



INTRODUCTION

JUDGE WILLIAM JOHNSON PAPERS

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Summary

The papers of the late Judge William Johnson, QC, comprise 20 volumes and c.50 documents, mainly relating to the Boy Scout movement in Northern Ireland.



Legal career



Judge William Johnson

William Johnson was born on the first day of April 1903, the second child of a prominent Newry solicitor. The young William was educated initially at Newry Intermediate School, progressing to Portora Royal School, Enniskillen, and thence to Trinity College, Dublin. He graduated in 1924 with a first class honours in the Senior Moderatorship in Legal and Political Science and in the same year he was awarded a Certificate of Honour in the final examinations of the King's Inns in Dublin. He was called to the Bar of the Irish Free State (incidentally, by the last Lord Chief Justice of Ireland) while still an undergraduate. In 1925 he was called to the Bar of the recently created state of Northern Ireland and, for a number of years, he combined practice at the Northern Ireland bar with the post of private secretary to the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland. An appointment to a lectureship in law at the Queen's University of Belfast followed in 1935 and, throughout his life, he maintained his interest in the academic side of the law. Even after his retirement he continued to write on the subject and a paper of his is handed to every new barrister when he, or she, is called to the bar of Northern Ireland.

William Johnson's legal career was interrupted by World War II. He enlisted and served initially with the Royal Artillery, and subsequently with the Judge-Advocate General's department, in the course of which he attained the rank of colonel and was mentioned in despatches. After his return to practice in 1946, he took silk and the following year was appointed County Court Judge for Co. Tyrone, a post he filled with distinction until his retirement in 1978.



Scouting career

Outside his professional work Judge William Johnson had a number of interest: while at university he had won his colours as a member of the University Harriers and throughout his schooldays he had shown a great interest in amateur dramatics. But undoubtedly his greatest interest was in the Boy Scout movement.

William's father had had an interest in youth work and it was probably he who encouraged his twelve year old son to join the 1st Newry Troop in the early months of 1915. William maintained his interest while at Trinity, running training courses for leaders in Dublin and accompanying the Irish Free State contingent to the 1925 Jamboree in Wembley, London. In the same year, when he was just 22, he was appointed District Commissioner for North Belfast and remained in that post for some five years. He held a number of increasingly senior posts in the scout movement, culminating in his service as Chief Commissioner for Northern Ireland from 1955 to 1965.

He combined his interest in drama with his interest in the scout movement, being responsible for the production of three scout pageants in the old Grosvenor Hall, followed by a number of 'Gang Show' in the Grand Opera House, Belfast. William was also responsible for the founding of scout troops at the Royal Belfast Academy (74th Belfast) Belfast Royal Academical Institution (69th Belfast) and the 78th Belfast (Duncairn) with which he was connected until the end of his life. His scouting was not, however, parochial, and his influence at the Committee of the Council of the Scout Association did much to advance the training of young people throughout the United Kingdom. His legacy also includes the founding, in 1948, of a scouting camp-site at Crawfordsburn County Park

Judge Johnson's career in scouting is recorded in his scrapbooks, which run from 1909 to 1968. These record his activities as a scout, a scoutmaster, and eventually as Chief Commissioner for Northern Ireland, and include photographs and programmes of scout jamborees in Great Britain and Ireland. The scrapbooks are indexed and provide an interesting insight into the activities of an important youth movement during this period. A series of five scrapbooks record his work on Gang Show and other theatrical productions, 1951-61, including scripts and photographs. Judge William Johnson died in 1993.

