

## Ralph Howard

**Born:** 1638

**President:** 1674-1675, 1695-1696, 1701-1702, 1707-1708

**Died:** 1710

Ralph Howard was born in 1638, the only son of John Howard and his wife, Dorothea. After the death of her husband in England, in 1643, Dorothea returned to Ireland with her son and remarried. She and Ralph settled in Shelton, near Arklow, County Wicklow. In addition to living at Shelton, Ralph Howard also lived in Great Ship Street in Dublin, not far from where the Chester Beatty Library is now located. During the reign of King James II, the family moved to England, but returned to Ireland after the victory of King William III. Howard married Catherine Sotheby in 1668 and they had three sons and three daughters. One of their sons became Bishop of Killala and Achonry, followed by Elphin, and another was a distinguished painter.

Ralph Howard entered Trinity College and graduated with an MD in 1667. In the same year, he was named in the Royal Charter of 1667 as one of the fourteen founding Fellows of the College of Physicians. He was elected President of the College, for the first time, in 1674. In the same year, he was appointed Professor of Physic (Medicine) in Trinity College. He remained Professor for 36 years until his death in 1710. He was subsequently re-elected President of the College of Physicians in 1695, 1701 and 1707.

Ralph Howard is probably most famous for his falling out with Sir Patrick Dun (qv) over a disputed appointment in 1693. They drew swords on York Street and, during the ensuing scuffle, Dun received a small wound. However, Howard helped ensure he was adequately cared for and there were no long-term health consequences for either man. This public event brought censure from the College and the church hierarchy. The event was the subject of much amusement amongst members of the public, and was the subject of a satirical verse attributed, possibly incorrectly, to Jonathan Swift.

As for motive most men doubt,  
Why these two doctors did fall out.  
Some say it was ambition:  
And that one did undermine  
The other's credit, with design  
To be the State's Physician.<sup>1</sup>

JFHH

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in John Widdess, *History of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland 1654-1963* (Edinburgh: E & S Livingstone, 1963), 42.

