



Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the MacDermott Lecture Series at Queen's University Belfast

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This year, 2022, marks the 50th Anniversary of the first MacDermott Lecture, an annual showcase lecture delivered at the School of Law, Queen's University Belfast. The MacDermott Lecture is delivered in honour of the late Lord MacDermott, who was Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland from 1951–1971. Lord Carswell, a biographer, who came to the High Court of Northern Ireland after Lord MacDermott's death, describes his lordship in the following way:

When he accepted the post of lord chief justice of Northern Ireland in 1951, returning to his social and intellectual roots, he became for twenty years the dominant legal figure, the conspicuous leader of the judiciary with unchallengeable authority over every court in which he sat. Those who appeared regularly before him remember vividly how he tested and examined each argument, sometimes to the discomfiture of eminent counsel who had just put it forward.

The standards that he set for himself were Olympian, and he attained them by sustained thought and effort, but he could not always see why lesser mortals fell short of them. He was at times impatient in small matters, which gave him the reputation of formidability, but when it came to more important affairs he would rise above this and look towards a larger horizon. Although his tolerance of any whose efforts he thought insufficient was limited, he was always generous to those who strove to reach the levels that he regarded as proper. When he sat as an additional judge after his retirement in 1971, he displayed a deep understanding of people and great humanity in his handling of cases concerning families and the wardship of children.¹

Lord MacDermott's preeminent position in the jurisdiction and legal history of Northern Ireland is without question. What may be less well known is that his lordship was also deeply rooted in Queen's University Belfast, the institution where this journal sits. The university was not only his lordship's *alma mater*, but also a place where he worked as a

1 Robert Carswell, 'MacDermott, John Clarke' (Dictionary of Irish Biography October 2009).

Lecturer in Jurisprudence between 1931 and 1935, and later as Pro-Chancellor from 1951–1969.

When the first lecture in the series was delivered, it was by Lord MacDermott himself in 1972, at the then Faculty of Law. The *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly* has occasionally published contributions to the MacDermott Lecture series. In this supplementary special issue we bring together, for the first time, lectures published in these pages from 1998–2022. Contributions are, fittingly for such a prestigious lecture series, by world-leading and renowned commentators. With just two exceptions, Twining, Professor of Law at University College London, whose lecture was in 1998, and Beloff, King’s Counsel, whose lecture was in 2014 (although at the time of speaking – and writing in these pages – he was, of course, Queen’s Counsel), most contributors serve(d) as judges (or equivalent). These contributions comprise (in (chronological) order of publication): Goldstone, writing in 1999 as Justice of the Constitutional Court of South Africa; Sedley, writing in 2001 as **Lord Justice of Appeal**, Judge *ad hoc* of the **European Court of Human Rights** and a Member *ad hoc* of the **Judicial Committee of the Privy Council**; McLachlin, writing in 2003 as Chief Justice of Canada; Higgins, writing in 2008 as President of the International Court of Justice; Hogan, writing in 2021 as Advocate General of the European Court of Justice (and who is now Judge of the Supreme Court of Ireland); and O’Leary, writing in 2022 as Vice-President of the European Court of Human Rights (and who is now President of that court).

Beyond the following, we largely let the contributions speak for themselves. Indeed, the range of contributions themselves clearly underscores the MacDermott Lecture series as an immensely valuable and much-needed vehicle for the exchange of often fresh and provocative thinking between leading lights of the judiciary, bar and academy, and a deeply engaged audience at Queen’s University Belfast. That audience includes legal academicians, members of the judiciary of Northern Ireland, and representatives from the legal professions and across wider society. We hope that you, the reader, find the individual lectures interesting and original contributions that push forward discourse around the law, as well as providing engaging and enjoyable reads.

Most importantly, we hope you share our view that the contributions are a fitting testament to the life and work of Lord MacDermott, a towering figure in the legal history of Northern Ireland, the island of Ireland, and indeed these islands. We are proud to take the opportunity presented by the 50th Anniversary of the Lecture Series to honour Lord MacDermott’s contribution and legacy in the pages of this journal.