

Law in 101 words

Snippets from *The Reduced Law Dictionary* by Roderick Ramage

Bribing judges

Once upon a time a farmer was in dispute with his neighbour. Before the trial of their case, the solicitor to one of them said: "I am afraid your case is weak. You should accept the offer made to you."

"That I will not, but would it help if I trussed a brace of chicken and sent them to the judge?"

"No. On no account do that."

The farmer won his case, but instead of congratulating his solicitor, he bragged: "It must have been that brace of chicken."

"What?!"

"Don't fash yourself. I put the other chap's name on the label."

Common law liberties

"Who told you you could do that?" Whenever anyone asks that question he or she undermines our freedoms under English common law. We do not need permission to do things. In principle, under English law you may to anything that is not expressly forbidden. Under codified European law systems, you may do nothing unless expressly permitted, and, under Soviet and other despotic laws, anything that you are not required to do is prohibited. In practice the English principle is not quite like this, because liberty restricts power and is something which all governments, bureaucracies and big businesses constantly seek to undermine.

Cross-examination

Never ask a question to which you don't know the answer. The defendant's barrister cross-examined a pump attendant from a garage, who testified that the plaintiff's sports car had pulled out of a side road and stopped at traffic lights while the defendant's lorry was still a long way off. The lorry had run into the back of the sports car. "If you are busy filling tanks and taking money, how did you have time to see what happened?" The question

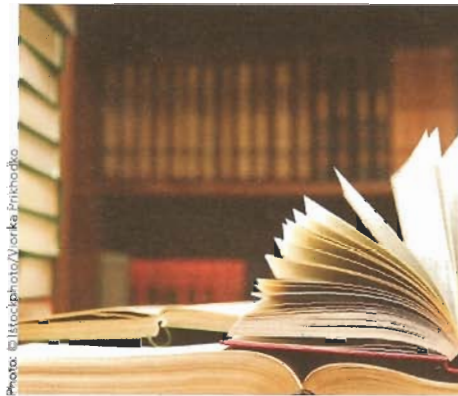


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backfired and proved her credibility. She blushed and hesitated: "It's the driver of the sports car. I rather fancied him."

Laughter in court

I defended a man in the Manchester magistrates' court. He was charged first with claiming to be a brain surgeon (to impress his landlady), while he was actually a hospital porter, and second with stealing some syringes and penicillin. When it was explained to the stipendiary that, having held himself out to be a doctor, he was treating his grocer for swollen ankles by injecting him in the buttocks, the stype remarked: "It seems to me that a so-called brain surgeon treating swollen ankles by injections in the buttocks represents a reasonable anatomic average." The defendant failed to see the joke.

Police English

Journalists and media types spend their time giving new meanings to old words and losing established meanings. Sure, they don't do it deliberately. It's a fashion thing without a moment's thought. The police are just as bad, except they do it solely by not thinking. They solemnly announce that a package or something is suspicious, rather than suspect. How then do they (and the journalists who imitate them) describe the state of mind of a person who suspects, eg that the package is dangerous? Dr Johnson had the same sort of problem when he retorted: "No

Well notes

One of the *Times's* cartoonists rose to the bait, when the front page was full of the latest wheeze to cope with our (actual or imagined) national work shy sickie culture.

Doctors, it was proposed, will no longer issue sick notes, but well notes. *The Times* cartoon on page two showed three characters in a GP's surgery, a doctor with a clipboard, a nurse at his side and no more than the turned up feet of a man lying on the floor. The doctor was saying to the nurse: "I can certify him as fit for work as an organ donor."

madam, you smell, I stink."

Thinking on your feet

"Mr Wilkinson, before you address me, I should tell you that, where your clients' evidence conflicts with that of the plaintiff, I wholly disbelieve your clients."

"Your honour. It does not matter whether my clients are world grade liars. This is contract. *Caveat emptor*. The plaintiff, Manchester Garages Ltd, is a big garage. It has all the facilities and expertise to assess the car it bought from my clients, but failed to apply them. It cannot be heard to say that it was taken in by small time street side traders."

Judge Bailey disagreed, but Mr Wilkinson's performance had been brilliant.

Witchcraft

In *R v Bunce* (1859), a gipsy obtained money and goods under pretence of practising witchcraft, without intention to return them and was properly indicted for larceny, as consisting in obtaining possession of the goods by a trick of fraud. The Witchcraft Act 1735 must be very powerful, because, according to LexisNexis it has needed the Statute Law Revision Act 1867, the Statute Law Revision Act 1887, the Statute Law Revision Act 1948, and the Fraudulent Mediums Act 1951 to repeal it (and the moment I had typed these words, LexisNexis closed down on my screen and had to be reloaded). NLJ

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