

## Sir Henry Marsh

**Born:** 1790  
**President:** 1841-1843, 1845-1847, 1857-1859  
**Died:** 1860

Henry Marsh was one of the leading Irish physicians of the nineteenth century and was elected President of the College of Physicians for three biennial terms in 1841, 1845 and 1857. He was born into a distinguished clerical family at Loughrea, County Galway in 1790. He was the son of the Reverend Robert Marsh, rector of Killinane, County Galway, and of Sophia Marsh (née Wolseley) a granddaughter of Sir Thomas Molyneux (qv) the first Irish medical baronet.

Marsh studied at Trinity College Dublin and graduated with a BA in 1812. Whilst at Trinity he became a member of the Church of God, a sect founded by John Walker which was critical of the government of the established church and, to the disappointment of his father, he rejected the ministry and decided to become a surgeon. He was apprenticed to his cousin, Sir Philip Crampton, at the Meath Hospital. While dissecting in the anatomy room he cut his right index finger which had to be amputated to prevent gangrene and following this he pursued a career in medicine; he graduated from Trinity College and became a Licentiate of the College of Physicians. He later studied at La Charité in Paris.

During his early years as a physician, Marsh was associated with Charles Johnson, Master of the Rotunda Hospital and together with Sir Philip Crampton they founded a hospital for sick children in 1821 at the rear of his own residence in Molesworth Street. It later moved to Pitt Street and subsequently became the National Children's Hospital. It was the first children's hospital in Great Britain and Ireland. One of the earliest trainees, Charles West, later went on to found the Hospital for Sick Children in Great Ormond Street in London in 1852. The objectives laid down for the hospital in 1821 were to: 1) Provide free medical and surgical aid to sick children; 2) Educate students on infantile diseases which clinical instruction alone can impart and 3) Educate mothers and nurses regarding the proper management of children both in health and disease. They clearly recognised that child health required dedicated trained staff, medical education and separate facilities for children. Their ambitions could scarcely be improved upon today 195 years later.

Marsh was also a founder, and highly esteemed lecturer, at the Park Street School of Medicine. His high reputation as a clinical teacher ensured his appointment as Professor of Physic at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. Due to very busy clinical commitments he resigned from the chair in 1832, following which he was appointed to the City of Dublin, St Vincent's, the Rotunda and later Dr Steevens' Hospital. He was a founding President of the Pathological Society of Dublin in 1838.



HERITAGE  
CENTRE

ROYAL COLLEGE OF  
PHYSICIANS OF IRELAND

Many honours were conferred on Marsh. He was appointed Physician to Queen Victoria in 1837, and was created a baronet two years later. He was conferred with an MD in 1840 from Trinity, elected Honorary Fellow (1831) and subsequently Fellow (1839) of the College of Physicians. Elected President of the College on three occasions, he contributed £200 towards the cost of the College's building on Kildare Street.

Marsh conducted important research at a time when diagnostics and medications were not available and published many papers in the *Dublin Hospital Reports* and in the *Dublin Journal of Medical Science*, including papers on the clinical features of disorders such as diabetes, dropsy, jaundice, thyrotoxicosis, laryngitis and various fevers. Contemporary writers gave laudable accounts of his qualities as a great physician and attributed his eminence to unyielding determination, invincible energy, profound knowledge and wide experience. As a clinician, he was commended for his accuracy in observation and diagnosis, gentleness, cheerfulness and a sympathetic manner.

A popular member of Dublin society, Marsh was a founding member, in 1856, of the revived Medico-Philosophical Society, a peripatetic dining club. According to Lombe Atthill (qv), 'he was fond of show; he kept handsome horses, had the best whip in Ireland as coachman, and sped through the streets at a great pace'.<sup>1</sup> He owned Kirrakil Castle in County Kilkenny, and houses in Knockmaroon, County Dublin, and on Merrion Square, Dublin.

Marsh twice married widows: first in 1820 Anne Arthur Crowe (d. 1846); they had a son, Henry Marsh (1821–68), who became colonel of the 3rd Regiment of Dragoon Guards. After the death of his first wife, he married in 1856 Mary Henrietta Kemmis Jelly; they had no children.

Marsh died on 1 December 1860 and was buried in Mount Jerome Cemetery. Following his death, a subscription of £800 was raised by his colleagues and friends to commission a memorial statue. Chairman of the subscription committee, Sir Dominic Corrigan (qv), referred to their work as a labour of love, that arose out of a deep feeling of regard for the loss they, in common with the public, had sustained. John Foley, the most famous Irish sculptor of the time, was commissioned and the marble statue was unveiled in the College's home on 6 Kildare Street, in November 1866, with his right index finger restored.

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<sup>1</sup> Lombe Atthill, *Recollections of an Irish doctor* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1911), 199.

