

Alan Proctor Grant

Born: 1918
President: 1977-1980
Died: 2004

Alan Grant was the first Ulster-based President of the RCPI in over 300 years. Though born in Dublin he came north to the Queen's University of Belfast for his undergraduate training. He graduated with honours in 1940. As with most of his generation he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps for the duration of the Second World War. He had an exciting and distinguished wartime career serving principally with the Eighth Army in North Africa and Italy, including both El Alamein and the Anzio Beachhead with the Americans. He was mentioned in dispatches on two occasions – June 1943 and January 1944.

On his return from active service he was appointed as Physician to the Down Hospital and later became a Consultant General Physician to the Belfast City Hospital. He was especially interested in diabetes and played a leading role in developing services for diabetics in the City Hospital, including an interest in working with early insulin pump technology. In addition to his clinical work, he was a leading figure in planning for the redevelopment of City Hospital which was the old workhouse with its grim forbidding granite exterior. It was replaced by a magnificent tower block and as one of the senior physicians he was invited to top out the building. He contributed over 40 original publications and presentations to medical literature, covering a wide range of topics. Subsequently he was invited to join many of the planning committees which were developing the new NHS structures across Northern Ireland. He was also recognised by the award of many Honorary Fellowships from sister colleges. Despite a somewhat intimidating exterior with his long white coat and heavy moustache he was very much concerned for all his patients and took a special interest in the welfare of his juniors.

His principal interest outside Northern Ireland was his involvement with the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. He was the first President from the North in 300 years, and his appointment heralded a greater involvement of Northerners in the life of the College. He was a founder member of the Corrigan Club, whose aim was to foster closer relationships between physicians from the North and the South. Grant was appalled by the trauma and destruction caused by the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Like most doctors in the North, he continued to deliver medical



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care equally to all in need, and on a strictly confidential basis. Grant volunteered to provide consultant care for the Maze Prison hunger strikers, delivering what help he could in those most difficult of times.

One of the most interesting legacies of Grant's presidency was the reminiscences he contributed to David Mitchell's history of the College published in 1992. His description of the interview and award of his Fellowship in 1954 and the wider circumstances for the College most graphically captures the then depressed state of the College;

'The President and about six senior Fellows sat at a large table. There were no carpets. The walls were a dull mustard colour with brown surrounds. The windows were grimy and the dull light showed flaking paint and cobwebs. It was cold. The velvet gowns of the Fellows which added a sombre dignity to the scene were practical and warm.'

Of the library he commented as follows 'There was no time to examine the tattered ancient volumes lining the walls. Financial stringency was obvious. The Registrar, frail and devoted, did his best to cope' and in summary 'an atmosphere where everything stood still and we had a relic of another Ireland and another age.'¹

Alan Grant was President of the Northern Ireland Red Cross and, in 1979, he was awarded a CBE for services to medicine in Northern Ireland.

Among his sporting interests was his love of sailing. He was the proud owner of a Glen Class yacht and a member of Strangford Lough Yacht Club, based at Whiterock. He was the holder of a Yacht Master's Ticket and was an enthusiastic instructor of Junior Members of the Sailing Club.

Sadly he developed blindness in his later years, yet his sharp mind and visits from many good friends sustained him through these troubled times. He died in 2004.

PD

¹ David Mitchell, *An interim History of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland 1963-88* (RCPI: Dublin, 1992), 83-95.

