

Francis LeHunte

Born: 1686
President: 1729-1730, 1741-1742
Died: 1750

Francis LeHunte was a significant figure in Irish medicine in the early years of the eighteenth century. He was born in Cashel, County Tipperary, second son to George and Alice LeHunte. The LeHunte family had originally come to Ireland with Cromwell and had been granted substantial lands in the south east of the country. Francis entered Trinity College Dublin in 1704 gaining his BA in 1708 and his MB and MD in 1719. It is probable that he spent some period in the interim studying outside Ireland as was typical for physicians of this period. However, there are no details available as to where he attended. He was elected Fellow of the College of Physicians in 1729 and served as President on two occasions.

In 1730, he is recorded as having a practice on Bride Street in Dublin and is listed as one of the fourteen attendees at the first meeting of the Dublin Society, later the Royal Dublin Society, in Trinity College in June 1731. He was involved with William Stephens (qv), another Dublin Society founder, in the opening of Mary Mercer's Hospital on Stephen's Street. He was appointed, with Stephens, as the first physicians of the new hospital in May 1734 and both also became trustees; this role was both voluntary and unpaid. In 1736, he also became a Visiting Physician to Dr Steevens' Hospital and, in September 1738, was elected a Governor of that hospital. In 1741, he was appointed Physician to the hospital with the salary of £80 per annum. LeHunte is recorded as usually attending the hospital on a Friday. However, in 1747, following the death of the foundress of the hospital, Grizzell Steevens, he was granted her rooms in the hospital to allow him to become resident and attend more frequently. He seems to have used this facility infrequently and, in 1747, gave up the practice of medicine entirely having inherited the family estates and an income of £1,200 per annum from his elder brother Richard, MP for the Borough of Enniscorthy. He requested that William Stephens be appointed to Dr Steevens' Hospital in his stead. According to one account, 'he retired from the business of his profession and enjoyed his friends with a cheerfulness and good nature'.¹

LeHunte spent his last years mainly in his large family home in Brennanstown, near Carrickmines, in South County Dublin, which he modernised. He appears to have been very highly thought of by his peers and acquaintances. The actor and poet Thomas Mozeen, who was part of David Garrick's company in Drury Lane, said that 'his abode was the home of every virtue and delight'.

¹ Quoted in Fergus Mulligan, *The founders of the Royal Dublin Society* (Dublin: Royal Dublin Society, 2005) 12.



LIVES OF THE PRESIDENTS



An obituary published following his death in 1750 stated that he was 'universally esteemed for his great knowledge in his profession'.²

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² Dublin Gazette, 4 December 1750



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