

Walk Through Ireland's Medical History & Development of General Practice



Picture by Brehon Academy



By David Thomas

Retired GP Discussion Group

Irish College of GPs

Walk Through Ireland's Medical History

Compromises of:

- *A description of Gaelic Medicine throughout Medieval Times, until the Mid-16th Century*
- *The early modern period 1600-1700's*
- *The development of Voluntary Hospitals and the Dispensary System*
- *How modern medical teaching developed*
- *The Golden Age of Irish Medicine*
- *The origins of General Practice in Ireland*
- *1800's*
- *Walking Tour of Dublin's Historical Medical landmarks*

Medieval Times – Mid 16th Century



Throughout Medieval times, up to the middle of the sixteenth century Ireland had a fairly sophisticated medical system. Gaelic culture prevailed, outside the small area around Dublin known as the Pale.

Brehon Laws, provided for primitive Hospitals and Laser Houses centred around monasteries, to cater for the sick poor.

Generally, medical practice was almost the exclusive preserve of certain Septs or families, within specific Clans. Prior to the invention of printing, many herbal remedies cures and traditions were handed down through families, by rote learning, often in verse form to sons, or apprentices, who lived with their master.



Herbal Remedies

These families commanded important respect and status in Gaelic Society and were supported by the Chieftain in exchange for medical services, with grants of land and other rights.

There is evidence many of them travelled in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to the European centres, Salerno, Louvain, and Palermo, obtaining medical degrees, keeping abreast of the most up to date information available at that time.

The decline of the Brehon medical system was dictated by several phases of general historical development.



Picture by Brehon Academy



Breakdown of Gaelic Culture

Initially, the dissolution of the monasteries, by Henry 8th from 1536 left Ireland devoid of any communal refuges for the sick poor, for a period of one hundred and fifty years. One example was the closure of the Augustinian Hospital of John the Baptist, in Thomas Street, Dublin with the ejection of 155 inmates to beg or starve on the streets.

The Battle of Kinsale 1601 and the subsequent Flight of the Earls 1605-08, resulted in the prominent medical families seeking exile in Spain and France. This left Ireland devoid of medical expertise.

The only regulatory body remaining, was the Mary Magdalene Guild of Barber Surgeons, Apothecaries and Periwig Makers centred around Dublin.

One Dermot O'Meara returned to Dublin, having obtained his medical qualifications from Oxford in 1619.

Appalled by the poor state of medicine in Dublin, and the suffering engendered, he petitioned the Lord Deputy for the regulation of the medical profession, to quote," full of cursed mountebanks, ignorant barbers, quack compounders and loose woman, all have free leave to profane the name of Aesculapius." At that time no action was taken, as the country remained divided, unstable, and was later ravaged by the 1641 rebellion and the Cromwellian Wars 1649-53



Teaching Begins

Fraternity of Physicians

The College of the Blessed and Undivided Trinity near Dublin, was founded in 1592 in what had been The Augustinian Monastery of All Hallows. A Faculty of Medicine was not established until 1711 one hundred and thirty years later.

However, during the rebellion of 1641 John Stearne fled in the company of The Provost, the Scholars and seven Fellows to Cambridge; where he studied medicine. Following the restoration 1649, having returned to Trinity, Stearne was elected Junior Fellow, his duties included, lecturer in Hebrew, an appointment as the “Trinitas Medicus” (Doctor to the College) and was conferred with the first recorded Irish Medical Degree, that of MD (Hon Causa) in 1649.



As a practicing physician he proposed that the University rather than set up a medical school, should support the establishment of a Fraternity of Physicians to teach medicine, to regulate, and grant licences to practice.

In 1661 the College approved the proposal designating it as a daughter College, situated just outside the walls of the University and the city in an old Bridewell or prison in Haagen's Green now College Green. To be governed under Stearne's presidency and by fourteen Fellows each granted Honorary MD's

Physicians, Barber-Surgeons and Apothecaries



Sir Patrick Dun

Following the Battle of the Boyne 1690 Sir Patrick Dun, having served as Physician to the Williamite forces, was elected President of the Royal College of Physicians. (1690) He used his influence to seek wide ranging changes affording jurisdiction by the College of Physicians and oversight of the Barber Surgeons, Apothecaries and Midwives, countrywide.

To summarise, Physicians either held a degree from Trinity, or a licence to practice from the College of Physicians, following a period of training and normally seven years apprenticeship.

Likewise, Barber Surgeons, and Apothecaries as members of the Guild were subject to seven years apprenticeship and examination but were considered of a lower order by the Physicians.

Origins of General Practice

From 1733 the Apothecaries Act had subjected all Guild members of the apothecaries to be subject to regular inspections by the College of Physicians.

The 1761 Lucas Act was an attempt by Charles Lucas, an Apothecary by trade and an influential member of Grattan's parliament, to promulgate his vision of placing apothecaries as practitioners in small Irish towns, asylums and fever hospitals, at a minimal cost. Sustained by their monopoly to sell snuff and alcohol.



Charles Lucas

The 1791 Act founded "The Hall of Apothecaries," to replace the Guild as the regulatory body, for the whole of Ireland.

The Governor and 13 members were required to provide courses in Materia medica, physiology, dispensing and compounding of medicines and conduct preliminary and final examinations, following a seven-year apprenticeship.

The Royal College of Surgeons Founded by Royal Charter in 1784, set up to support professional standards, for surgical training and practice. Fifty-one members of the Guild of Barber Surgeons were granted letters of testimony to practice surgery.

The Westminster Medical Act 1801

The foundation of the College of Surgeons 1784, the Hall of Apothecaries 1791, the Irish Physic Act 1800 and the Westminster Medical Act 1801, brought order to the teaching of medicine and the establishment of General Practice in Ireland.

From 1810 the College of Surgeons was required to provide courses in anatomy, physiology, surgery and midwifery, conduct examinations, and subject to seven years indenture to grant a licence to practice John Cheyne was appointed as Professor of Medicine in the RCSI in 1813.



John Cheyne

Following the Act of Union 1801, the Westminster Medical Act had recognised thirteen medical licencing bodies throughout these Islands, In Ireland Trinity alone could grant a degree, the College of Physicians, College of Surgeons and the Hall of Apothecaries could grant licences to practice.

Prior to this it was estimated that more than 1/3 of medical practitioners were not qualified.

Following the Act of Union Dublin was still considered the second city of the Empire. There was an urgent need to train Doctors for the Navy, Army, the Indian Medical Service, and for growing domestic needs.

With the relaxation of the Penal laws this was a very attractive prospect for the sons of the growing number of Middle-Class Catholic families.

Private Medical Schools

In order to sustain the needs of the growing number of indentured students in Dublin Hospitals, several private medical schools were established.



Ledwich Medical School

Ledwich Medical School in Peter Street founded in 1807, it closely associated with the Meath and Adelaide Hospitals amalgamated with RCSI 1889.

The Park Street Medical School 1824 situated, opposite the present Irish College of General practice in what is now Lincoln Place, was founded by Arthur Jacob and Robert Graves, later joined by William Wilde and Robert Adams. It was aligned with the Meath and Dr Steevens, and was absorbed into the Trinity Medical School in 1856.

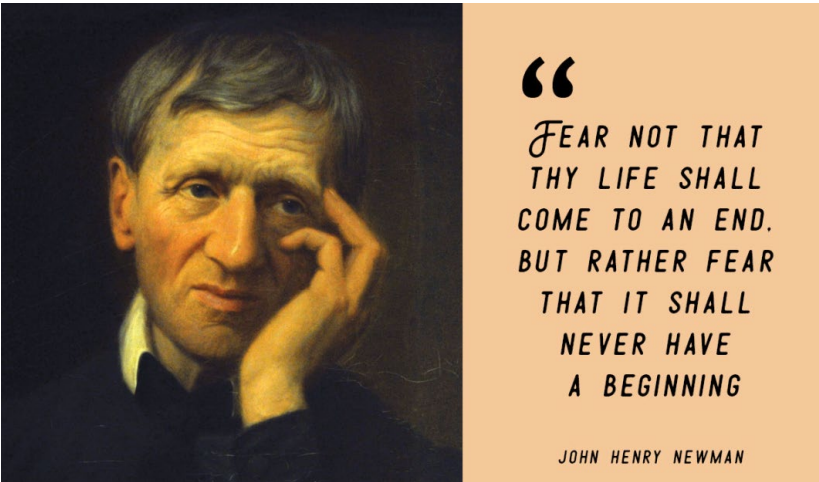
The Carmichael School founded by Robert Adams 1826 associated with Richmond Hospital also amalgamated with the RCSI again in 1889.

The Catholic University Medical School 1856 – 1908, founded by Newman acquired the teaching premises of the School of Apothecaries in 4 Cecelia Street, but without the right to grant a Licence to practice.

Between 1840 and 1858 there were 17 Bills passed to reform medical education with a view to abolishing the Private Medical School System.

Cardinal Newman

The foundation of the Queens Colleges 1849, in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Belfast (The Royal University), to placate Catholics and Dissenters, was considered godless by the Irish Bishops.



“
FEAR NOT THAT
THY LIFE SHALL
COME TO AN END.
BUT RATHER FEAR
THAT IT SHALL
NEVER HAVE
A BEGINNING
JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

Following a synod held in Thurles in 1850, Newman was invited to establish the Catholic University in Dublin in 1854, based on the Oxford model. During the two fresher years, students studied a general course in philosophy and letters, followed by if preferred, professional studies in law, science, medicine or theology in the final years.

Newman having acquired the Apothecaries building as a teaching centre in Cecilia Street, founded the Catholic University Medical School in 1855.

The training was immediately recognised by the Army, Navy and Indian Medical Services Boards.

However not recognised as a licensing body, in 1857 he was forced to make arrangements with RCSI and Hall of Apothecaries to grant licences, or alternatively students could arrange to undertake one-year further study in Glasgow or Edinburgh and sit for a Scottish MD degree. This situation remained in place until 1908.

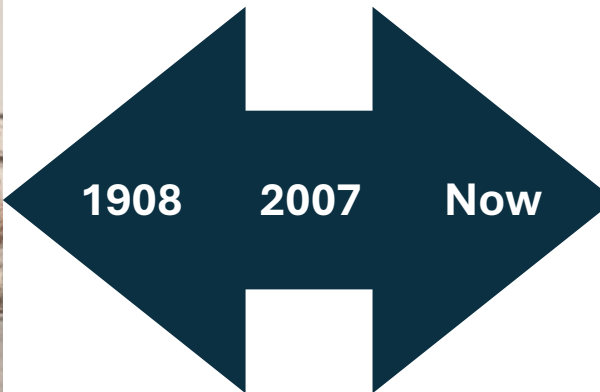
The Hall of Apothecaries remained as an examining body but not a teaching body, recognised by both the British GMC and the Irish IMC, until 1972. Candidates for the Licentiate of the Hall of Apothecaries Dublin were required to produce evidence of having attended the proscribed lectures and practical's.

Cecilia Street, Earlsfort Terrace, UCD

*Initially Hall of Apothecaries medical school 1810-1856. Newman
Acquired teaching premises but the licence to practice 1856 Became
Catholic University Medical School 1856 reconstituted as the UCD
medical school 1908 moved to Earlsfort Terrace 1931. We relocated
to Belfield, the state-of-the-art facility in 2007.*



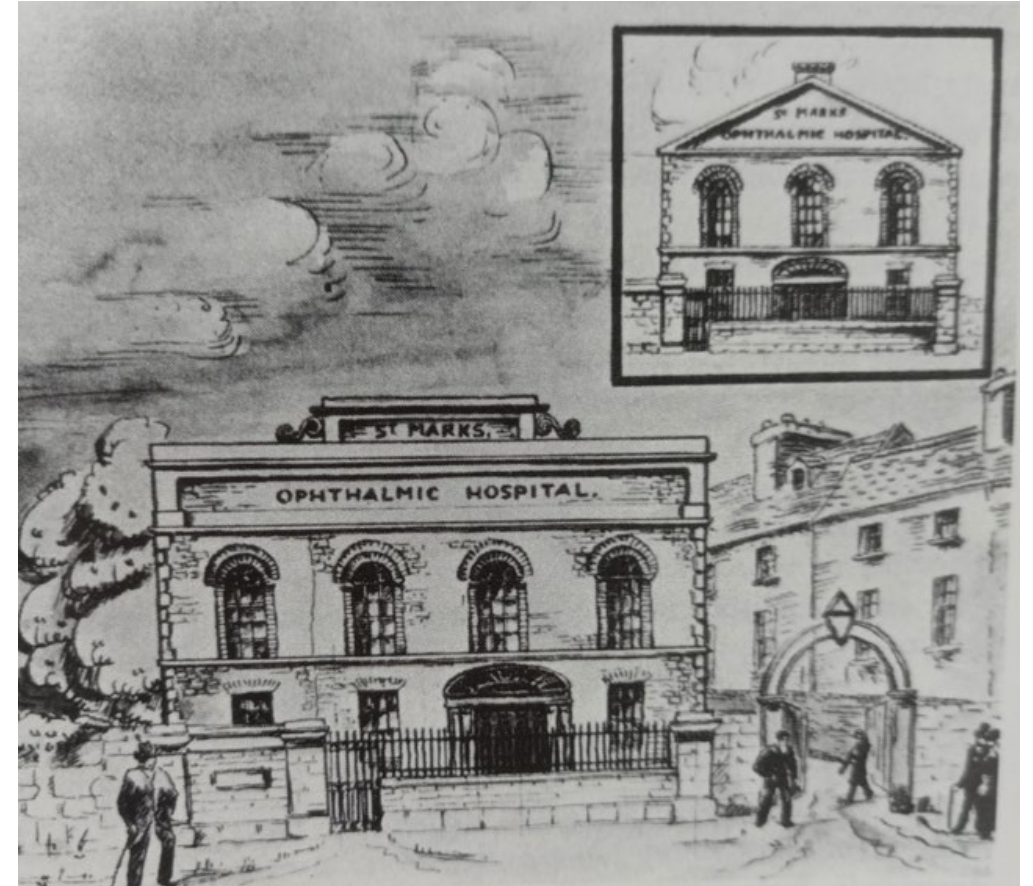
Cecilia House, 4 Cecilia Street



The Park Medical School

Park Street Medical School 1824 -1856,, founded by Arthur Jacob and Robert Graves, later joined by William Wilde, and Robert Adams. Absorbed into Trinity Medical School 1856

Later converted by Wilde to be St Marks Eye and Ear Hospital 1856-1897, amalgamated with National Eye and Ear dispensary to form R.V. Eye and Ear. Became Trinity Genetics Dept in 1956 where Jane Farrer and Pete Humphries identified the gene for retinitis pigmentosa 2002.



Park Street Medical School

Enlightenment Movement

Towards the beginning of the 18th century the Enlightenment Movement fostered a period of learning and high thought, that swept through Europe. This contributed to a sense of philanthropy and social justice In Ireland. Spearheaded by the thinking of Berkeley, Dr Worth, and Dean Swift.

In their writings, all highlighted the miserable conditions endured by the sick poor, the need for charitable medical care in Ireland, and that Ireland had been devoid of any hospitals care since the dissolution of the monasteries.



Berkeley



Dr Worth



Dean Swift

Foundation of Voluntary Hospitals and Dispensaries



17 Dr Steeven's Hospital

Dr Steevens Hospital commenced building 1717, based on Bart's Hospital London, Cook Street Charitable Infirmary opened 1718 with six beds, and Cork Charitable infirmary in 1720.

Thirty-seven Hospitals around Ireland, were built in the 18th cent, eight voluntary Hospitals in Dublin and twenty-nine in the rest of Ireland, in addition to twenty-three County Infirmaries.

Countrywide Dispensary System 1805 -1974

This led to a more country wide distribution, with the introduction of the Irish Dispensary act of 1805. An attempt to improve medical care in rural and small towns initially defined as an institution where medicine and advice would be given free-gratis.

Local committees were formed to raise money to fund local outpatient dispensaries, matched with equal funding from the County Grand Juries. The local committee was responsible for appointing doctors, the provision of medicines, providing accommodation, and sanctioning who was eligible to attend. it was a system open to corruption.

The 1805 Act did not specify locations, it was dependent on a district's local private wealth. The Poor Law enquiry in 1836 reported uneven distribution of 430 dispensaries.

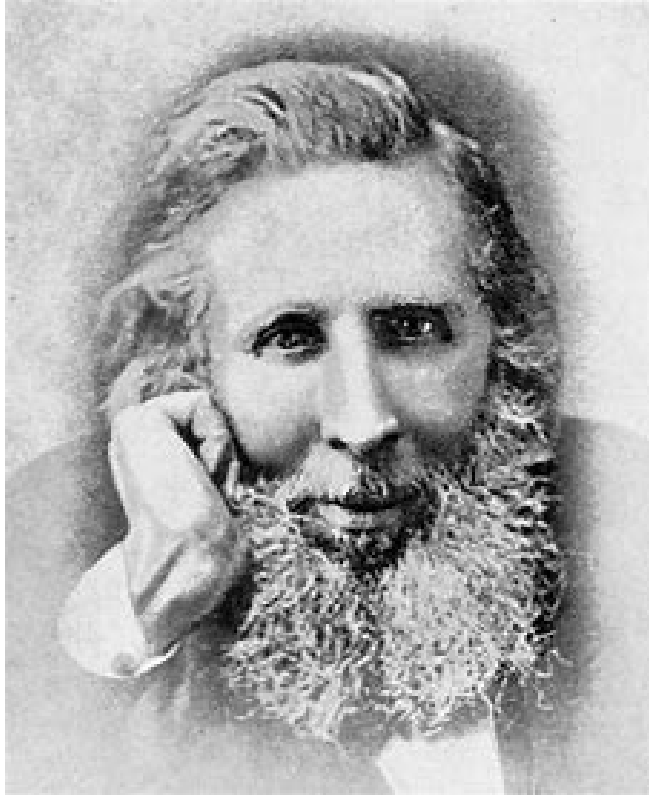
Following Wilde's report on the Famine in 1850 it was restructured and was taken under government control.



The Famine Memorial in Dublin

Medical Charities Act

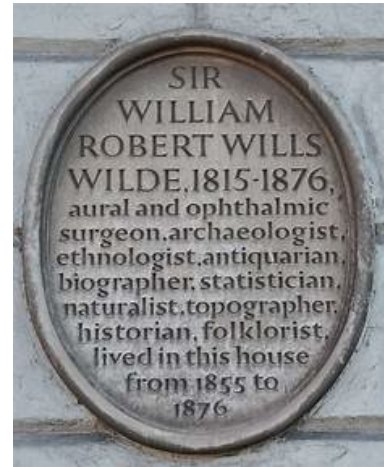
The famine was a watershed in Irish History, out of a total population of 8 million, 1.5 million emigrated, 1 million died of disease and starvation. It overwhelmed the dispensary system, temporary fever sheds were set up in 1846, of 34,622 patients, being treated in sheds 10 % died. A quarter of dispensary doctors died from, typhoid, typhus, and other infective diseases.



Sir William Wilde

William Wilde's census and report on the famine put pressure on government to regulate the system. 785 countrywide dispensaries were established under the supervision of 169 Poor Law Local Guardian Committees comprised of local clergy, rate payers, and lawyers. Guardians determined eligibility, 1/3rd of the population was covered.

Red Tickets entitled patients to domiciliary visits, and black tickets to only dispensary attendance. With various adjustments this system remained in place until 1974 when it was replaced by the GMS system.



*Sir William Wilde Plaque
No 1, Merrion Square,
Dublin*

Golden Age of Irish Medicine



A group of elite physicians and surgeons emerged holding honorary attachments to the voluntary hospitals.

James Macartney, Professor of Surgery in Trinity, attached to Sir Patrick Duns, Cheyne Professor of Medicine in the College of Surgeons attached to the Meath and the Richmond, and Abraham Colles Surgeon to the Meath and Dr Steeven's, formed the Dublin School, based on hospital bed side teaching, apprenticed students could attend all hospitals. The apprentice system was in place. Elite doctors could have up to 70 apprentices.

Macartney, Cheyne and Colles inspired their pupils notably Robert Graves, (Graves' Disease) and his colleague both in Trinity and the Meath Hospital, William Stokes. They further developed the system of bed side teaching; students being assigned specific cases to examine and follow throughout their hospital stay. This system spread from there throughout the English-speaking World.

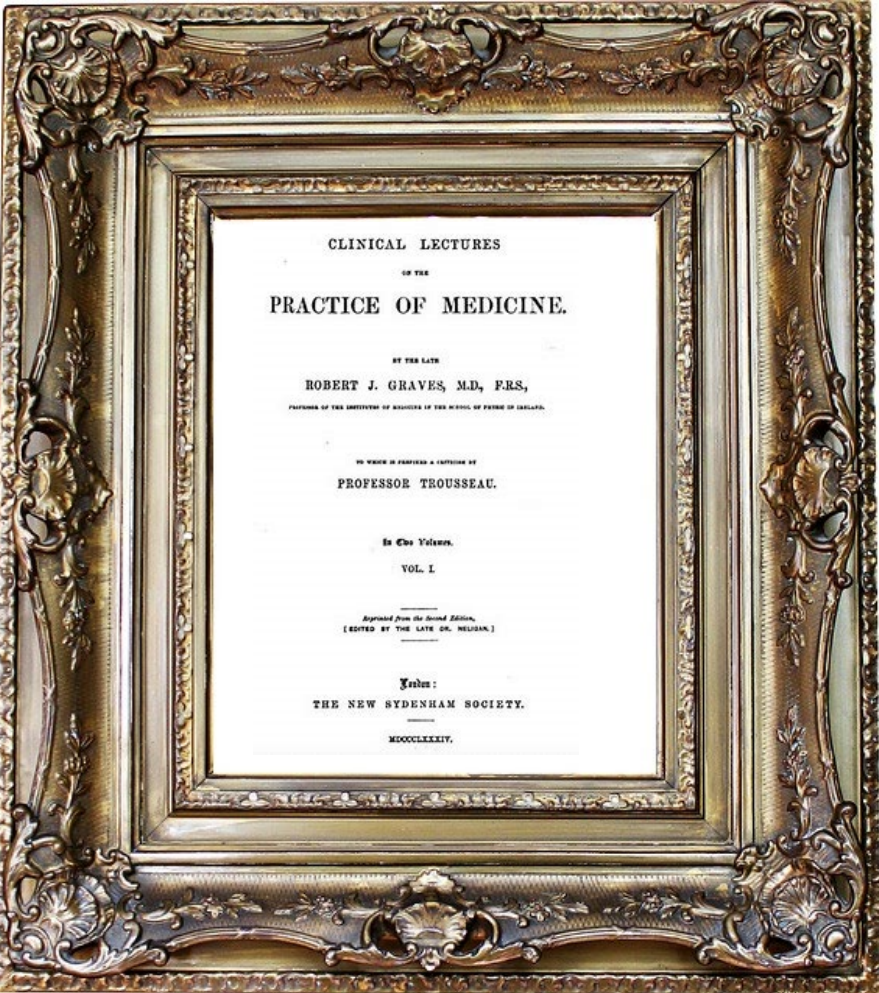
Golden Age of Irish Medicine

Robert Graves published, in 1843 “A System of Clinical Medicine,” “This became the standard textbook in these islands and North America and was translated into French, German and Italian.

William Stokes also published widely his celebrated textbook on “Diseases of the Heart and the Aorta” in which he described, “Cheyne Stokes Breathing” and “Stoke Adams Attacks” also translated into many languages.

Other notables who contributed to the success of the Dublin method of teaching throughout the nineteenth century included, Jacob, (Membrane Jacobi), the polyglot and father of Oscar, Sir William Wilde who founded St Marks’ Eye and Ear Hospital the forerunner of the Eye and Ear, Robert Adams of the Richmond, founder of the Carmichael School of Medicine, Sir Dominic Corrigan (Corrigan’s Pulse) of the College of Physicians and the Richmond , Stokes’ son Sir William Stokes Professor of Surgery , College of Surgeons the Meath and Adelaide.

Throughout the nineteenth century Irish innovations included O’Shaughnessy’s’ introduction of intravenous therapy 1832, Rynd’s development of the hypodermic syringe 1844, and Leared’s, invention of the bi-aural stethoscope 1851.



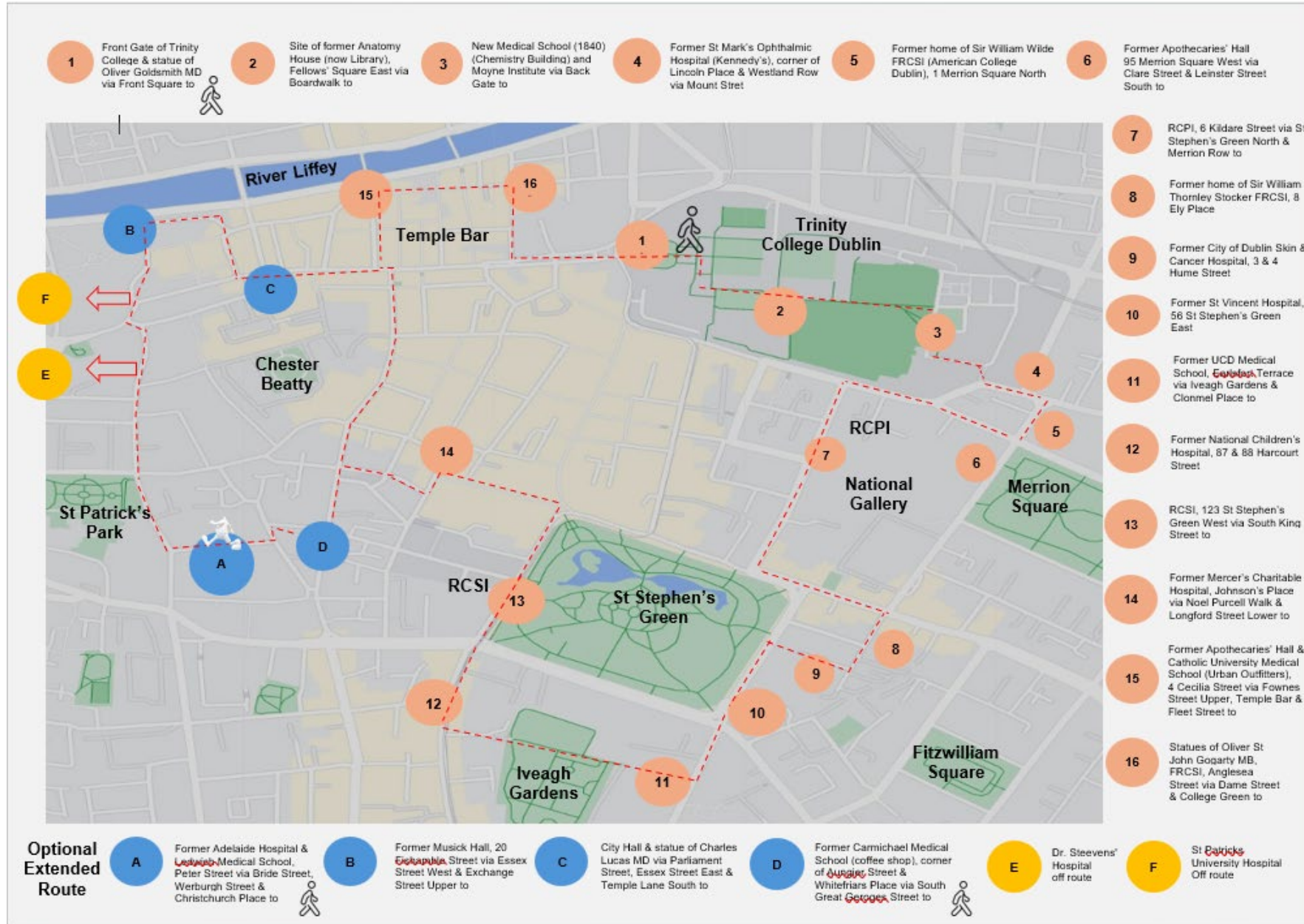
CONCLUSION



In the opinion of Daniel Reisman, President of the American College of Physicians, in 1921 “Graves as well as Stokes, while not the first to make use of bedside teaching.....Boerhaave had done it 100 years earlier.....did it so successfully and so consistently that it was adopted by teachers elsewhere and especially in North America.

Or, finally conclude in the words of Sir Gordon Wolstenholme the Hunterian medical historian and Master of the Honourable Company of Apothecaries speaking in 1989 “if Victorian medical teaching had been written by an Irishman, he would be accused of chauvinism.....The ultimate achievement of Graves and Stokes was the “Dublin School” a mighty heritage from which the twentieth century profited greatly.”

Map of Walking Tour



Self-Guided Walking Tour

Approx Duration: 60 mins

Adapted from <https://heritage.rcpi.ie/About-Us/Apothecaries-Hall-of-Dublin>

Thank You!

We hope you enjoy your walk



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❖ *References will be supplied on Request*