Blackstone becomes the first Vinerian Professor of Common Law, which adds to his reputation. While not discussing the Commentaries in substance, Prest does sketch the background of how Blackstone came to deliver them first as lectures, then in four published volumes, as well as the reactions to them. Blackstone's other and less-known publications also are discussed. Blackstone's ultimate ambition was to become a judge; toward this end he did a stint in Parliament and performed other public services. In 1770 he is appointed a judge, serving up with Lord Mansfield in the King's Bench division (interestingly, Prest recounts, Mansfield would not allow the Commentaries to be cited in his court). Prest discusses Blackstone's judicial career, finding him to have been an "exceptionally careful, conscientious, and well-respected judge." The rather stinging criticisms of the young Jeremy Bentham (alleging that Blackstone was "the sworn enemy of reform") and other critics are briefly discussed, as well as the continuing popularity of the Commentaries in England and America. The book runs some 300 pages of text, and includes an exceptional bibliography of original and primary sources, 22 pages of notes, and some wonderful illustrations, many in full color. As usual, Prest's research is nothing less than incredibly comprehensive--he appears to have read everything pertinent. And although his topic is a serious one, his writing style is anything but heavy and dull, it moves along nicely. All told, the wait for a superb Blackstone biography has been worth it with the publication of this fine volume. 2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Awesome By Michael Sharp My wife loves this she's using it to become a paralegal and it works great for her. great buy. Woo.

Lawyer, judge, politician, poet, teacher, and architect, William Blackstone was a major figure in eighteenth century public life. Over his varied and brilliant career he made profound contributions to English politics, law, education, and culture through involvements in legal practice, Parliament, and the University of Oxford. Throughout he also remained engaged in his society's literary and spiritual life. Despite the breadth and influence of his work, Blackstone the man remains little known and poorly understood, the lack of engagement with his public and private life standing in stark contrast to the scale of his influence, particularly on the development and teaching of the law. Blackstone's 'Commentaries on the Laws of England' remains the most celebrated and influential text in the Anglo-American common-law tradition. This great book has inevitably overshadowed its author, while the dispersal of his personal and professional papers further complicates the task of understanding the man behind the work. The lack of a thorough account of Blackstone's life has fuelled controversy surrounding his intellectual background and political views. Was he the deeply reactionary conservative painted by Bentham, or rather a committed reformer and early champion of human rights? The present biography makes full use of a considerable body of new evidence that has emerged in recent years to shed light on the life, work, and times of this neglected figure in English and American history. Exploring Blackstone's family upbringing and private life, his political activities and ideology, his religious outlook and championing of the enlightenment, Prest weaves together the threads of an extraordinary mind and career.

"For generations scholars concluded that a true biography of Blackstone--one setting his life and thought in the historical, social, legal, literary, and cultural contexts that shaped him and his work--would be impossible. And yet, thanks to the tireless labor, skillful historical detective work, and literary craftsmanship of Wilfred Prest, we now have that book... William Blackstone: LAW AND LETTERS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY presents a persuasive, nuanced portrait of its subject grounded on admirably thorough research." --R. B. Bernstein, New York Law School Law and Politics Book About the Author Born in Melbourne of English parents, Wilfrid Prest was educated at the universities of Melbourne and Oxford; after a brief spell as a publishing trainee he returned to a lectureship in history at the University of Adelaide, where he has spent most of his academic career, apart from two years as Assistant Professor at Johns Hopkins University, and visiting positions at All Souls College Oxford, Clare Hall Cambridge, Princeton University, St Andrew's University, and the Australian National University. From 2002-2007 he held an

Australian Research Council fellowship for a project on the life and works of William Blackstone at the University of Adelaide, where he is currently Professor Emeritus and Visiting Research Fellow in History and Law.