

Three Nineteenth-Century Limerick Apothecaries

JOHN PHAYER

The family background, relationships and lives of three members of the Phayer family, who pursued medical careers as apothecaries and doctors in the nineteenth century, are discussed. A list of apothecaries, and where they operated their businesses in Limerick city, is included, compiled from eighteenth and nineteenth century trade directories.

Dr Thomas Raleigh Phayer was born in Newcastle West, Co. Limerick circa 1805¹ and from the evidence that has been located, had one brother John and a sister Jane. No details survive about their parents because the surviving Roman Catholic baptismal records for Newcastle West only commence in 1815. The mother's surname may have been Raleigh as both Thomas and his brother John had Raleigh as their 'middle' names.² This is a long established surname in the area and a Thomas Rawleigh is listed as a painter and glazier in the town in 1824.³

The first reference to Thomas Phayer's medical career is the appearance of his name as having been examined by the Governor and Director of the Apothecaries Hall in Dublin and receiving a certificate of his proper qualification to enlist himself as 'an apprentice to learn the art and profession of Apothecary' in May 1815.⁴ It was a long apprenticeship as it was only in June 1824 that he obtained his Diploma and was regarded as being 'duly qualified to practice the art of apothecary'.⁵

Once qualified he immediately set up his own apothecary business in Newcastle West.⁶ Some time later he decided to become a surgeon and is recorded as having taken his membership exams at the London College of Surgeons and Physicians on 8 Dec 1829.⁷ He is next mentioned as living and working in Newcastle West in 1837 and is recorded as: 'Thomas R. Phayre, Esq. M.D.'⁸ while in 1846 he is again listed in a Directory under 'Physicians / Surgeons'.⁹ In valuation records of the 1840s he pays £17 in rent for premises on the Square while his residence was in Bridge Lane.¹⁰ While he was a tenant of house in the square, he in turn had a tenant there, Daniel Fitzgibbon, presumably sub letting portion of it as he was doing with his own house in Bridge St which also had a tenant, Richard Scully.

¹ Death notice: *Cork Examiner* 15 June 1851, aged 46 yrs.

² Barbara A. Phayre, *Cromwell's Legacy: The Story of the Phayre family in Ireland* (California, 2011) Appendix 3, pp 102-103.

³ *Pigots Directory of Munster – Newcastle*, 1824, p. 303.

⁴ *Apothecaries License in Dublin*, (Apothecaries Hall, Dublin) p. 44.

⁵ *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 June 1824.

⁶ *Pigots Directory of Munster* (1824) p. 303.

⁷ List of Members, 1829 Royal College of Surgeons of England, p. 212.

⁸ Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, vol. 1 (London, 1837) p. liv.

⁹ *Slater's Directory of Munster* (1846) p. 299.

¹⁰ *Griffiths Valuation of Ireland, 1848 – 1864*, Newcastle Union, p. 493b.

The only direct testimony we have in relation to Phayer comes from the admittedly somewhat unreliable memoir of Nicholas Upton D'Arcy, a Newcastle West resident, probably written in the early 1890s. He describes Dr Phayer as 'a queer fellow' and relates a conversation with him about his conducting experiments on patients when there was an outbreak of cholera in the town. He bled nine people one night, all of whom were dead in the morning. Far from feeling any remorse or even concern he is reported as saying that he felt quite justified in what he had done, as he was trying to find a cure for the disease.¹¹

Another instance of his approach to medicine is provided by an account of his action when a local man was killed by lightening in July 1842. As Superintendent of the Knockaderry Dispensary District he obtained permission from the jury, assembled to hold an inquest into the death, to perform a post-mortem on the body. There were few external injuries, mainly to the left ear. A detailed internal examination showed that the left part of the man's brain appeared to be 'wholly disorganised' along with damage appearing to the right lung. The abdomen area appeared to have escaped any injury from the lightening but a livid colour trace could be identified about the instep in the middle of the sole of the foot showing where the lightening exited his body. Apparently, the majority of the individual's clothes escaped damage except for his hat and left shoe which were torn to pieces.

The victim was a member of the travelling community and had a habit of carrying pins and needles in his hat which were found when he was killed. Dr Phayre suggested that these pins and needles acted as 'pointed conductors' and were primary factors in conducting the electricity. A woman and girl who were with the victim were struck to the ground with great violence within a few yards of the deceased but quickly recovered from their injuries. The woman was not able to give clear evidence at the inquest, apparently still in shock from the fright and 'appeared to have an inability to properly speak English'. The child, her niece of approximately 12 years of age, described the violent shock as 'a terrible box on the head, as if something very heavy had fallen on her' and recalled how she rolled over and over with a sheet of fire all around her. When called on by her aunt to run away, she was unable to get up as she felt 'as if her knees were broke'.

Another insight into the character of Dr Phayre was revealed at the inquest. Because the girl did not understand what an oath was, most of her other evidence could not be accepted or recorded. Dr Phayre, in establishing her lack of appreciation of the nature of an oath, asked her about her understanding of Heaven and Hell. In relation to the latter she said 'she often heard of it, did not know where it lay, but it was a place for protestants'.¹² In December 1842, Phayre was one of the signatories of a petition by doctors against the proposal that Medical Charities should not be placed under the control of the Poor Law Commissioners. He signed it 'Dr Thomas R. Phayre, Knockaderry Dispensary'.¹³

Phayre would appear to have gone to America in 1848 as indicated by his Will, which was dated 19 June 1848:

I the undersigned Thomas R. Phayre, Surgeon, late of Kilkenny and of Newcastle, Co. Limerick being of sound mind and health do make this my last will and testa-

¹¹ Mary Casteleyn, 'A Memoir of some 19th Century Residents of Newcastle, Co. Limerick and its Vicinity', *Old Limerick Journal*, vol. 43 (2009) pp 50-3.

¹² 'Original Report – Post-Mortem examination in a case of Death by Lightening', *The Dublin Medical Press*, vol. viii (July–Dec. 1842) p. 22.

¹³ 'Advertisements – The Medical Charities Bill', *ibid.*, p. 415.

ment as I think it prudent to do so previous to my voyage to America. I leave and bequeath to my brother John Phayer, apothecary of Kilkenny City, the freehold property which I hold in the town of Newcastle, Co. Limerick, to wit a dwelling house and offices in the Square ... also a dwelling house in Bridge St ... I leave and bequeath to my sister Jane Phayer, alias Poyntz, the freehold property I have in the town of Kilfinane ... to wit two slated houses and a piece of garden...for the term of her natural life, after her demise I wish this property to go to my brother and his children.

He then alludes to the contents of a sealed parcel, which he had deposited in the National Bank of Ireland containing share certificates and deposit receipts amounting to approx £750: 'I leave £300 in trust to my brother, John Phayer ... trustees are to invest ... for his use and at his death, this £300 is to be the property of his two sons, Joseph and Alexander Phayer and is to be divided equally between them when they arrive at age.'¹⁴

His sister Jane was to receive £300, the interest was made for her use and at the time of her death, the capital to be the property of her niece, Mary Jane Phayer (a daughter of John Phayer) 'interest is to be paid to her until she arrives at age, when it is to be given to her as a dowry;

Dr Phayer then left a legacy to his home town:

I leave and bequeath to be used as a loan fund for the town of Newcastle £150. The trustees (of the will) are empowered to place the last sum in the hands of proper persons in that town to lend it to the poor and it to be the nucleus of a loan fund, forever devoted to that type of institution. If the trustees cannot accomplish this, they are at liberty to divide it into £50 lots and give it to the Sisters of Charity in three different localities to be distributed amongst the indigent poor people.

No details survive of his trip to America, if it indeed took place. He is recorded in 1850 as taking a course in Midwifery in Anglesey Lying-In Hospital, Peter St, Dublin.¹⁵ However by the following year he was dead as his will was proved in 'common form of law by John Raleigh Phayer of Kilkenny, brother and one of next of kin of Testator' on 22 July 1851. There appears to be no provision made in the will for his wife, Ellen née Enright or for their son, also named Thomas who was baptised in the Church of Immaculate Conception Newcastle West on 7 May 1840.¹⁶

Dr Thomas Raleigh Phayre junior

Dr Phayre's son, Thomas, followed his father into the medical profession. He is listed as a Non-Matriculated student at Queen's College, Galway in 1857. His address is given as Athlone when he receives his qualifications, six years later. He is recorded in 1863 as having received a Diploma from the Coombe Lying-In Hospital, qualifying him to practice Midwifery¹⁷ and a few months later as having obtained a Diploma from the Apothecaries Hall of Ireland qualifying him to practice Medicine.¹⁸ After qualifying he went to Edinburgh where he attended the Royal College of Physicians and received his

¹⁴ Phayre, *Story of the Phayre family in Ireland*, p. 102.

¹⁵ *Thom's Directory of Ireland, 1850*. (Dublin, 1850), p. 274.

¹⁶ Baptismal Register, 1840, Church of the Immaculate Conception, Newcastle West.

¹⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Dec. 1863.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 28 March 1864.

licentiate in medicine and surgery in the following May.¹⁹ By 17 Sept 1864, he had returned to Athlone, Co. Westmeath to take up employment there but he also worked in the Limerick Union Workhouse where in 1870 he is listed as 'resident medical officer'.²⁰

In 1874 his prompt action in attending to a patient there who had attempted suicide was reported as having saved his life.²¹ However in the following year he was the subject of an enquiry by the Limerick Union on charges of overspending and negligence. The medicine account for the year ending September 1874 was £200 over-the-average. The four visiting physicians of the Workhouse: Drs O'Sullivan, O'Connor, Cullen and Barry were questioned and all claimed that Dr Phayre, as the resident physician, was responsible. The doctors also stated that when they visited his surgery, drugs and various medicines were lying about in a careless manner and a pauper boy was in charge. Somewhat surprisingly in the light of this evidence the doctors stated they did not wish to bring any case against Dr Phayre who was held in high regard by them.

The enquiry also found that many of the medicines which were purchased could have been prepared in the surgery itself and that excessive prices amounting to three times the price were paid for certain medicines. In Phayre's reply to these accusations, he claimed that the surgery was being cleaned out on the day these doctors visited the surgery, hence, the reason for it looking 'a little irregular'. He said that the pauper boy was clever and trustworthy, had worked in the surgery for eight years and had been adequately trained to make various medical mixtures. Dr Phayre also claimed that it was as cheap to order the various medicines rather than making them himself and pointed out he did not have adequate assistance in the surgery.

The Committee, while noting that there were no clear guidelines outlining proper work practices and authority to be followed by workhouse hospital's medical officers, found that Dr Phayre had committed inexcusable irregularities by ordering large supplies of drugs and medicine without obtaining appropriate permission from the Board of Guardians and that he had failed to monitor medicine wastage. It was found that the prices paid for medicines far exceeded the contract price and this practice was condemned. On the other hand, they accepted that he had to deal with poor working conditions in his surgery. They did not blame him for employing a pauper boy since this boy was working in the surgery when Dr Phayre took up his duties in the office nor did they object to him working there, as Dr Phayre did not have an efficient assistant.

However one of the most prominent Guardians, Lord Clarina, requesting Dr Phayre to resign from his position as resident medical officer as a result of the findings. Another member of the Board, Mr Studdert, pointed out that while there was no charge brought on his reputation or honour nevertheless Dr Phayre had been found guilty of 'great laxness in his discharge of his duties'. The Board of Guardians decided that Phayre should get the inquiry which he had requested and that the issue of his resignation and termination of employment should be postponed. The committee further recommended that a qualified resident apothecarist should be appointed and that medical staff should be reduced to one resident medical officer and also a resident assistant. They also believed that huge savings could be made if the Government could establish a medical store in Dublin for the supply and distribution of medicines and drugs at wholesale price to all workhouse hospitals.²²

Phayre appears to have resigned as requested and moved to Galway where he was listed as residing when he married in 1876. The wedding was in St Patrick's church Cork

¹⁹ Ibid., 19 May 1864.

²⁰ Slater's *Directory of Munster* (1870) p. 166.

²¹ *Irish Times*, 12 Feb. 1874.

²² *Irish Times*, 25 March 1875.

where his wife, Ellen Mary O'Grady, daughter of Jeremiah O'Grady, gentleman, presumably came from, though she was living in Patrickswell, Co. Limerick at the time of her marriage.²³ Dr Phayre continued to live and work in Galway. He is mentioned as one of the people who greeted Gladstone when he visited Athenry, Co. Galway on 10 December 1881 where he called for 'three cheers for Mr Gladstone' but received no response of any kind. He was described as a 'home ruler and tenant righter'.²⁴ Dr Thomas Raleigh Phayre Junior, died in Galway in March 1884 aged 55 years.

John Phayer

Dr Thomas Raleigh Phayer Senior had one brother, John, who was also an apothecary in both Newcastle West and Kilkenny. The first reference relating to John Phayer is his certificate from the Apothecaries Hall, Dublin to enlist himself as an apprentice on 7 Sept 1825. He received his qualification in Apothecary from the Apothecaries Hall in 1835.²⁵ That he was in business in Newcastle West is shown by a bond in which his name appears as a security for a Pawnbroker, William C. Hartnett of Listowel, Co. Kerry on 19 July 1831.²⁶ By the mid 1830s however John Phayer had moved to Kilkenny where he married a widow, Catherine Murphy, and had three sons, all born in Kilkenny – Joseph (born in 1836), Thomas (born in 1836) and Alexander-Patrick (born in 1838).²⁷ Three specific references to John Phayer residing and owning property in St Mary's parish, Kilkenny appear in 'Griffiths Valuation in the 1840s'.²⁸

In 1848 he is mentioned as one of those chosen to inspect the Kilkenny workhouse to determine the exact number of inmates there.²⁹ In March 1876, the *Irish Times* recorded the birth of a granddaughter, Frances, the child of his son Dr Alexander Phayre, who had continued the family medical tradition. John Phayer died on 4 April 1876 and his death was registered in the District of St Mullins in the New Ross Union in County Carlow.³⁰

Jane Phayer

Thomas and John Phayer had one sister, Jane Phayer, who married a surgeon, William Poyntz, in 1845. Two separate marriage entries have been found for this union as her husband was a Protestant. The first is in the Roman Catholic register for St Andrews Church, in Kilfinane for 12 August 1847,³¹ whilst the second entry is in the Church of Ireland register in Kilfinane for 12 Oct 1847.³² According to Griffiths Valuation William Poyntz had property holdings in Kilfinane. No records of any children have been found for this couple and their final whereabouts is unknown.³³

²³ Civil Registration Marriage certificate, 27 September 1876, copy in author's possession.

²⁴ A.B. Cooke and J.R. Vincent, 'Herbert Gladstone, Forster and Ireland 1881 – 2 (1)', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 17, issue 68 (Sept, 1971) pp 521-48.

²⁵ 'List of practitioners in Medicine and Surgery, 1868', *The Medical Register Journal* (1868) p. 348.

²⁶ *Report from the Select Committee on Pawnbroking in Ireland together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index*, 1838, p. 179.

²⁷ Graiguenamanagh Church Records, *Baptismal Register*, Graiguenamanagh Roman Catholic Church, 1847. Available for download at: <http://www.rootsireland.ie/>

²⁸ *Slater's Directory of Leinster* (1846) p. 57.

²⁹ 'Papers relating to the Relief of Distress and State of Unions of Ireland', 5th series, part 12, (1848) p. 364.

³⁰ Church of the Latter Day Saints Death records; <http://www.familysearch.org>; Also copy of Civil Registration Death certificate, 4 April 1876, in possession of author.

³¹ Marriage Register, St Andrews Catholic Church, Kilfinane, 1847.

³² Phayre. *Story of the Phayre family in Ireland*, p. 102.

³³ I would like to dedicate this article in memory of Michael Phayer, who died 18 September 2011.

List of Apothecaries in Limerick City from 18th & 19th Century Trade Directories

J. Allen	George St	Deane 1838; Triennial 1840
John Allen	1 Shannon St	Pigot 1824; Slater 1856
Joseph Allen	Main St / Creagh Lane	Ferrar 1769
John Beveridge	Francis St	Triennial 1840
James Bold	Main St, Irishtown	Ferrar 1769
John Bold	Broad St	Lucas 1788; Holden 1809
John Bouchier	83 George St Upper Glentworth St	Slater 1856; Slater 1870
Richard Bouchier	12 George St	Pigot 1824; Deane 1838; Triennial 1840
Bourke and Co.	137 George St	Henry & Coghlan; Slater 1870
M.V. Bourke	137b George's Quay	Slater 1856, 1870,
Byfield and Co.	132 George St	Slater 1846 & 1856
Thomas Carey	Rutland St	Triennial 1840
James Carroll	12 Charlotte Quay	Deane 1838; Slater 1856
John Carroll	Broad St	Pigot 1824
John Carroll	12 Charlotte Quay	Triennial 1840; Slater 1846
J. Cleary	William St	Deane 1838
M. R. Cleary	42 William St	Henry and Coghlan 1867
Ml. P. Cleary	6 William St 36 William St	Triennial 1840; Slater 1846 & 1856;
P.J. Croker	32 Catherine St	Bassett 1877
W. Daly	Charlotte Quay	Deane 1838
George Davis	Main St, Ballsbridge	Ferrar 1769
George Davis	Mary St	Lucas 1788
Samuel Davis	Main St, Shamble Lane	Ferrar 1769

John Donegan	Unknown	Holden 1809
John Dungan	Unknown	Holden 1809
Wm.S. Frazer	35 George St	Deane 1838; Triennial 1840; Slater 1846
Robert Frith	18 Charlotte Quay	Deane 1838; Slater 1856; Henry and Coghlan 1867
Wm J. T. Galbraith	Commercial buildings	Slater 1846
Charles S. Grace	Unknown	Holden 1809
T. S. Hance	Unknown	Bassett 1880 & 1884
Stephen Hastings and Son	Main St, Exchange	Ferrar 1769
George Henchy	Mary St	Lucas 1788
John Hogan	Unknown 128 George St George St 131 Geo St	Holden 1809; Pigot 1824; Deane 1838; Slater 1846 & Triennial 1840
C. & J. Homan	17 George St	Slater 1870
E. Homan	14 Rutland St	Pigot 1824 Deane 1838
Ed. Homan	17 George St	Triennial 1840 Slater 1846 & 1856 Henry and Coghlan 1867
?? Ingram	William St	Deane 1838
Eugene Kelly	Nicholas St	Slater 1846
T. Kelly	William St	Deane 1838
Michael Kennelly	11 Rutland St	Slater 1870
John H. Lee	10 Ellen St	Bassett 1879 & 1884
John Joseph Locke	Ballsbridge	Pigot 1824
Jeremiah Madden	5 William St	Pigot 1824
McMahon and Co.	12 George St	Henry and Coghlan 1867

McMahon & Co	136 George St	Slater 1870
Day, McMahon and Co.	136 George St	Bassett 1875
? Moore	117 George St	Deane 1838
John Moore	4 Upper Cecil St	Triennial 1840; Slater's Munster 1846
Richard Murray	Unknown	Holden 1809
George Myles	26 George St	Slater 1870
Eugene O' Kelly	Bowman St	Slater 1856
Timothy O' Kelly	9 William St	Pigot 1824; Triennial 1840
James O' Shaughnessy	12 George St	Triennial 1840; Slater 1856
James Barrington Parker	7 Upper Cecil St	Slater 1846
Sarah Phillips	Unknown	Holden 1809
John Purcell	Unknown	Holden 1809
Eustace Rahilly	Mungret St	Lucas 1788; Holden 1809
V. Rahilly	Upper William St	Pigot 1824
John F. Raleigh	19 William St	Deane 1838; Triennial 1840
Wm Richardson	Mainguard	Ferrar 1769
Luke Rowe	Market House, Mungret St	Ferrar 1769; Lucas 1788; Holden 1809
George & John Ryan	Quay Lane	Pigot 1824
J. Ryan	Rutland St	Deane 1838
Lawrence Ryan	36 Upper George St	Pigot 1824
P. H. Scott	Broad St	Deane 1838
Patrick Hugh Scott	5 Bridge St	Slater 1846
Anthony Size	Mary St 51 William St 22 Charlotte Quay	Deane 1838; Triennial 1840 Slater 1846