

Abstract presented at the meeting British Society for the History of ENT
Held December 3rd 2015
In the Toynbee McKenzie Room, at the Royal Society of Medicine, London

ENT and Irish Independence – a View from Both Sides

Robbie Woods, Conrad Timon

The Irish Free State seceded from the United Kingdom in December 1922. ENT was a relatively new specialty, but there had been significant contributions by its early pioneers in Ireland, such as Sir William Wilde. Two internationally respected and closely linked ENT surgeons had particular roles to play in the formation of the Irish Free State from opposing sides.

Personal correspondence between two prominent ENT surgeons was analysed alongside books, memoirs and historical accounts. MEDLINE was searched for contributions of these surgeons to ENT.

Robert Woods, the first surgeon in Ireland to specialise solely in ENT, had an illustrious career that included presidency of the Royal College of Surgeons and a knighthood from King George V. He became politicised during the Great War, being elected a Unionist Member of Parliament, and was involved in Anglo-Irish negotiations during secession. Sir Robert was a dedicated teacher, with his protégé and eventual eulogist Oliver St. John Gogarty becoming another famous ENT surgeon. Gogarty was a polymath who not only established a successful ENT practice, but became a renowned author and poet and was well known for flamboyant theatrics in the operating room. He was a staunch Republican and Sinn Féiner who became a Senator in the new Irish Free State.

With the impending 100 year anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising, it is poignant to discuss the role of distinguished ENT surgeons in Irish politics. Practice at the time was evolving rapidly and contributions of these surgeons to the specialty were considerable.