

Dr. Bryan G. Alton 1919 – 1991

Dr. Bryan G. Alton was a polymath with notable achievements in such diverse fields as medicine, art, banking, administration and politics among others. Boundless energy and drive, a formidable intellect, together with an abiding interest in people, manifesting itself in the ability to relate with his considerable charm, to all manner of persons irrespective of class or creed – collectively these attributes formed the basis for an outstanding career. The only child of a banking family Bryan was educated in Castleknock College where he had a dazzling career. This brilliance continued throughout his medical studies at UCD from which he graduated with a first class degree. Quite unprecedentedly he was appointed to the consultant staff of the Mater Hospital within two years of graduation. For the remainder of his professional life, Bryan Alton served this hospital wholeheartedly and most effectively in a variety of ways. Most significantly perhaps were his masterly chairmanship for nine years of the Mater Hospital Medical Board and his organisation in the 1960s of the Mater Hospital Pools which provided much needed financial assistance to the hospital at a time of financial stringency.

From early on, Bryan built up an enviably large medical practice, founded on his professional expertise, his compassion for and care of his patients. It was a measure of his constant concern for the less well off and the disadvantaged that a significant portion of his sessions was on a pro bono basis to deserving patients who received the same dedicated attention as more affluent and distinguished clients. In time, Bryan's contribution to medicine was recognised by his election to the prestigious position as President of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, where with typical energy and enthusiasm he initiated many improvements and fostered important contacts with several Far Eastern and Middle Eastern states. Always keenly interested in politics, Bryan soon realised that a sound working relationship with politicians and the different government agencies was essential to furtherance of his medical goals and aspirations. Not surprisingly he successfully stood for election as an independent senator representing the National University. Following family tradition Bryan Alton joined the board of Ansbacher Bank where he was subject to first hand exposure of the world of high finance.

For most of his life Bryan Alton was deeply interested in and involved in the arts. He was gratified to be chosen on three occasions as Master Goldsmith of the Company of Goldsmiths. Similarly, late in life his appointment as a director of the National Gallery of Ireland afforded him much pleasure. Over the years Bryan amassed an outstanding and high class collection of silver, paintings, porcelain and furniture, based on a most "discerning eye" and the advice of carefully selected experts. Underpinning his collecting was meticulous research and enhanced by regular visits to galleries and museums in the course of his many trips abroad.

In his home Bryan was a most attentive and generous host. Quite regularly towards the end of the evening he would display to his guests some of his "treasures" and regaled them with fascinating accounts of their history and provenance. A highly sophisticated man, Bryan Alton was invariably an engaging and entertaining companion – totally devoid of any form of pretension. Kindness and loyalty were dominant and distinguishing characteristics of this remarkable man. During his lifetime he strove to help all manner of people employing his considerable talents and widespread contacts in the process. He was never deterred by the demands of his extensive medical practice and his membership of so many voluntary bodies and other organisations.

He was a devoted husband to his gracious wife Winnie who supported him wholeheartedly in all his endeavours. His care for her and attention to his seven children were exemplary. To this day Bryan Alton is still remembered in many circles. He has left behind him a secure legacy in the persons of his family together with the enduring fruits of philanthropy and his unique art collection.

J. G. C. July 2016