

Robert Elsworth Steen

Born: 1902
President: 1960-1963
Died: 1981

Robert 'Bobby' Steen was a renowned paediatrician, sportsman and musician. He was the son of David and Elizabeth Steen and was born in Dublin in 1902. He received his school education at St Andrew's College, Ballsbridge, studied medicine at the University of Dublin, Trinity College and graduated in 1923.

After several hospital appointments as an Assistant Physician, he was appointed Physician to the Meath Hospital. As his great interest was paediatrics, then in its infancy in Dublin, he astounded many by leaving his post and going to the Hospital for Sick Children in Great Ormond Street, London for postgraduate training. There he worked with Sir Robert Hutchinson who had an interest in cardiology.

He returned to Dublin and applied for a consultant post at the National Children's Hospital in 1932 for which there was stiff competition from Robert Collis and Monica Lea Wilson. The Governors found a compromise by appointing all three of them on the same day. He was also appointed to the neonatal department of the Rotunda Hospital and to the Meath Hospital. He later resigned from the Meath Hospital in 1948 and confined himself to paediatrics. In 1960, he became the first Professor of Paediatrics in the University of Dublin, Trinity College.

Steen performed the first cardiac catheterisation and angiocardiogram in Ireland in 1950 along with Sholto Douglas and Eric Doyle. He was also a pioneer, along with Dorothy Price, in BCG inoculation for protection against tubercular disease.

Many honours and awards were bestowed on him. He was elected President of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland from 1960 to 1963.

He was a founder member of the Irish Paediatric Association in 1953, the objectives of which were defined as the promotion of paediatrics in Ireland; the study of current literature; and the bringing together of all those interested with the object of inauguration of discussions of subjects of immediate interest.

He was elected President of the British Paediatrics Association in 1968, the only paediatrician from the Republic of Ireland at the time to be so honoured. He hosted their annual meeting in Dublin. In addition, he was President of the Irish Cardiac Society and of the Paediatric Section of the Royal Academy of Medicine of Ireland.



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His publications include: *Infants in Health and Sickness* (1937), and numerous contributions to medical journals such as 'Recent Advances in the Diagnosis and Treatment of Congenital Heart Disease' in 1959.

He has been described by his colleagues as a man with an effervescent personality who allied the old-fashioned qualities of courtesy, kindness and generosity to a personal charm which made him the most delightful and enriching of companions.

He was a keen bridge player. He also rowed for Trinity in his undergraduate days and became President of the University Boat Club. He rode to hounds regularly and in later years croquet became a great interest. He also had a love of music and was a member of the choir of his local Tullow Church in Carrickmines.

In 1939 he married Elizabeth Cochrane, daughter of Sir Ernest Cecil Cochrane and they had two children, Michael and Sally. He retired from medical practice in 1971 and he died in his 79th year in December 1981. He was buried at St Patrick's cemetery in Enniskerry, County Wicklow. At a memorial service for him held in Christ Church Cathedral a beautiful rendering was given of a hymn for which he had composed both the words and music.

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