

John Mollan

Born: 1790
President: 1855-1857
Died: 1877

John Mollan was born in 1790 in Newry, County Down. He studied medicine in Edinburgh, where he graduated in 1814. Mollan came to Dublin in 1816 and worked as a physician in the General Dispensary on Fleet Street until 1827, providing medical services to the poor. He was admitted a Licentiate of the College in 1819 and elected a Fellow in 1839.

In 1822, Mollan, along with other prominent medical figures of the day, was sent by the Government Board of Health to assist with the fever epidemic in Galway. In 1834, he was appointed Physician to the Whitworth Fever Hospital and two years later was appointed Physician Extraordinary at the Richmond Asylum in Grangegorman, Dublin owing to his medical experience across various Dublin hospitals and his particular interest in the insane. He had previously deputised for Alexander Jackson at the asylum.

Two years after his appointment to the Richmond, Mollan presented a detailed 'statistical report on the Richmond Lunatic Asylum' at the Evening Meeting of the College on 26 March 1838. Throughout his overview, Mollan emphasised that the Richmond was intended not just for the safe-keeping of the insane, but for their rational treatment and cure. The Richmond, he said, was the first institution in Ireland 'specifically constructed' for the classification of the insane, with a view to the provision of better and more appropriate care.¹

Mollan was a strong proponent of laborious employment and, in 1838, sixty men were involved in cultivating the Richmond asylum grounds; fifteen were employed in various trades (e.g. tailors, shoemakers, carpenters); and others were engaged in activities such as making mats and domestic work. Female patients were occupied with spinning, knitting, needle-work, washing and other domestic tasks. This emphasis on occupation was duly noted by the inspectors who visited the asylum and recommended strengthening the programme.

As Physician Extraordinary, Mollan was not paid for his zealous work at the Richmond, a fact pointed out in no uncertain terms by Francis White, Inspector of Lunatic Asylums, in his 1846 report. Mollan, however, was never awarded a salary for his dedicated work as Physician Extraordinary, although he was appointed Senior Physician at the Richmond in 1848 following the death of Jackson.

¹ John Mollan, "Statistical report on the Richmond Lunatic Asylum", *Dublin Journal of Medical Science* 13 3 (July 1838): 367-84.



LIVES OF THE PRESIDENTS

Mollan was especially interested in the wellbeing and education of asylum patients and was instrumental in establishing a patients' library in 1844. Books approved by the Board included travel volumes about the Polar seas, Arabia and Africa, and biographies of Napoleon, Nelson and Newton. Mollan was also, from 1852, deeply involved in efforts to establish a school in the asylum. This initiative was later taken up with enthusiasm by Joseph Lalor, Resident Medical Superintendent from 1857 to 1886, who considered education and training to be the most valuable treatments in asylums. The Richmond school duly taught a broad range of subjects including reading, writing, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, geography, drawing, needlework and various arts and crafts. The initiative attracted attention internationally and added greatly to the reputation of the establishment.

Outside of the asylum, Mollan served as Treasurer of the College from 1847 to 1855, and President from 1855 to 1857. He took an active part in the formation of the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund, aimed at assisting members of the medical profession when in distress, and supporting their widows and orphans when necessary. Mollan was also known more broadly for his many other charitable works and for holding clear political views, but also being highly tolerant of the political views of others. Mollan died in 1877.

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