

Thomas Herbert Orpen

Born: 1775
President: 1812-1813, 1818-1819
Died: 1845

Thomas Herbert Orpen was born in 1775, the son of John Herbert Orpen, Physician to the South Infirmary, Cork. Orpen entered Trinity College in 1791 at the age of 16 years. He then proceeded to Edinburgh University, where he graduated in 1797. Following his graduation in medicine from Edinburgh, Orpen spent a further five months on an extended walking tour, which took in much of the north and west of England and the London area, before returning home to Ireland. Orpen was described by his father as 'a tall, clean, dashing young fellow ... he has an open countenance, looks up with black eyes and hair, visage rather thin, and his demeanour modest and tintured with the bashful.'¹

On his return to Dublin, Orpen set up practice in Grafton Street before moving to South Frederick Street. He was admitted a Licentiate of the College in 1801, a Fellow in 1803 and an Honorary Fellow in 1826. He was elected President in 1812 and 1818 and appointed Dun's Librarian in 1826, a position he held until 1833. His principal achievement during his tenure as Dun's Librarian was the publication of a catalogue of the library in 1828, with an additional supplement in 1832. He presented many books to Dun's Library, all bearing his distinctive bookplate. Orpen was also a member of the College committee which drew up the first Dublin Pharmacopeia. This Pharmacopeia was implemented by an order of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. After its publication only medications conforming to the standards set down in the Pharmacopeia could be lawfully dispensed.

Orpen was a prominent member of the Royal Dublin Society, serving on the Executive Council, and was especially active in the field of chemistry and botany. He was a charitable man, and was an active member of the Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor, the Meath Charitable Loan Society, the Howard Society for Prison Reform and the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society. He does not seem to have been politically active to any great extent, with one exception. At a public meeting in 1829, held in the Rotunda Hospital Rooms, he moved a resolution calling for a boycott of West Indian goods, as a protest against slavery.

A manuscript note by T Percy C Kirkpatrick claims that Orpen fought a duel with one Dr Waldron, which was reported in the Dublin Evening Post of December 1825, 'the former gentleman [Orpen]

¹ Quoted in Edward A Martin, *A dictionary of bookplates of Irish medical doctors with short biographies* (Dublin: De Burca, 2003), 105.



LIVES OF THE PRESIDENTS

discharged his pistol in the air which terminated the affair we are happy to say without material accident.'²

Orpen died in Dublin on 31 March 1845.

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² Manuscript note by T Percy C Kirkpatrick in the Thomas Herbert Orpen File, Kirkpatrick Index, RCPI

