

Michael Francis Cox

Born: 1852
President: 1922-1924
Died: 1926

Michael Francis Cox was one of Dublin's leading medical practitioners. He was born at Kilmore, County Roscommon in 1852. His early schooling was at St. Mel's College, Longford and he went on to attend the Catholic University of Ireland (now University College Dublin) where he served as auditor of the Literary & Historical Society and graduated with a BA in 1875. He then enrolled at London University where he undertook postgraduate medical training. He became a Licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in 1875, then a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland in 1877 and was subsequently made a Member in 1882 and a Fellow in 1892.

Married to Elizabeth Mary Cox, the 1911 census records him living at 26 Merrion Square North along with a 19-year-old son, Arthur C J Cox, and three servants. Arthur went on to have a distinguished life, establishing a firm of solicitors which is still prominent today as well as befriending some of the most influential politicians of his day such as Kevin O'Higgins, Minister for Justice. The couple had one other son, Aedan, who served with the Royal Garrison Artillery in the First World War and died in 1920 aged 32.

In 1911 during the Lieutenancy of Lord Aberdeen, Michael Cox was made a member of the Privy Council - becoming the first Irish doctor to serve on this advisory body. Among a number of notable positions he was Senior Physician to St. Vincent's Hospital, Dublin (an appointment which caused controversy at the time due to his youth and inexperience but one which was thoroughly vindicated) and Consulting Physician to the Children's Hospital, Temple Street. His kindness and human touch is mentioned in a number of sources; the Irish Journal of Medical Science noted that 'few medical men had such a gift of inspiring confidence in their patients. In him, sufferers felt they had found an intimate personal friend as well as a physician'.¹

Cox was a proud nationalist and a supporter of the Irish language; he won prizes as a schoolboy for the Irish language and he was well versed in Irish folklore. He counted John Redmond, John Dillon and Charles Stewart Parnell among his friends and he attended Michael Davitt on his

¹ In Memoriam –Michael Francis Cox. Irish Journal of Medical Science. 1926 April, 184-85



deathbed in 1906. During the 1916 Rising he attended the wounded in St. Vincent's Hospital. Responding to a comment from a patient who doubted that a member of the Privy Council would treat him, Cox replied 'I am first an Irishman, secondly a member of the medical profession and other matters only follow those'.² In 1920 he resigned from the Privy Council in protest over the failure to implement Home Rule in Ireland and over the actions of the Black and Tans after the 1916 rising.

He had a keen interest in subjects outside of medicine, in particular in archaeology, literature and horse-racing. He was the author of a number of works including *The Country and Kindred of Oliver Goldsmith* and *Notes on the History of the Irish Horse* and he kept up a correspondence with Douglas Hyde.

In 1922, he was elected President of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland; to mark the occasion he was presented with a beautiful replica of the Ardagh Cup by his colleagues in St. Vincent's hospital. A year into his presidency Dr Cox contracted a serious illness from which he never fully recovered. The British Medical journal afforded him a glowing tribute noting that 'in the various positions which he held he contributed to the full the resources of his medical skill and experience, and did much to uphold the dignity and traditions of the Irish medical profession'.³

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² "Michael Francis Cox," RCSI, accessed August 17, 2018,

<https://digitalheritagecollections.rcsi.ie/surgeonsandinsurgents/items/show/35>

³ 'The Right Honourable Michael Francis Cox M.D. , F.R.C.P.I', British Medical Journal 1926, 1, 457

