

Sir George Frederick Duffey

Born: 1843
President: 1896-1898
Died: 1903

Sir George Frederick Duffey was an important figure in the Irish medical world at the end of the nineteenth century. He contributed to Ireland's medical life on many fronts as a physician, clinician and educator, as a contributor to scientific medical literature, and as an energetic player in the medical politics of the day.

Born in 1843, he was educated in Kingstown School and Trinity College, graduating in medicine and surgery in 1864. He entered the Army Medical Department the same year, taking first place in the entrance examination to the Army Medical School at Netley. From 1866 to 1871 he was stationed in Malta with his unit, the 1st Battalion the 24th Regiment. In 1871, he retired from the Army and returned to Dublin taking his MD degree later that year. Also in that year, he became a Licentiate of the College of Physicians and then in 1873 became a Fellow.

In 1873, he founded *The Irish Hospital Gazette*, a medical journal which he edited and then in 1875 it merged with *The Dublin Journal of Medical Science*. Of interest is that he published, in 1872, a paper on fevers that he had encountered in Malta entitled 'Rheumatic Orchitis as a sequel to Fever'. While he described these clinical features of fevers occurring in Malta he formed the view that all were variants of what was then termed 'enteric fever'. It was to be a later British Army Medical Officer, David Bruce, who was to identify brucellosis as the cause of relapsing fever in Malta, describing its causative organism and eventually establishing the link between it and goats.

In 1876 Duffey was appointed Physician to Mercer's Hospital, and Lecturer in Materia Medica in the Carmichael College of Medicine and Surgery. In 1879 he edited, and greatly contributed to, the writing of *Handsel Griffith's Materia Medica and Pharmacy*, adding to his reputation as a leading authority in the field. When, in 1889, the Carmichael College was amalgamated with the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland Duffey became Professor of Materia Medica in the resulting Medical School, a position he held until his death. In 1882, he resigned his position in Mercer's to take up an appointment as Physician to Baggot Street Hospital.

In 1877 Duffey was one of the leading lights in the founding of a Dublin branch of the British Medical Association (BMA), and is credited with obtaining the support of the College of Physicians for the project. In 1887, the BMA convened in Dublin with George Duffey as Secretary to the meeting; in 1896, he was President of the Section of Medicine at its meeting in Carlisle, having previously been Secretary to this Section at its meetings in Cork (1879) and Belfast (1894).



He was an Examiner for both the Queen's University and Trinity, and was several times chosen by the General Medical Council as its Inspector of Examinations, also by the Privy Council as Visitor of the examinations of the Pharmaceutical Society. In 1896, he was elected President of the College of Physicians and, in Queen Victoria's Jubilee Year of 1897, he received a knighthood.

Throughout his career, Duffey worked for the improvement of his profession, and for the betterment of people's lives. He was involved in the reform and rationalisation of Dublin's several medical schools that established today's Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland Medical School; he energetically worked to build a modern professional association for Irish doctors; he wrote textbooks, and he published articles on a wide range of medical topics. One campaign he was interested in has a certain resonance with one of the College's concerns today; in 1881, the question of the extension, or otherwise, of the Sunday Closing Act was due to be considered by Parliament. The Act had entered force in October 1878 and, in default of being extended, was due to lapse in December 1882. Furthermore, the provisions of the Act were less restrictive in the cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Belfast than in the rest of Ireland. The Irish Association for the Prevention of Intemperance submitted a petition to Parliament in December 1881 expressing satisfaction that it was generally expected that the Act would be renewed and made permanent, but requesting that it also be extended fully to the exempted cities. The Association submitted 1,769 signatures of clergy, magistrates, doctors and employers resident in the cities supporting its petition. George Frederick Duffey was among the signatories.

In April 1903, at a time when he must have appeared to have been approaching the peak of a truly successful career, he suffered the onset of 'certain symptoms pointing to a central nervous lesion'.¹ His condition steadily deteriorated, and on 13 October 1903, he passed away.

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¹ Obituary, British Medical Journal, 24 October 1903

