

Patrick Mitchell

Birth: c.1671
President: 1712-1713, 1723-1724
Death: 1750

Patrick Mitchell was born in Scotland about 1671, the son of Thomas Mitchell (d. 1687) and his third wife Katherine Dun. The families of Mitchell and Dun were both prominent in and around Aberdeen. For example, Patrick's half-brother, Thomas, served as Lord Provost of the city in 1698-99. His mother, Katherine, was the eldest sister of Sir Patrick Dun (qv), the well-known physician who was born in Aberdeen in 1642 and later made his career in Ireland. Dun had settled in Dublin by 1676 where he enjoyed a high profile as physician to the state. His example may have attracted his nephew to medicine, and later to Ireland.

Patrick Mitchell was probably the student of that name who is recorded as a magistrand (fourth-year student) at Marischal College, Aberdeen in 1690-91. A year earlier, he was among the signatories to 'The students of Marischall's College Attestation anent the burning of the Pope' which related to a street procession and mock trial organised by the students in January 1689.¹ Mitchell was at Leiden in 1694. In the following year he graduated with an MD from the University of Harderwijk, also in the Netherlands. His thesis was on *De Variolis et Morbillis*.

By 1696 Mitchell was in Ireland. Given Sir Patrick Dun's central role in the College at this time, it could only be a matter of time before Mitchell became affiliated. In the autumn of 1696 he petitioned for admission as a Candidate and was duly approved by the Censors. Mitchell eventually presented himself at a meeting of the College in April 1697, where it was agreed that his fees of £7 10s would be taken out of a sum owed by the College to Dun.

As with many physicians of this period in Ireland, details of Mitchell's medical practise are hard to come by. Like his uncle, he took up residence on the north side of the Liffey, and in the 1730s was resident on Capel Street. He became a Fellow of the College in 1704 with Patrick Dun again taking responsibility for the relevant fees. He was Registrar in 1705, and in 1709 was one of the Fellows responsible for drawing up new by-laws. Mitchell was elected President in 1712 and again in 1723. He resigned his Fellowship in 1729 and was elected an Honorary Fellow.

Mitchell also benefitted from access to Dun's extensive social network beyond the College. Dun's connections were also presumably a factor in Mitchell's own marriage to Elizabeth, the daughter of Sir John Topham. Elizabeth Topham's step-mother was sister to Dun's wife Mary, née Jephson.

¹ Peter Anderson (ed.), *Fasti Academiae Mariscallanae Aberdonensis* (3 vols., Aberdeen, 1889-98), ii, pp.262-3.



Mitchell is probably best known for the lengthy and acrimonious dispute that ensued upon the death of his uncle in 1713. The letters sent by the widowed Mary, Lady Dun, to her friend and confidant Archbishop William King around that time reveal that she suspected Mitchell of having turned her husband against her in the years prior to his death, with a view to securing Dun's fortune for himself. Under the terms of his will, Dun left most of his property to his wife for her life with the intention that his estate should, after her death, be used by the College of Physicians to endow a Professorship of Physick. Within months of Dun's death, Mary and Patrick, both named as executors in the will, had filed bills against each other in Chancery. A decree issued in 1715 confirmed the division of property as set out in the will, with Mitchell securing immediate control only of Dun's 'Mathematical Instruments' and 'other curiosities'.² Further legal proceedings, involving Mitchell, Mary Dun and the College, ensued in 1723, 1733 and 1740. While the College was anxious to derive some benefit from Dun's will in the short term, Mitchell's personal interest in the matter posed difficulties. In 1720 Duncan Cumings (qv) lamented that the College would not be able to discuss 'Sir Patrick Dun's noble design' at its St Luke's Day dinner in the Rose Tavern on Castle Street because 'by Dr Mitchell's presence there must be nothing among them of the matter'.³

Mitchell made his own will in 1745, directing burial alongside his wife in St Audeon's Church and dividing most of his property between his three children: Patrick, Topham and Elizabeth. He left his 'Physick Bookes' to John Anderson (qv).⁴ Following Mitchell's death on 28 December 1750, Faulkner's Dublin Journal published a glowing obituary 'drawn by a friend'. This tribute inevitably highlighted Mitchell's positive characteristics including his care for the poor, he 'regarding them as patients in a double capacity'.⁵ Mary Dun's letters provide a counterview of 'that ill instrument'. As she told Archbishop King, 'all men have their failings & by many actions I can conclude too much self is Dr Mitchell's'.⁶

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² T.W. Belcher, *Memoir of Sir Patrick Dun* (Dublin, 1866), p. 48; National Archives of Ireland, RC/6/3, p.482.

³ Lyons Collection of the Correspondence of Archbishop William King: Alphabetical Calendar, A-F, TCD, no. 1961.

⁴ Kirkpatrick Will Notebooks, RCPI Archive TPCK/5/3/1, ii, pp 19-24.

⁵ 'Patrick Mitchell Card', Kirkpatrick Index, RCPI Archive.

⁶ Belcher, *Memoir of Sir Patrick Dun*, pp 58, 55.

