

## Samuel Litton

**Born:** 1781  
**President:** 1823-1824, 1829-1831  
**Died:** 1847

Samuel Litton was a native of Lancaster. At the age of 14 he was recognised for his academic potential and pious deportment by Dr Magee, then a junior Fellow of Trinity College and later Archbishop of Dublin. Magee encouraged Samuel's father to send Samuel to Dublin to pursue his studies at Trinity College. He was not mistaken in his choice of the young Samuel, for he gained many prizes and certificates of excellence, as well as a scholarship and gold medal. In one regard Samuel did disappoint Magee. He had hoped that Samuel would take holy orders in the Church of England; however, as time went on Samuel was drawn towards a dissenting sect, the Walkerites. While Magee was unhappy with this decision, he nevertheless continued to support him with his friendship and encouragement.

Litton was awarded a BA in 1800 and an MA in 1804, both from Trinity College. At this point he decided to embark on medical training in Edinburgh University. Following the award of his MD in 1806 he returned to Dublin where he continued his studies taking a special interest in botany. When the Chair of Botany at Trinity became vacant, he was unsuccessful in his application. In 1810, he was appointed to a Chair of Chemistry and Natural Philosophy in the newly established Royal Institution on Sackville Street, modelled on the London Royal Institution. There he delivered several popular courses of lectures before large audiences.

In April 1811, he was awarded the Licentiate of the College of Physicians, and the same year was appointed Physician to the House of Industry Hospital. In 1814, he became a Fellow of the College, and was elected President of the College for the first time in 1823. Litton was involved with many other learned societies; he was Librarian and later Professor of Botany at the Royal Dublin Society. Clearly a bibliophile he also held the position of Librarian to the College from 1833 to 1840. On the establishment of the School of Medicine of Apothecaries Hall in 1837 he became their Professor of Botany, and he was a Member of the Council and Vice President of the Royal Irish Academy. Litton's enduring interest was botany and he did much to popularise the Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin.

In his early life, while an undergraduate at Trinity, there is an interesting event involving the working of divine providence in his life. Following a vacation at home, he had to return to Dublin for an exam and was booked on the packet ship *The Viceroy*. To his consternation, when he arrived at the pier on the Mersey, the ship was already sailing down the river; Litton had mistaken the sailing time. He was fortunately able to take the next packet ship arriving just as the



# LIVES OF THE PRESIDENTS

Examination Hall was being closed, and he was duly successful in the receipt of a gold medal. The Viceroy was lost at sea and never reached Dublin.

Samuel Litton never married and in his later years moved away from his involvement with the dissenting church. He died of angina pectoris in 1847 and was interred in St Thomas's Churchyard in Dublin.

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