

## John Magee Finny

**Born:** 1841  
**President:** 1890-1892  
**Died:** 1922

John Magee Finny was born on 9 February 1841, the third son of Reverend Thomas Finny, rector of Clondulane, County Cork, and his second wife Frances, daughter of William Magee, Archbishop of Dublin. He was the grandson of the Commissary-General for Ireland. Finny married Agnes Anne, youngest daughter of William Watson.

He studied at a private school and then at Trinity College Dublin where he obtained BA in 1860. He was a distinguished scholar and in 1864 obtained the MB degree, a medical scholarship and became the senior exhibitioner. In 1868 he became a Fellow of the College of Physicians and was conferred MD in 1873.

Finny was appointed Physician to the City of Dublin Hospital in 1874; his appointment 'met with the universal approval of his professional brethren, among whom he is most deservedly popular'.<sup>1</sup> He had for several years been demonstrator of anatomy in the School of Physic.

In 1882 he was appointed King's Professor of Medicine in Trinity College Dublin and Physician to Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital, where his teaching attracted large numbers of pupils to his lectures and clinics. He was chairman of the Academy of Medicine, Consultant Physician to Mercer's Hospital, Dublin, member of the Senate of Trinity College Dublin, a member of the Board of Superintendents of the Dublin Hospitals and HM Visitor in Lunacy. He was also an examiner at the army medical examinations in London.

Finny contributed frequently to the medical journals and made numerous communications to the Royal Academy of Medicine. His interests were diverse and he published widely over fifty years with several articles in the British Medical Journal and over one hundred articles, case reports and other communications in the Dublin Medical Journal.

On 18 October 1890 Finny was unanimously elected President of the College of Physicians. At that meeting examiners were appointed in the various specialties for the professional, conjoint board and membership examinations. Standing committees were constituted for library, economy, parliamentary and estate. As was usual, much of the minutes during his presidency was devoted to examination results and regulations.

---

<sup>1</sup> British Medical Journal, 7 March 1874



In 1890 the College changed its name from the King and Queen's College of Physicians in Ireland to the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. Advertisements were placed in the *Lancet*, *British Medical Journal* and *Medical Press* stating that Fellows, Members, Licentiates and Diplomates of the College could have their titles altered by applying to the registrars of the branch medical council in each division of the Kingdom.

There was disquiet at suggested changes in the regulation of midwives and the College proposed that 'any alteration should be in the direction of placing the examination and licensing of midwives in the hands of the various licensing bodies'. There was a disagreement with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) on the length of attendance required at medico-chirurgical hospitals; the RCSI wanted to reduce this but the RCPI strongly insisted on 30 months, as was required by the London Colleges.

Other items in College minutes included 'that a hose be procured for the purpose of washing the front of the college' and that a 'Milner's fireproof safe be procured for the College'. A committee was to consider that societies habitually using the premises make a pecuniary arrangement to recoup the actual expenditure incurred by the College.

Finny was a man of polished manners and taught the importance of precision and of detail in the observation of clinical cases. Many students owed to him their skill in the physical examination of patients and their knowledge of the importance of the art of case reporting. His obituary in the *Medical Press* noted that 'From his house physicians and residents he insisted on a high standard of attention and care. Any inattention or oversight elicited swift rebuke. In this he was consciously performing a duty to his pupils. No teacher showed a more genuine interest in the welfare of his pupils, and he spared no exertion to forward their interests, whether by advice and counsel, or, where it was permissible, using his personal influence. Dr Finny had high ideas of the honour and importance of his profession, and always practiced and inculcated professional methods of the highest standard'.<sup>2</sup>

John Magee Finny died on 7 December 1922 at his home in Sandymount at the age of 81. He had previously lived in Merrion Square. The funeral service was in Christ Church, Leeson Park, where he had been a member of the congregation for over fifty years. He had been seriously ill for some months prior and had retired from practice four years previously. He left a widow and four sons, two of whom were members of the medical profession.

TC

---

<sup>2</sup> *Medical Press and Circular*, 20 December 1922

