

Thomas Edward Beatty

Born: 1799/1800

President: 1864-1866

Died: 1872

Thomas Beatty was born on either the last day of the eighteenth century or on the first day of the nineteenth century to John Beatty, a Dublin obstetrician, and Mary Betagh, daughter of a Dublin solicitor. Beatty was conferred with the BA degree by Trinity College Dublin in 1818 after which he travelled to Edinburgh to study medicine where he graduated MD in 1820. He returned to Dublin and was admitted Licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in 1821.

Beatty practiced as an obstetrician, his patients being drawn mainly from Dublin's upper and middle classes. He was Master of the South-Eastern Lying-In Hospital and was responsible for publishing important reports of the institution's clinical activities, which has long been a feature of obstetric practice anticipating the current requirement for audit. He was Lecturer in Midwifery at the Park Street Medical School and in 1832, with five others, Beatty was a co-founder of the City of Dublin Hospital, Baggot Street with the intention of providing improved facilities to support the teaching of medicine. When gynaecological practice was established in the hospital, Beatty was placed in charge. He published widely, and was appointed Professor of Midwifery at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in 1842, and prior to that he had served as Professor of Medical Jurisprudence at the same institution. Beatty was elected President of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in 1850.

He then became more involved in the activities of the College of Physicians. He was admitted Licentiate in 1860, Fellow in 1862 and elected President two years later. This was a period of importance for the College of Physicians. Beatty was the first new President to be installed in the College's new home. At the end of his term he presented the College with a fine chair carved from Irish oak, still used by the President today.

Beatty enjoyed professional recognition and a very full social life. He received an honorary MD degree from Trinity, served as President of the Dublin Pathological Society and the Dublin Obstetrical Society; he was Honorary Member of the Obstetrical Societies of London and Edinburgh, Vice-President of the Zoology Society and Secretary of the Medico-Philosophical Society which had evolved from a predominantly learned society to a dining club for hospital doctors. In his capacity as Secretary, he minuted an interesting social function which was a visit of some members to the country home of the surgeon Sir William Wilde, Moytura on Lough Corrib, County Galway. Interesting because it provides an unusual insight into the collegiate relationships and excesses of the time. It followed the notorious court case for libel taken against Wilde's wife, Jane, who had unwisely discredited claims by Mary Travers that Sir William had



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molested her. Although the court found in favour of Mary Travers, the award was derisory reflecting the low level of her credibility. However, the publicity surrounding the case at home and abroad led to Wilde's departure from medical practice and his retreat to Moytura.

Wilde invited colleagues to join him again on the Corrib. A group including the eponymous duo of William Stokes (qv) and Robert Adams travelled the six-hour train journey to Galway. Beatty describes great mirth and hospitality over three days. He records that after dinner on the day of arrival, which featured roast salmon and beef and excellent sherry, madeira, hock, champagne and claret, 'all restraint was thrown into Lough Corrib and toasts and speeches, fun and frolic and poteen punch were indulged into a very late hour'¹. It seems likely that this visit was at least in part a demonstration of support for their colleague and friend who had many times previously been their host at his home on Merrion Square for extravagant soirees attended by prominent members of Dublin's professional, artistic, cultural and academic circles. There are accounts of Beatty who had 'a sweet tenor voice' performing on these occasions.²

Beatty has been described as a 'portly handsome man with a florid clean-shaven face' displaying an 'unflagging play of bonhomie and pleasantry that lightened up his genial face and enlivened his discursive talk'.³ He married twice, both women predeceasing him without any record of offspring. Beatty developed cellulitis and septicaemia complicating a dental extraction and was attended by William Stokes. He died after a brief illness on 3 May 1872.

Beatty's obituary in the *Lancet* noted that his election to presidencies of the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Physicians was 'a distinction never before conferred on the same individual'⁴; and so it is to this day, and with increasing specialisation in medicine it is unlikely ever to be equaled.

TJMCK

¹ Quoted in Davis Coakley, *The Irish School of Medicine. Outstanding practitioners of the 19th century* (Dublin: Town House, 1988), 138

² Quoted in John Widdess, *A History of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, 1654-1963* (London: F & S Livingstone, 1963), 181

³ *Ibid*, 181

⁴ 'Obituary – Dr Thomas Edward Beatty, *The Lancet*, May 11 1872

