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THE GOLDEN DAYS OF LAW SCHOOL

In his comprehensive and handsome study of schooling in medieval England, Professor Nicholas Orme focuses briefly on legal education, including law school for the children of privilege:

The third group came from the aristocracy, especially those who came to be known in the fifteenth century as gentlemen. In their case practical studies developed a more exalted form based on ‘common’ or English law rather than on the arts of business. These studies developed in London, or more specifically in the suburbs along the Strand where the common lawyers lived, near the royal courts of law at Westminster. By or soon after 1400 ten lesser ‘inns of chancery’ and four greater ‘inns of court’ developed in this district, the latter consisting then as now of Gray’s Inn, Lincoln’s Inn, the Inner Temple, and the Middle Temple. The inns housed some seven hundred to eight hundred practising lawyers and two hundred to three hundred students in the fifteenth century, the practitioners exercising supervision over the studies and behaviour of the students. ‘Readings’ or lectures on the common law were held in the halls, and students practised how to work in the king’s law courts by pleading mock cases in ‘moots’, judged by their seniors. Students attended the real courts too, and observed the proceedings. Some of those who studied at the inns were gentlemen’s sons who aimed to become professional lawyers. Others were eldest sons who would inherit family property. For

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them attendance at the inns was an acceptable way of leaving home, living under supervision, and acquiring useful knowledge for adult life. Sir John Fortescue, who wrote a laudatory account of the inns in the 1460s, praised them as being

like a school of all the manners that nobles learn. There they [i.e. the students] learn to sing and to exercise themselves in every kind of harmony. They also practise dancing and all the games proper to noblemen, just as those in the king's household are accustomed to practise them.

At this end of the social scale legal education came close to that of young noblemen and gentlemen in the king's household or in the households of the great aristocracy.

Singing, dancing, playing games. It sounds just like *IL*.

- NICHOLAS ORME, *MEDIEVAL SCHOOLS: FROM ROMAN BRITAIN TO RENAISSANCE ENGLAND* 70 (Yale 2006); SCOTT TUROW, *ONE-L* (Putnam 1977).

