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Handlist of the papers of Mrs N.W. Johnson

Date range of material: 1941-1953

Durham University Library
February 2024

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Preface

Creation of catalogue

WP list JH February 1992. SGML RIH August 2002

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Introduction

Collection title: Johnson, Mrs Naomi Winifred

Reference code: GB-0033-SAD

Dates of creation: 1941-1953

Extent: 2 boxes

Repository: Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections: Sudan Archive

Creator: Johnson, Mrs Naomi Winifred

Language of material: English

(Naomi) Winifred Johnson (née Graham)

(1900 - 1983)

1946 Apr	Married Thewlis Clarkson Johnson in England
1946 Apr	Travelled to the Gezira with husband
1946-1953	Lived at Wad Hussein, Gezira, where husband was block inspector for Sudan Plantations Syndicate and (after 1950) for Sudan Gezira Board
1953	Retired to England with husband

Accession details

Presented by Mrs H. Johnson, 1990

Arrangement

1. Official Papers
2. Personal Papers
3. Diaries
4. Newspaper Cuttings
5. Miscellanea
6. Photographic Material
7. Printed Material

Form of citation

Material in the Sudan Archive is given a reference number, which is unique across the collections of papers. Usually it is not necessary to give the name of the person or organisation within which collection the item is found, although it may be convenient to do so.

The short form of citation should be GB-0033-SAD.*reference number*

Most printed references take the form: SAD.*reference number*.

To order items in the searchroom, use the collection reference code(s), derived by removing the repository code (GB-0033-), followed by the reference number. Citing the section of the finding aid is useful.

1. Official Papers

- SAD.751/4/1-8 1941 Jun 25
Note from Governor's office and enclosed report on "The Gezira Province Police; June 1940 to April 1941" to R.N. Parker, Sudan Defence Force, Khartoum
- SAD.751/4/9-11 1948 Jan 1
List of staff, Sudan Plantations Syndicate Ltd., Barakat headquarters and Kassala Cotton Co. Ltd.

2. Personal Papers

- SAD.751/5/1-72 1946 Jul 8 - 1953 Jun 17
Letters and telegrams to Winifred and Thewlis Johnson from family and friends, chiefly from the Sudan, discussing coming or past social events. Mimeographed copy of a 4-page letter from Clifford and Alison Drew describing in detail the crash of a Hermes aircraft off the coast of Malta, Aug 1952, on which they were passengers (SAD.751/5/12-15)
- SAD.752/17/1 [n.d.]
Handwritten notes of a taped interview of Thewlis Henry Johnson by John Kenrick on the Abyssinian Campaign of 1940 - 1942
- SAD.752/17/2-5 [n.d.]
Handwritten notes by John Kenrick on the diaries kept by Winifred Johnson from 1946-1953 while living in the Gezira with her husband, Thewlis Johnson, a block inspector at Wad Hussein
- SAD.752/17/6-26 [n.d.]
Domestic account book, unsigned, but presumably kept by Winifred Johnson while living in the Gezira, 1946 - 1953, showing groceries purchased and wages paid to household staff

3. Diaries

SAD.751/6-751/20; 1946 - 1953

752/1-752/16

Thirty-one student exercise books, handwritten, kept as a daily diary by Mrs. Winifred Johnson [W.J.], wife of Thewlis Johnson [T.J.], a block inspector with the Sudan Plantations Syndicate and (after 1950) the Sudan Gezira Board, recording events and activities, commenting on political, economic, and social conditions, discussing in great detail personal lives of friends and acquaintances, and their own lives in the Gezira during the post World War II period. These years included the end of the Sudan Plantations Syndicate in 1950, the establishment of the Sudan Gezira Board, political turmoil in Palestine and Egypt, growing political consciousness in the Sudan, demands for independence, the agreement to hold free elections, and planned British withdrawal by 1956. Mrs. Johnson had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances, was active in the social life of Medani and Messelemya and entertained frequently in her home at Wad Hussein. She was enthusiastic about the Sudan and her life there and greatly interested in the rapidly changing political landscape. First entry 16.4.46; final entry 8.6.53

Many of the accounts and comments are based on secondhand information; discussions with her husband and friends, newspaper/magazine articles, radio broadcasts. She frequently made note of an event, recorded others' opinions, then commented directly, giving her own opinion Mrs. Johnson's handwriting can be difficult to read, with no margins or spaces between entries, but patience will bring success. Intimates and acquaintances are frequently referred to by first names or nicknames. Her husband is 'T'

SAD.751/6/1-20; 1946 Apr 16 - May 3

751/7/1-8

Preparations for journey; complicated paperwork for personal effects taken into the Sudan. Journey to Port Said on the Cunard ship, *Mauretania*, leaving Liverpool Apr 17, arriving Apr 25. Description of fellow passengers, including 4,000 Italian P.O.W.s returning home. Several days in Cairo at the Metropolitan Hotel. Observations re full shops after 6 austere wartime years in Britain. On to Wadi Halfa by boat and there by train to Khartoum. First impressions of Khartoum: dusty, dirty streets, small buildings, sand. Many comments on political changes since World War II, Egyptian politics, British rule in Middle East, need to understand local people and their aspirations

SAD.751/8/1-21

1946 May 20 - Jul 4

Block Hag Abdullah. Discussion of political unrest and upheaval in the Sudan: political parties, leaders, strikes, riots, fighting in the streets. Met Muhammad Efendi, Ahmad Mahjub, District Judge, and party leader, anxious to have the British out. Great uncertainty over future of the Sudan Plantations Syndicate after 1950. Rumours circulated that Tenants Provident Fund, saved from profits in good years to be used in poor years, had been squandered by Gezira managers. Angry encounters. Active social life, centered on Medani. Acquaintances include J.A. and

- SAD.751/9/1-26 Stephanie Gaitskell, Bill Willard, Dis and Margaret Nixon, Bill and Joan Morris. W.J. favoured opening Medani Club to Sudanese and in every way helping to ease transition to Sudanese control. Critical of her countrymen who resist change
1946 Jul 5 - Aug 11
Bill Willard, promising young inspector, resigning from Syndicate. Johnsons deplore loss of able young people who have come to work in the Sudan in troublesome times, but are thwarted at every turn and given no support. Transferred to Wad Hussein. Continuing strikes and unrest. Tenants refuse to plant crops. Discussion with colleagues over means of escape should the Gezira 'blow up'. Larger fears of Arab/Jewish war and communist takeover
- SAD.751/10/1-26 1946 Aug 12 - Sep 22
Farmers end strike and begin planting crops in Wad Hussein. Conversation with J.A. Gaitskell who reported a long meeting with leaders of the Ashigga, or Congress, Party at Barakat, at which he tried to explain plans for the Gezira. W.J. critical of British policy, short sighted, damaging to the Sudan's future. Nile floods, record level. Prices rising. Shortage of basic supplies: flour, sugar. Complaints by others anger W.J. Large clouds of locusts sighted. Noise and other efforts to scare them away from crops
- SAD.751/11/1-26 1946 Sep 22 - Oct 29
Flour and bread shortage. Account of disturbance in the village of Rufa`a on Blue Nile, opposite Hassa Heissa, where a woman had been sentenced to serve four months in prison for circumcision of her young daughter. Mob of more than 1,000 demanded her release, threatened British officials and Sudanese police; ended only when troops sent from Khartoum. Worried about 'agitators' who arouse the people. Fear of Russian and communist influence.
Discussion of great stress of living in the Sudan during such unsettled times. Several British officials suffering from or on verge of breakdowns. Loneliness also a problem. Mekki Abbas resigned. Blow to J.A. Gaitskell. W.J. speculates that Abbas afraid to be too closely identified with the British. Social life continues in Medani - club, cricket, dinners, parties
- SAD.751/12/1-26 1946 Oct 29 - Nov 28
Some conflict between the British who had served in the forces and those who had stayed in the Sudan during the war. Riot in Omdurman, 15 in hospital. Six thousand demonstrated in Khartoum. Gordon College closed. Many British refuse to face reality of sweeping changes in the Sudan. Armistice Day party, list of guests. Met Ward-Price, *Daily Mail* journalist, on way to South Africa to cover Royal Family's tour. Brought T. and W. up to date on agreement being negotiated in London re the Sudan, far too hastily and without consultation

- SAD.751/13/1-26 1946 Nov 28 - Dec 25
 Steven Davidson, inspector, an Australian, dismissed by Boyd. Reason given: 'Didn't fit in'. Later confirmed by Gaitskell. Johnsons worried; new inspectors not supported because they want change. Governor-General Huddleston addressed Syndicate inspectors at Messelemya on Dec 15 on plans being made in London for the Sudan. Trouble ahead: nationalism, tribalism, Russia in the wings. Sweeping changes happening too quickly
- SAD.751/14/1-26 1946 Dec 25 - 1947 Jan 19
 Death of Bill Burton, ex-POW. Johnsons felt colleagues who stayed in Sudan during the war not able to appreciate stresses of war and prison camp experience. Four other inspectors sacked. Shortage of schools for Sudanese children; British failed to found enough schools before the war, now a scramble for places as independence approached. Shortage of pickers for cotton crops; need to bring in more workers, but a bumper crop of millet had kept workers away from the cotton fields. Syndicate very worried. W.J. cannot understand bad treatment of Sudanese servants by their British employers; high price in lost good will. Gaitskell tired; appeared to have lost energy and enthusiasm for the Gezira
- SAD.751/15/1-26 1947 Jan 19 - Feb 14
 Arrangements for leave in Rhodesia and South Africa, via B.O.A.C.; great difficulty getting passage. More dissatisfaction among the younger inspectors; some are victims of social snobbery. Watched cotton being loaded on train: 500lb. bales carried by workers from the western Sudan. Mobile cinema arrived; great excitement among the villagers. Distressing news re increasing tension in Palestine. Two thousand British dependents ordered to leave. Speculation about unrest in the Sudan and possibility of their hasty departure. Ammunition seized at Omdurman. Social activities continue; considerable discussion of various colleagues and spouses
- SAD.751/16/1-26 1947 Feb 14 - Mar 26
 Staff Committee meeting at Barakat created more discontent among inspectors; more resignations; jobs uncertain after 1950. Shortage of labour in cotton fields becoming desperate. Met Harold Wooding, new Managing Director, Sudan Plantations Syndicate. Speculation on changes Wooding will make. Rumour that 'Nobby' Clarke may be sacked; very worrying to the Johnsons; everything unsettled in the Syndicate
- SAD.751/17/1-25; 1947 Mar 26 - May 8
 751/18/1-9 'Nobby' Clarke sacked; reason, 'lacked personality'. Everything in flux in the Gezira and the Sudan generally. More Sudanese appointed to government and Syndicate jobs. Some British fight change, but better to anticipate and influence change. Depart for leave to Rhodesia and South Africa on 9 Apr, via B.O.A.C. Several weeks in Rhodesia, visiting T.J.'s family and exploring possibility of purchasing a farm there. On to Johannesburg and

- Durban. Extensive observations re colour bar: 'Whites only' signs everywhere. Fear that South Africa creating great problems for itself by not learning how to live with a mixed population. Diary breaks off 8.5.47
- SAD.751/19/1-50 1947 Jul 9 - Sep 29
Back at Wad Hussein. Comments re Sudanese servants and a servant class which is changing rapidly as sons go into other work. Young inspectors continue to feel unsettled about their future; more resignations. Railway strike; demands include higher wages, recognition of the union, and no Egyptian personnel brought in. Identified Eunice Ibrahim as an 'agitator'. Worried about vacant tenancies passing only to Sudanis, who do not like to work, but only to boss others. What will happen to the Gezira? What will happen to Gaitskell after 1950? Would he continue to work for the new Syndicate? Discourse on shortcomings of Atlee and Labour Government. Rioting in Hag Abdullah (15.8): 6 killed, 40 injured; clash between Ashigga Party and Umma Party. Funding from Egypt. Anti-British riots (24.8) in Egypt
- SAD.751/20/1-26 1947 Sep 29 - Nov 6
British politics and troubles at home. More discontent among inspectors; many looking for new posts. Continued civil unrest; fear that Sudanese police can no longer be trusted. Daily round: Social life in Medani, friends, entertainment, house guests
- SAD.752/1/1-25 1947 Nov 7 - Dec 31
Reaction to wedding of Princess Elizabeth to Duke of Edinburgh heard on wireless; deeply moved by tremendous crowds, cheering, expressions of national unity after years of wartime austerity and post-war economic problems
Worried that she and T.J. are under attack by 'old-timers' because they champion the cause of the young inspectors and are willing to see changes come to the Syndicate. Christmas preparations; party for 18 on Christmas Day. Attended school sports day at Wad Hussein and presented prizes
- SAD.752/2/1-50 1948 Jan 1 - Apr 11
Meeting of inspectors at Barakat with Gaitskell; heated discussion re salaries and rising cost of living. Lengthy observations on problems of block inspectors, relations with Syndicate, and Gaitskell. Sudden death of Tony Fleck, a young inspector. Contagious diseases, immunization and illness a constant worry. Attended local wedding; description of family, house, entertainment. Railway, irrigation employees and taxi drivers on strike. Strikes continue for several weeks. Worried about coups and purges in Eastern Europe, Russian expansion, possibility of another war
- SAD.752/3/1-49 1948 Apr 12 - 1949 Jan 14
Rioting in Khartoum. Friend Tony G. leaving Syndicate after only one year. Tenants receive money from Tenants Reserve Fund, source of dispute in previous years. Evening with Gaitskell; long talk about unhappiness of young inspectors. Johnsons feel Gaitskell is a theorist and idealist, but not a practical

businessman. Riot in Wad Medani; Greek shop stoned; police slow to arrive; Ashigga and Umma supporters fight. On leave 2 Jun - 29 Aug; no entries.

Ted Sandars new governor Blue Nile Province. Rioting again in Khartoum and Wad Medani. Met newly elected Member of Parliament from their district. Interesting to observe the taking over of government duties by the Sudanese. Tenants resist idea of Sudanese inspectors in the Gezira; want 'only British inspectors'. Social rounds continue through Christmas and New Year holidays

SAD.752/4/1-26

1949 Jan 16 - Mar 24

Gaitskell talk to inspectors; believed Britain would be in Sudan another ten years. Johnson disagreed, pointing to social unrest, party conflict, expansion of communism. Worried that too many very left 'fellow travelers' are in the Education Department.

Trouble with cotton crop: bolls and leaves dropping off; experts unable to find reason. British trade union officials organising in the Sudan. Johnsons elected Secretary and Lady Member of Messelemiya Club. General strike

SAD.752/5/1-26

1949 Mar 24 - Jun 24

Met Hugh Bonstad at Medani, Johnson's c.o. in Abyssinian campaign. New deputy governor C.W. Beer announced twenty new inspectors coming in 1949; some Sudanese inspectors by 1950. Met Padre Logan. Met Sir James and Lady Robertson, Civil Secretary and wife, on trip to Khartoum. Gaitskell expressed uncertainty about future of the Syndicate; Johnsons fear chaos if British depart too quickly; Gaitskell under pressure re his future as Managing Director. Football teams organized throughout Gezira to encourage British/Sudanese cooperation

SAD.752/6/1-24

1949 Jun 25 - Oct 4

Plans for 'devolution' in the Gezira. Tension and quarrelling among engineering staff. Social life continues at lively pace. Announcement on Omdurman Radio and in press of reorganization plan for the Gezira: three or four boards whose chairmen become Executive Council, each board to be half Sudanese; Managing Director will run the scheme; five Sudanese inspectors immediately, followed by fifteen more as replacements for British inspectors; no further intake of British field staff. Pat and Joan Boyd retire after twenty-seven years. Home leave in October

SAD.752/7/1-26

1950 Jan 9 - Mar 31

Back from leave. Many staff changes and speculations re future of new inspectors. Meeting with Gaitskell who announced that Sudanese inspectors will be treated as equals, may join clubs and enjoy all amenities. Cannot predict how long British inspectors will continue in the Gezira. Uncertainty damages morale of inspectors. Bishop of the Sudan, the Right Rev. Gelsthorpe, and wife visit. Shortage of doctors in the Sudan. Gezira workers on strike for three days. T.J. to be assigned one of the first Sudanese inspectors, whom he will train. A new era

- SAD.752/8/1-26 1950 Apr 1 - Jun 30
Some inspectors leaving, uncomfortable with Sudanisation of the Syndicate. Strike of dressers at Medani hospital. Quality of Sudanese applicants disappointing. Directive to Medani Club from Governor General stating Sudanese inspectors would be allowed to join. Uproar. Johnsons accept changes. Bill Beer and Ibrahim Badri, new Sudanese Director, to lunch. Sudanese inspectors arrive, creating great discontent among British inspectors. Rumour that Gaitskell will leave in 1951 though only recently made Managing Director. Sudan Plantations Syndicate nationalised: new name, Sudan Gezira Board. Party at Johnsons to mark transition not a great success. Many British workers have given their best to the Syndicate for forty years; some feel betrayed
- SAD.752/9/1-33 1950 Jul 1 - Nov 4
Party in Medani; farewell to Sudan Plantations Syndicate and welcome to the Sudan Gezira Board; speeches by Governor Sandars and Gaitskell. First Sudanese inspector assigned to their block: Muhammad Husni Ahmad, bachelor, 37. C.W. Beer worried about instability in the Gezira; tenants need to feel confident about leadership. Gaitskell to address tenants' representatives to explain loss of £50,000 from Tenants Reserve Fund because of devaluation of the pound. Plague of caterpillars. Fenner Brockway, MP, visited Medani; brought to Sudan at Mahdi's expense; believed to have communist sympathies
- SAD.752/10/1-26 1950 Nov 4 - 1951 Mar 10
Visit to Khartoum. Met Jack Mavrogordato and John Rintoul. Mavrogordato had drafted Gezira Board Bill which stated inspectors were not 'Government servants'. Sudanese Legislative assembly voted 38-37 in favour of independence, on motion of Umma Party. Ashigga Party and South not in favour; Egypt must also agree. Governor Sandars leaving; W. Luce replacement. Meeting of staff committee with Gezira Board. Inspectors frustrated; lack of authority over tenants; sometimes overruled by Board. T.J.'s Sudanese inspector, Husni, disillusioned with job. Too many Sudanese applicants not really interested in Gezira scheme. Staff meeting, Messelemya. Heated discussion on Sudanisation. Staff Committee finished; Staff Association new group. Johnson criticised for speaking out.
- SAD.752/11/1-26 1951 Jul 19 - Oct 12
Back from home leave. Husni transferred in Johnson's absence. Visit from `umdah of Medani, recently returned from trip to England. Enthusiastic about Britain, especially the hard-working people; not idle as in the Sudan. Trouble with Ahmad, second Sudanese inspector; refuses to work with Johnson. General strike; inspectors have to regulate canals. Lunch and political discussions with Mekki Abbas in Medani. Reassignments for block inspectors. Egypt abrogates treaty of 1936 and declares Farouk King of Egypt and the Sudan. Rumour that Gaitskell to leave in April

- SAD.752/12/1-26 1951 Oct 13 - 1952 Jan 29
 Discussion of turmoil in Egypt, Suez Canal, future of the Sudan and the British Empire. Official abrogation of 1936 treaty and 1899 Condominium agreement by Egyptian Parliament and King Farouk, who declared himself King of Egypt and the Sudan. Gordon College closed because of unrest; rioting at Hantoub Secondary School. Gaitskell announces retirement in 1952. George Raby to succeed Gaitskell as Managing Director; Gaitskell to stay on as advisor. Fifteen Sudanese inspectors appointed. General strike; Medani hospital workers on strike; riots in Medani
- SAD.752/13/1-24 1952 Jan 30 - Apr 29
 Rioting in Cairo; Shepherd's Hotel burnt to ground. Memorial service for King George VI. Sudanese inspectors increased to forty-five. Mekki Abbas dismayed at 'colour bar' he experienced on a trip to Nairobi. Growing tension between British and Sudanese inspectors; Sudanese criticized for not taking enough responsibility. Servants demand higher wages. T.J. and others discuss militancy among servants at meeting in Barakat. New Managing Director Raby meets with senior staff, giving assignments. Dines with Johnsons; makes favourable impression. Secondhand account of visit of two American State Department officials to investigate Sudanese attitudes toward union with Egypt under Farouk. Home leave
- SAD.752/14/1-26 1952 Jul 16 - Oct 7
 Return from leave. Decided 1952/53 will be their last year in the Gezira. May have difficulty getting possessions home because of strikes, floods, political tension. King Farouk abdicates, leaves Egypt. Trouble with servants; suffragi sacked after 6 years. Sowing cotton for last time. Mekki Abbas crashed car; injured. Irrigation workers strike; no water for cotton. M.H. Mackenzie commits suicide. Difficult to get supplies; shops empty; more strikes. Mau-Mau trouble in Kenya. Continued problems with Sudanese inspectors. Delay in appointing new bishop for Sudanese church
- SAD.752/15/1-34 1952 Oct 7 - 1953 Mar 20
 Conversation with Mekki Abbas re problems in the Gezira with tenants and labourers; difficulties of incorporating the Southern Sudan into the nation. DDT spraying of crops from airplanes begun. Sudanese and Najib of Egypt reach agreement; elections set for Sudan. Johnson informs supervisor Peter Power that he will not return after next home leave. Inspectors unhappy with Raby. Trip to Khartoum; more political confusion there. Johnsons feel senior British officials are spineless and give in too easily to demands. Receive permission to leave 6 weeks early. Unrest among local tenants; fear 'communist agitators' are at work. Sudanese legislators side with Najib; want British out sooner rather than later. Discussion of engagement of Mekki Abbas to Dr. Elena Davidson and the furore following: Egypt and Britain sign agreement re the Sudan: commission to supervise elections;

independence in three years. British women stoned. Mekki Abbas and Dr. Davidson married. Raby fires MacManus and Elliott, two block inspectors. Railway strike for five days

SAD.752/16/1-22 1953 Mar 19 - Jun 8

More unrest among British staff; feeling of malaise grips the Gezira. Sudanese want British gone; British suspicious of one another. Lunch with Mekki Abbas and wife; discussion of problems re cross-cultural marriages. Farewell party at Wad Hussein; more than 200 present. Johnson served twenty-three years in the Sudan. Farewell to servants; gifts and bonuses for them. Observations on vast changes in the Sudan since Johnsons arrived as newly married couple in 1946. Departed from Port Sudan on S.S. *Rhodesia Castle* in spite of trade union attempts to interfere with sailing. Relieved to be leaving the Sudan. Final entry 8.6.53.

4. Newspaper Cuttings

SAD.752/18/1-39 1946 Jul 12 - 1960 Mar 9

Newspaper cuttings, chiefly from the *Sudan Star*, on progress toward independence for the Sudan, development of political parties, civil unrest, fear of communism and change of Sudan Plantations Syndicate to Sudan Gezira Board

5. Miscellanea

SAD.752/19/1-12 1946 Oct 24 - 1952 Feb 15 and undated
Restaurant menus, tour maps (South Africa), memorial service booklet
(King George VI), food parcels price list, and invitations

6. Photographic Material

- SAD.752/20/1 1947 Mar
Three British men in shorts, informal
- SAD.752/20/2 1948 Jan 22
Tony Fleck, died Medani Hospital
- SAD.752/20/3 1948
Merebea (canal), used as Christmas card, "Greetings from Sudan"
- SAD.752/20/4 1948 Jun
Two-engine passenger plane in air: "type of plane we travelled home in to England from Wadi Halfa"
- SAD.752/20/5-6 1953 Jun 24
S.S. *Rhodesia Castle*: "ship Thewlis and I travelled home from the Sudan on, on final leave"

7. Printed Material

Separated printed material now in Durham University Library

Printed material deposited with collection; now integrated into the library's printed collections and catalogued on the Open Public Access Catalogue

