

Manx Notes 330 (2018)

COLONEL JOHNSON *

(1789/91–1868)

The first mention of Colonel Johnson in the Isle of Man comes from the *Manx Sun* newspaper in its issue for 1 May 1840. On Easter Monday in Ramsey around one hundred teetotallers met for tea in the National Schoolroom and after said refreshment had been drunk:

[A]ddresses were delivered by several of the members.—A most cheering, instructive, and animated address was delivered by Col. Johnson, from the United States of America, upon the rise, progress, and present prospects of total abstinence from all intoxicating liquors in that country, and other parts of the world.¹

It was added that “Col. Johnson kindly consented to give another lecture on Tuesday evening next.” The 7 July saw him at Ballakaneen in Andreas where he chaired the anniversary meeting of the Auxillary Branch of the Wesley Missionary Society, the next day he was again in Ramsey, where “[t]he chair was taken by Col. Johnson, from the United States of America, who gave a lucid and animating sketch of the happy effects of Wesleyan Missionary labours among both the civilized and heathen tribes on that vast continent.”²

It is as Colonel Charles Johnson that he appears in an apology for libel published in the *Manx Liberal* in 1849, and this allows him to be identified for certain in the census record.³ In 1841, he was returned as being aged 45 and living at Ballabrooie in Lezayre with his wife, Eliza (30), born in England, and with a servant, Ann Thompson (20).⁴ 1844 saw him living in Douglas at 6 Woodhouse Terrace, when he sold the contents of the house there at auction, the advert mentioning that Colonel Johnson “declines House-keeping.”⁵ Almost the goods on offer were “20 Dozen prime old Claret,” besides “fine old Brandy in bottles.” The census for 1851 see him as a visitor on the night of the census at 93 Malew Street in Castletown, 60 years old, and with his daughter, Mary J[ane] Johnson (8), born in Douglas, present with him.⁶ His occupation is given as “News paper Editor.” His wife was enumerated as a visitor as well, but in Douglas, staying at Bank Street, and born in Bedford, Engand.⁷ In the 1861 census, now 71, he was residing at 2 Crosby Cottage in Crosby, with his wife,

* This is an introductory sketch only to Johnson and there is much more than could be written about his time living in the Island.

1 Anon, “[Localities] On Easter Monday ...,” *Manx Sun* 1 May 1840.

2 Anon, “[Localities] The anniversary meetings ...,” *Manx Sun* 17 July 1840.

3 Anon, “Apology,” *Manx Liberal* 26 May 1849. The libel appeared in the *Manx Cat* but there is no extant issue available.

4 *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Lezayre 1841, HO 107, 1464/1, fol. 58.

5 Anon, “[Advert] Sale of Choice Furniture,” *Mona’s Herald* 30 July 1844.

6 *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Castletown 1851, HO 107, 2526, fol. 148, sch. 142.

7 *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Douglas 1851, HO 107, 2525, fol. 201, sch. 52.

Eliza (50), their daughter Mary (17), a music teacher. Johnson was now an “Editor & Public Writer Novels Tales &&” and stated to have been born in New York.⁸

Johnson died in 1868, aged 79, and was buried at Braddan on 7 June that year.⁹ There are minor discrepancies then in his actual year of birth: 1796 (1841), 1791 (1851), 1790 (1861), 1789 (1868). That for 1841 shows age rounding and can be discarded, so placing his birth between 1789–91. An Elizabeth Johnson was buried in Braddan on 7 February 1886, aged 77, and this must be his wife, making her born in 1809, though the ages stated in the censuses making it 1811.¹⁰ Their daughter, Mary, married James Alfred Pacey in Liverpool in 1867, an American of Bostonian descent, and she was stated as being the granddaughter of the late Sir William Johnson of the United States.¹¹ There was another child in the family, as an advert in 1842 by Johnson sought to place his son with a merchant or “first rate” grocer in Douglas, remarking that “the lad is thirteen years of age, has a good school education, and is an active sensible boy.” He offered the remarkably large sum for the period of £500 as capital towards his son entering into a partnership with any merchant or grocer.¹²

The Colonel had a financial hiccup in 1858, with a Notice to Creditors being issued, his address given as Westham Cottage in Castletown, and three trustees being appointed to manage his affairs.¹³ He was again in financial straits in 1868, the year of his death, when his Freemason brothers of the Athole Lodge “voted a handsome sum from the Lodge funds for the relief of Col. Johnson, an old member of the craft.”¹⁴ This was in January and was clearly insufficient as a more grand affair was put on later that year on 28 April in the Victoria Hall in Douglas,¹⁵ where the Liverpool Saxhorn Quartette Club and a Mrs Tarte were announced as participating in the evening’s programme.¹⁶ Dispensation had even been given for brethren to appear in full Masonic costume by the Earl of Zetland, the Grand Master of the Lodge.¹⁷ It was reported that “Colonel Johnson, in his old age, has been assailed by sickness and poverty, and this entertainment is got up for the purpose of raising a small fund to supplement the contributions from the masonic brotherhood for his support during the remaining years of his life.”¹⁸ Another account of the evening

⁸ *Census Enumerators’ Book* for Marown 1861, RG 9/4426, fol. 7, sch. 39.

⁹ Brian Lawson, *An Index to Manx Burials* [online resource].

¹⁰ Brian Lawson, *An Index to Manx Burials* [online resource].

¹¹ Anon, “Births, Marriages, and Deaths,” *Manx Sun* 11 January 1868.

¹² Anon, “[Advert] Wanted,” *Manx Sun* 31 December 1842. £500 is worth around £50,000 today.

¹³ Anon, “Notice to Creditors,” *Mona’s Herald* 2 June 1858.

¹⁴ Anon, “[Localities] Athole Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons,” *Manx Sun* 11 January 1868.

¹⁵ Anon, “[Advert] Victoria Hall, Douglas,” *Isle of Man Times* 25 April 1868.

¹⁶ Anon, “Masonic Entertainment for Col. Johnson,” *Manx Sun* 25 April 1868.

¹⁷ Anon, “[Local News] Freemasonry,” *Manx Sun* 28 March 1868.

¹⁸ Anon, “Masonic Entertainment for Col. Johnson.”

mentioned its intention was “to relieve the distress of poor Col. Johnson, who is now suffering intense agony and torture, the result of a fatal disease.”¹⁹ After the expenses for the evening had been settled, some £33 was left to be handed over.²⁰

In a legal petition from 1868, Johnson is described as the “editor of *Monas Herald*,”²¹ As seen, in the 1851 census he was a “News paper Editor,” and in 1861, “Editor & Public Writer Novels Tales &c&c.” Johnson may have styled himself so as editor, but no others agreed with him. The *Mona’s Herald* in 1846, under the title of “A Few Words to the *Sun*,” the first item in its leader column, stated that:

We have to assure the editor of the *Sun*,—whether he be the first *son* of *Adam*, or the last *Welch*-man that has *come over*, and now sojourns amongst us “for reasons best known to himself,”—that Col. Johnson is no more the editor of the *Herald* than *he* of the *Sun* is, or *ever was!*²²

Whilst dating from 1846, there is no indication that he ever became editor after that date, though he was associated with the *Mona’s Herald* as was mentioned in 1868 at the time of his benefit concert when some seemingly questioned its need to be answered that “had he been properly remunerated for his long services on the Herald, extending over about thirty years, there would have been no occasion for the masonic entertainment.”²³ Another comment was that “Col. Johnson laboured for many years as a writer for *Mona’s Herald*,” adding “[w]e are informed that up to the present time, and during his long illness, the proprietor of that journal has never relieved his necessities to the amount of one farthing.”²⁴

In 1853, he was described as a “writer of leading articles in the *Mona’s Herald*”²⁵ in a letter written by Manninagh to the *Manx Sun*, though not to praise by the editor of that newspaper who added a long note to the letter, “[...] there is a man who repeatedly writes a world of trash in the *Herald* with the prefix, ‘by Col. Johnson,’” also adding “[n]ow this pretentious gentleman (?) who may be as mythical as we are assured his rank is self-appropriated.”²⁶ Whether Colonel or not, he was clearly a figure who through his long residence in the Island found little favour for some.

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¹⁹ Anon, “Masonic Entertainment,” *Isle of Man Times* 2 May 1868: 4e.

²⁰ Anon, “[Local] The Recent Masonic Entertainment,” *Isle of Man Times* 30 May 1868.

²¹ Anon, “[Advertisements] To the Honorable ...,” *Mona’s Herald* 4 November 1868.

²² Anon, “A Few Words to the *Sun*,” *Mona’s Herald* 7 October 1846.

²³ Anon, “S.—The statement is ...,” *Isle of Man Times* 2 May 1868.

²⁴ Anon, “F.E.M.—You are right....,” *Isle of Man Times* 25 April 1868.

²⁵ Anon, “[Letter to the Editor] Emigrants and Emigration. Letter xiv.—American Slavery—Cotton in Australia,” *Manx Sun* 5 March 1853: 2a.

²⁶ Note by the editor of the *Manx Sun* appended to Pseud [signed as “Manninagh”], “[Letter to the Editor] ‘A Real Editor,’” *Manx Sun* 26 March 1853.

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- . “Apology.” *Manx Liberal* 26 May 1849: [2]f.
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- . “[Local News] Freemasonry.” *Manx Sun* 28 March 1868: 4c.
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- . “[Localities] Athole Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons.” *Manx Sun* 11 January 1868: 8e.
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- . “S.—The statement is” *Isle of Man Times* 2 May 1868: 4c.
- Pseud [signed as “Manninagh”]. “[Letter to the Editor] ‘A Real Editor’.” *Manx Sun* 26 March 1853: 5a.

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