

William John Edward Jessop

Born: 1902
President: 1972-1974
Died: 1980

William John Edward Jessop, Jerry, was born near Mullingar, County Westmeath to John Brabason Jessop, a farmer and Mary Jessop (née Anderson). After attending the Ranelagh School in Athlone and Mountjoy School in Dublin, he studied in Trinity College Dublin where he became a foundation scholar. He obtained a first class honours degree in experimental science (1925), an MSc in biochemistry (1927) and graduated MB BCh BAO (1928) with distinctions in all subjects.

Jessop was Professor of Physiology and Biochemistry in the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland from 1929 to 1952, and held an appointment as a physician biochemist at the Meath Hospital from 1930 to 1980. Becoming interested in public health issues, he obtained his Diploma in Public Health in 1931, followed by an MD in 1935. His research included a nutrition survey which reported, in 1946, that 100% flour extraction, and the resulting low intakes of calcium and iron, was causing a high prevalence of rickets and anaemia in Dublin. His findings on the prevalence of dental caries lead to the fluoridation of public water supplies in 1952. His research continued after he became the first Professor of Social Medicine in Trinity College Dublin in 1953, including collaboration in the Ireland Boston Study which compared possible causative factors for coronary heart disease in brothers who had emigrated and those who remained in Ireland.

In recognition of his capacity to bring about change, Jessop was Dean of the School of Physic and Dean of the School of Dental Sciences in Trinity from 1959 to his retirement in 1972. Representing Trinity, he served terms as a Senator from 1952 to 1954, and from 1960 to 1973. Having been elected a Fellow of the College of Physicians in 1944, his term as President coincided with commencing as Visiting Professor of Chemical Pathology at the University of Ife in Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Jessop was an active member of many professional organisations. He was on the Council and contributed to the discussions of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, and in 1963 he presented a comprehensive, comparative review of the Irish health services. He was a founding member of the Medical Research Council, acting as both Honorary Secretary and Chief Executive from 1952 until he retired. Uniquely he served on the General Medical Council, the Medical Registration Council of Ireland and the General Veterinary Council. He was also a Council member of the Royal Zoological Society of Ireland.

As Dean of the School of Physic in Trinity, Jessop provided leadership to reorganise hospital services, aiming to improve the quality of patient care and of clinical teaching. A report in 1953 based on an inspection by the American Medical Association was critical of the medical school,



and this was followed by a similar report prepared jointly by the medical councils in the UK and Ireland in 1956. Jessop 'set out on a major programme of reform' and 'became very committed to the concept of amalgamating the smaller voluntary hospitals into a major teaching hospital on one site'.¹

The Department of Clinical Medicine in Trinity was established in 1960 'at the instigation and motivation of Jerry Jessop', followed by units for surgery, obstetrics and psychiatry.² An Act was passed in 1961 which set out the legal basis for the amalgamation of the hospitals, which provided clinical teaching for Trinity students, to become known collectively as the Federated Dublin Voluntary Hospitals. The Act (Section 25) also provided a statutory basis for the transfer of funds from Sir Patrick Dun's estate to go from the College of Physicians to Trinity College and Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital; the College would henceforth no longer have a role in the appointment or funding of the King's Professors who provided teaching for Trinity students. That agreement was appended to the Act and was signed by the trustees and board members of the relevant organisations including Jessop as Dean of the Medical School.

A further step in the organisation of services and co-ordination of clinical teaching was the establishment of a new board for St. James's Hospital, previously known as St. Kevin's, in 1971 and the agreement by the boards of Sir Patrick Dun's, Mercer's and Baggot Street Hospitals that their institutions would transfer to the St. James's site. Thus, by the end of Jessop's tenure as Dean of the School of Physic there had been major changes in the delivery of health care and the foundations had been laid for the transfer of the remainder of the Federated Hospitals to a new hospital in Tallaght.

In accepting his appointment as Professor of Social Medicine in 1952 Jessop wrote to the Registrar of the College 'I shall spare no effort in the development of the new department and in the service of the University.'³ Obituaries written by colleagues confirmed that he fulfilled this promise, commenting on his 'intelligence, humour and a great capacity for industry'⁴ and that 'Jerry Jessop will be long remembered for his brilliant contribution to the TCD medical school and indeed for his important influence on the development of academic medicine in Ireland'.⁵

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¹ David Coakley, 'From founding hospital to university teaching hospital: the development of St James's Hospital' in David Fitzpatrick (ed), *The Feds. An account of the Federated Dublin Voluntary Hospitals 1960 – 2005* (Dublin: Farmar A & A, 2006), 7-18.

² D G Weir, 'Clinical medicine at Trinity' in David Fitzpatrick (ed.), *The Feds*, 171-180 and Peter Gatenby, 'Professor W J E Jessop', *Trinity Trust News* 1980; 5 (2), 5.

³ D I D Howie, 'Memorial address for Professor WJE Jessop', *Journal of the Irish Colleges Physicians and Surgeons* 1981; 10 (3), 148.

⁴ J S McCormick, 'Obituary. WJE Jessop', *Journal of the Irish Med Association* 1980; 73 (7), 281.

⁵ Peter Gatenby, 'Professor W J E Jessop', *Trinity Trust News* 1980; 5 (2), 5.

