

Thomas Gillman Moorhead

Born: 1878
President: 1930-1933, 1934
Died: 1960

Moorhead, Thomas Gillman (1878–1960), physician, was born 15 October 1878 in Benburb, Co. Tyrone, second son of Dr William Robert Moorhead and Amelia Davis Moorhead (née Gillman) of Oakmount, Co. Cork, and grew up in Bray, Co. Wicklow, where his father practised. From Aravon School Thomas entered TCD, and after winning many prizes took a medical degree in 1901. He proceeded MD in the following year, became MRCPI (1905), and was elected FRCPI (1906). Meanwhile he had visited Vienna as a graduate student. His elder brother James Herbert and a younger brother, William St Leger Moorhead, also entered the medical profession, practising in Birmingham and London respectively.

Moorhead married (1907) Mai Beatrice, daughter of Robert Erskine Quinn, and they lived in 23 Upper Fitzwilliam St., Dublin. A younger colleague recalled ‘the stacks of bicycles ranged against the railings of his house, set there by Trinity students who flocked to his tutorial classes in every subject from biology and physiology to materia medica and internal medicine’ (Doolin, 438). His classes at the Royal City of Dublin Hospital and Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital, where he was visiting physician, were well attended. Co-editor of the Dublin Journal of Medical Science from July 1907, he published several articles from his own pen; these dealt with a variety of subjects, which included the teaching of anatomy and accounts of recent advances in medicine. A report to the Academy of Medicine's section of pathology of a case of bacterial endocarditis was made on Moorhead's behalf in 1913 by Adrian Stokes (qv), then a trainee pathologist. The autopsy showed ulcerative endocarditis of the heart valves, from which Stokes obtained what he called a pure culture of ‘a cross between streptococcus and pneumococcus’ (Stokes, 216).

Dun's Hospital, in common with other Dublin voluntary hospitals, opened its wards to war casualties in 1914. This opportunity to be of service satisfied Moorhead, until in the summer of 1915 it was clear that the armies in Gallipoli were beset by disease. He joined the RAMC with the rank of temporary captain, and reached Alexandria, the primary medical base for Gallipoli, on 31 December 1915. The evacuation of troops from the Gallipoli peninsula had by then been almost completed.

At Alexandria there were four large hospitals for European and Anzac troops, two for Indian troops, and a local Egyptian government hospital. Moorhead was posted to the largest general hospital, which accommodated 2,500 patients, and had a staff of forty medical officers who lived in tents. The officer in command, Col. Healy, was a Dubliner; the matron, an Irish nurse, had



trained at St Vincent's Hospital. Moorhead was soon faced with an epidemic of 'camp jaundice'. This ill-understood condition resembled what at home was called catarrhal jaundice, actually hepatitis A. Jaundice diminished after a week; most patients left hospital within a month of admission.

While on leave in July 1916, Moorhead was elected to the chair of medicine in the RCSI. He held the post for one year only, but was appointed regius professor of physic at TCD in 1925. He made an extensive tour of the United States and Canada in 1925, visiting medical and research clinics. He crossed to England in July 1926 to attend a meeting of the BMA. Stepping down from the sleeper at Euston station, he slipped and fell; helped to his feet, he was conscious, but totally blind. A bilateral retinal detachment had occurred when his head struck the platform. Predictably, Moorhead did not allow this appalling accident to end his career. With the help of a colleague to elicit certain clinical signs, he still undertook consultations. He devoted more time to teaching, and was in demand as chairman of many committees. Socially, he remained gregarious. He was a regular theatre-goer. A 'panel' of friends took it in turn to accompany him on Saturday afternoon country walks. His avocations included bridge (which, after becoming blind, he played with braille playing-cards), fishing, and mountain-climbing, of which he gained some experience in Switzerland and France. He was interested, too, in the history of medicine, and published 'A sketch of the history of medicine in Ireland' and A short history of Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital (1942). A keen, but allegedly a somewhat uninspired dean of the school of physic, Moorhead was often in conflict with J. W. Bigger, the professor of bacteriology, who represented a group striving to make a place for research in a pedestrian curriculum designed to turn out competent general practitioners.

Moorhead was to be the recipient of many honours – honorary FTCD; LLD h.c. (NUI and QUB); president of the BMA and IMA. He died 3 August 1960 and was buried in Dean's Grange cemetery.

Mai Moorhead died in 1935. Three years later 'T. G.' married Sheila Gwynn at Brompton Oratory. The bride was given away by her father, the author Stephen Gwynn. There were no children from either marriage.

J B Lyons

A. Stokes, 'Malignant endocarditis', *Dublin Jn. Med. Sc.* cxxxvi (1913), 136; T. G. Moorhead, 'Some experiences in a base hospital in Egypt', *Dublin Jn. Med. Sc.*, clvii (1916), 413–14; William Doolin, 'In memoriam', *Ir. Jn. Med. Sc.* (1960); 438; J. B. Lyons, *Brief lives of Irish doctors* (1978); R. B. McDowell and D. A. Webb, *Trinity College Dublin 1592–1952: an academic history* (1982), 445; J. B. Lyons, *A pride of professors* (1999), 208–21



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