

Professor E.J. Conway

The Conway Institute of Biomolecular and Biomedical Research is named after Professor E.J. Conway, FRS the first Professor of Biochemistry and Pharmacology at University College Dublin (1933-1963).

Biography

EDWARD JOSEPH CONWAY was an international figure in biophysics and an outstanding Irish scientist. He was born near Nenagh, Co. Tipperary on 3 July 1894. Although his family moved to Sandymount in Dublin, Conway always retained a great love of the Irish countryside, and for fly-fishing.

Young Conway first attended the Christian Brothers' School at Nenagh. He was a quiet and serious boy, but had a sense of fun. He was always regarded as clever, but at times seemed out of touch with his lessons, simply because he had become so deeply involved with his own thoughts.

His ability was amply confirmed when he obtained sixth place in Ireland for the junior grade of the Intermediate Board, qualifying for a first-class exhibition in experimental science and a similar award in mathematics, as well as a prize for modern literature. He chose the science award and entered as a student at Blackrock College, Co. Dublin.

Here, he earned prizes and awards in experimental science and mathematics and, in 1912 matriculated in the National University examinations, obtained an exhibition to University College Dublin. He graduated in medicine in 1921 but only used his medical course as a springboard to train for research in the biological sciences. He joined the staff of Professor James O'Connor and taught physiology and engaged in research.

Conway's researches comprise three overlapping phases: 1920-1937 (renal function), 1937-1945 (ionic balance of tissue, particularly muscle/ chemical evolution of the ocean), post-1945 (acid secretion by yeast and gastric mucosa).

Invention – “Conway Unit”

Conway invented a simple but accurate method of measuring minute quantities by distillation using a glass dish with two concentric chambers. The method has been used to measure levels in blood of ammonia, carbon dioxide, glucose etc. His book on the use of the units has gone through 5 editions and has been translated into Japanese.

Notable Dates

1894 – Born on July 3rd in Nenagh, Co. Tipperary

1932 - Appointed to the first Chair of Biochemistry & Pharmacology at UCD.

1947 - Elected a Fellow of the Royal Society

1953 – Founded the Graduates' Association of the National University of Ireland with an associated publication *The University Review*

1961 – Nominated by Pope John XXIII as a Member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (only Irish scientist honoured)

1968 – Awarded the Boyle medal by the Royal Dublin Society

1968 – Died December 29th in Dublin

(Taken from the Biographical Memoirs of the Royal Society 1969, vol 15; pp69-82)