



King's Inns and the Battle of the Books, 1972: Cultural Controversy at a Dublin Library (Irish Legal History Society)

Colum Kenny

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Kenny recounts a major cultural controversy that marked the recognition of the King's Inns Library as an important part of the heritage of modern Ireland. In 1972 thousands of non-law books from King's Inns were sold at Sotheby's in London. The row that ensued involved many well-known people including Cearbhall Ó Dáiligh, Mary Robinson and Charles J. Haughey. The sale was criticized as the random dispersal of an irreplaceable collection and it raises vital questions about the proper care of libraries, about the relationship of general knowledge to professional expertise and about the problematic nature of Irish identity in a post-colonial era. The books were sold because King's Inns was in financial difficulty, a difficulty exacerbated by the fact that the benchers had recently renovated their kitchens. The government was kept informed by the benchers of their plans but failed to respond to a proposal that might have resulted in all of the volumes remaining in Ireland. Kenny suggests means of avoiding acrimony or major controversy in connection with any possible disposal of books by King's Inns Library in the future.

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