

Anthony Relhan

Born: 1715
President: 1755-1756
Died: 1776

Anthony Relhan was born in Ireland in 1715 and was educated at Trinity College where he became a scholar in 1734 and obtained his BA the following year. Having studied medicine at the University of Leiden from 1740 he returned to Dublin and graduated MD from Trinity College on 12 July 1743. He was admitted to the Fellowship of the College of Physicians in October 1747 and was elected President of the College in 1755.

He was appointed Physician to Mercer's Hospital in January 1753 and having become a governor was entrusted with financial transactions involving the purchase of land and property on the hospital's behalf. In the following year, in his capacity as governor, he was the hospital's recipient of a grant of £500 from Parliament intended to support the building of a new hospital. However, the money was not passed to the Treasurer and it was only after threats of legal action that the sum in question was made available. He consequently ceased to be a member of the Board of Governors.

He appears to have had an interest in hydrotherapy and alternative medications and he corresponded with Dr Richard Russell of London and Brighton and Dr Robert James whose powder Relhan prescribed for his patients. As Dr James refused to reveal the constituents of his remedy it fell into disrepute particularly in Dublin. Relhan, as an advocate of it, was held in poor opinion and Dublin physicians refused to collaborate with him and as a result in 1758 he left to replace Dr Russell in Brighton.

He established an excellent reputation there and contributed significantly to the development of the town's role as a health resort. In 1761 he published a *Short History of Brighthelmstone (Brighton): With Remarks on Its Air, and an Analysis of Its Waters* in which he extolled the nature of the local wells and lent credibility to the suggestion that their mineral content favourably affected gastric disorders. It led to a substantial increase in public interest in drinking mineral water. However, a purported beneficial effect on fertility did not receive his support. Relhan also authored a treatise on the use of music in medicine, and several other medical publications.



In 1762 he transferred to London, his doctorate was incorporated at Cambridge in 1763 and he became a Fellow of the College of Physicians in London on 25 June 1764. In the same year he published a *Refutation of the Reflections against Inoculation*. He became a Censor of the London College in 1765 and again in 1771. He was honoured by becoming Gulstonian Lecturer in 1765 and Harveian Orator on 18 October 1770. The oration included much praise for Thomas Linacre and other benefactors of the College and dwelt at some length on the friendship of Erasmus and Linacre.

He died in October 1776 and is buried in Paddington Street burial ground in Marylebone. He was twice married and had a son and daughter by his first wife. His second wife was Lady Hart, widow of Sir William Hart, a wealthy banker, and she possessed houses in London and Brighton where she spent the bathing season for many years. His son, Richard Relhan, was a Fellow of Kings College and published a renowned account of plants growing near Cambridge.

The town of Enfield in New Hampshire was renamed Relhan in 1766 to honour Anthony Relhan, but reverted to Enfield in 1784.

JH

