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INTRODUCTION

JOHNSTON OF BALLYKILBEG PAPERS

November 2007

Johnston of Ballykilbeg Papers (D880)

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Summary

c.1000 documents, volumes and photographs comprising: the diaries and correspondence of William Johnston, MP, the prominent Orangeman of Ballykilbeg, Co. Down, and also of several members of his family, 1847- 1902; title deeds, leases and testamentary papers of the same Johnston family of Ballykilbeg and Downpatrick, Co. Down, 1739-c.1900.



Background

William Johnston was born on 22 February 1829, the eldest son of John Brett Johnston and his wife Thomasina Anne of Ballykilbeg near Downpatrick. He studied at Trinity College, Dublin between 1848 and 1856 and attained the degrees of BA and MA. Originally intended for the medical profession, he later adopted law and was called to the Irish Bar in Hilary Term in 1872. However, he never practised law. Instead he devoted his energies to the Orange Order which he joined on 8 May 1848 and he was a prominent member for most of his life later becoming Deputy Grand Master of Ireland. He was also Sovereign Grand Master of the Black Institution, founded in 1866, due to his proposal made in December 1865.

In 1853, he began the publication of tracts, novels and a newspaper, the *Downshire Protestant* printed from 1855 to 1862. It is the survival of much of this and other written material, which renders the collection such a rich source for the researcher.



Opposing the Anti-Processions Act

The original Anti-Processions Act, 1832, was a measure purporting to abolish all party processions, later amended by the Party Processions Act 1850 which introduced more stringent rules allowing for the prosecution and imprisonment of any person taking part in an illegal procession, however inadvertently. In open opposition to the Act, Johnston held the 12th July celebrations at his demesne at Ballykilbeg in 1866 and in the following year he headed the 12th of July demonstration from Newtownards to Bangor. As a result he was imprisoned in Downpatrick Gaol for two months. This act of defiance and personal sacrifice greatly raised his profile resulting in his election as Independent Conservative MP for Belfast at the General Election of 20 November 1868. In 1869, he introduced a Bill to repeal the Party Processions Act and in 1872 the Liberal Government, with Lord Hartington as Chief Secretary for Ireland, repealed the legislation. Johnston resigned his seat in 1878 having been appointed Inspector of Fisheries for Ireland by the Conservative Prime Minister, Lord Beaconsfield. Because of his verbal attacks on Home Rule supporters and the Land League he was dismissed from the position of Inspector of Fisheries by Earl Spencer, the Liberal Lieutenant in 1885 and was immediately re-elected as MP for South Belfast, a seat he held until his death in 1902.



Political related Papers

All these events and details are fully documented in the archive which includes: 32 diaries, 1847-1902; envelopes of personal, political and Orange Order related correspondence and literature, 1841-1902; many speeches in pamphlet format including one given in the House of Commons on 17 March 1869, moving the second reading of the Bill to repeal the 'Party Processions Act.'



Songs and novels

Johnston's many outside interests and skills are also represented in the collection in the form of copies of songs and novels written by him 1849-1863, and there are copies of the *Ballykilbeg Newspaper* which he was largely responsible for, 1844-1849, which included articles and features on a range of topics such as horticulture, poetry, the weather, local and national news, etc.



Estate Records

The collection also contains a large number of title deeds, leases, testamentary papers and rentals and estate accounts pertaining to Johnston property at Ballykilbeg and Downpatrick, Co. Down, 1739-c.1900, eg, 'an account of cash expended in building and other improvements at Ballygalbeg...', Ballykilbeg, Co. Down, 1790-1792. It should also be noted that the archive contains a selection of Johnston family photographs, c.1880-1890.

