



# *Footsteps*

A WALK THROUGH 123

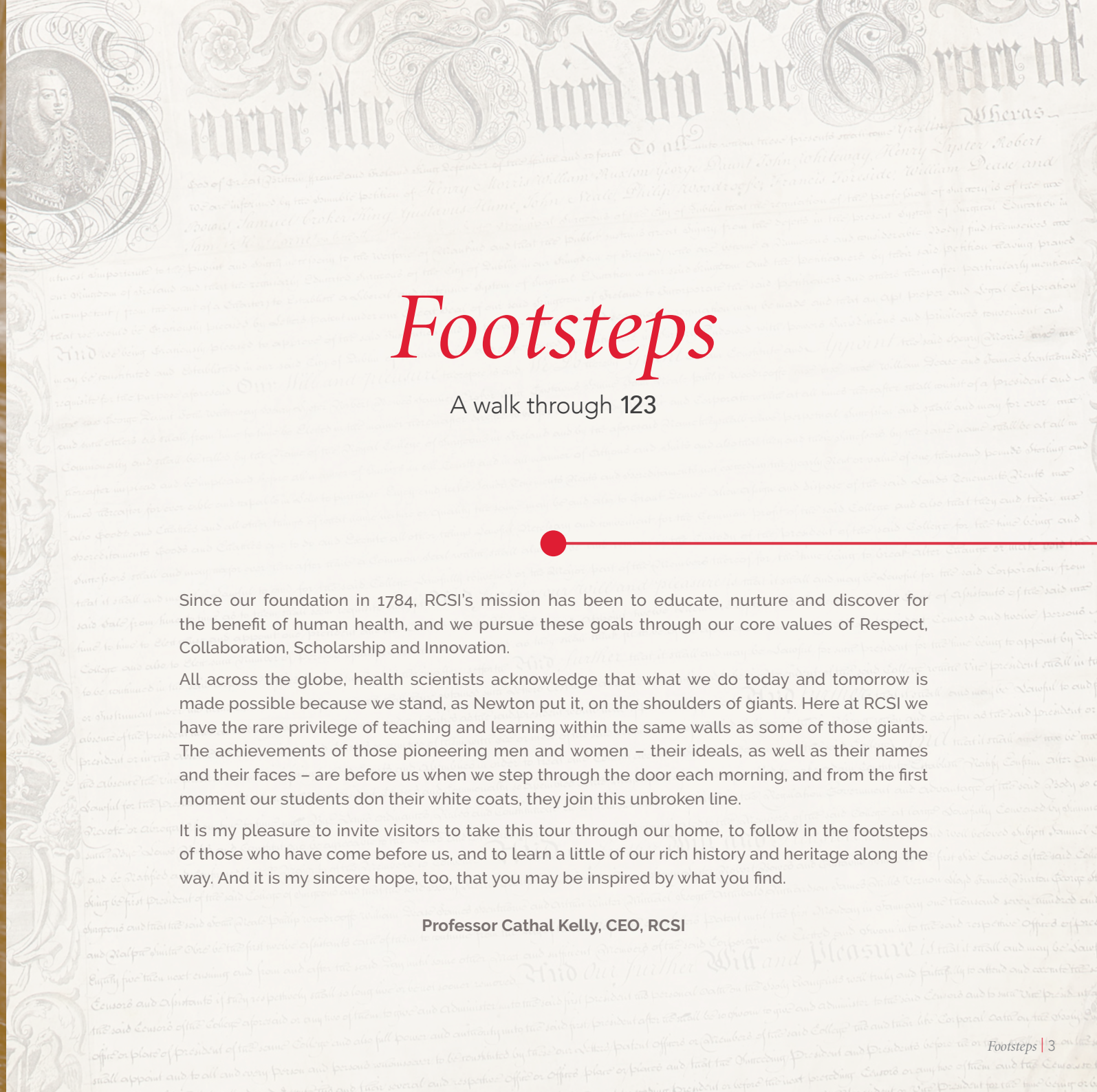


**RCSI**  
UNIVERSITY  
OF MEDICINE  
AND HEALTH  
SCIENCES









# Footsteps

A walk through 123

Since our foundation in 1784, RCSI's mission has been to educate, nurture and discover for the benefit of human health, and we pursue these goals through our core values of Respect, Collaboration, Scholarship and Innovation.

All across the globe, health scientists acknowledge that what we do today and tomorrow is made possible because we stand, as Newton put it, on the shoulders of giants. Here at RCSI we have the rare privilege of teaching and learning within the same walls as some of those giants. The achievements of those pioneering men and women – their ideals, as well as their names and their faces – are before us when we step through the door each morning, and from the first moment our students don their white coats, they join this unbroken line.

It is my pleasure to invite visitors to take this tour through our home, to follow in the footsteps of those who have come before us, and to learn a little of our rich history and heritage along the way. And it is my sincere hope, too, that you may be inspired by what you find.

**Professor Cathal Kelly, CEO, RCSI**

# the Advancement of Surgery

It starts with an idea, an ambition. A vision.

A quarter-millennium ago, an Irish surgeon returned home from his training on continental Europe, and he brought with him some ideas, some fresh thinking. His name was Sylvester O'Halloran, and what he saw, when he looked at surgery in his native land, left a lot to be desired.

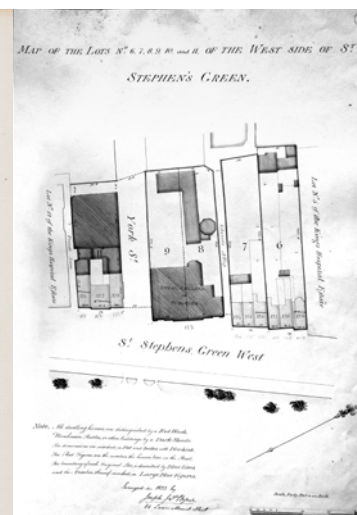
For several hundred years surgery was the poor relation in the world of medicine. Physicians had the upper hand: they were engaged in an intellectual pursuit, a realm of book-learning. They were respected, they studied with professors at universities, and they could

call themselves doctors. Not so with surgeons: theirs was a practical trade for which they used their hands and, worse, terrifying tools: any amount of saws, knives, hooks, needles and lancets. They were trained through apprenticeships, the value of which varied widely depending on the master. In their ruling body since the Middle Ages, the Barber-Surgeons Guild, they were vastly outnumbered and outvoted by the barbers. Where they went, blood spilled. When your doctor washed his hands of you (metaphorically, not literally: the link between health and handwashing was not yet known), only then would he call for a surgeon. You only went to one when all else had failed, when life was

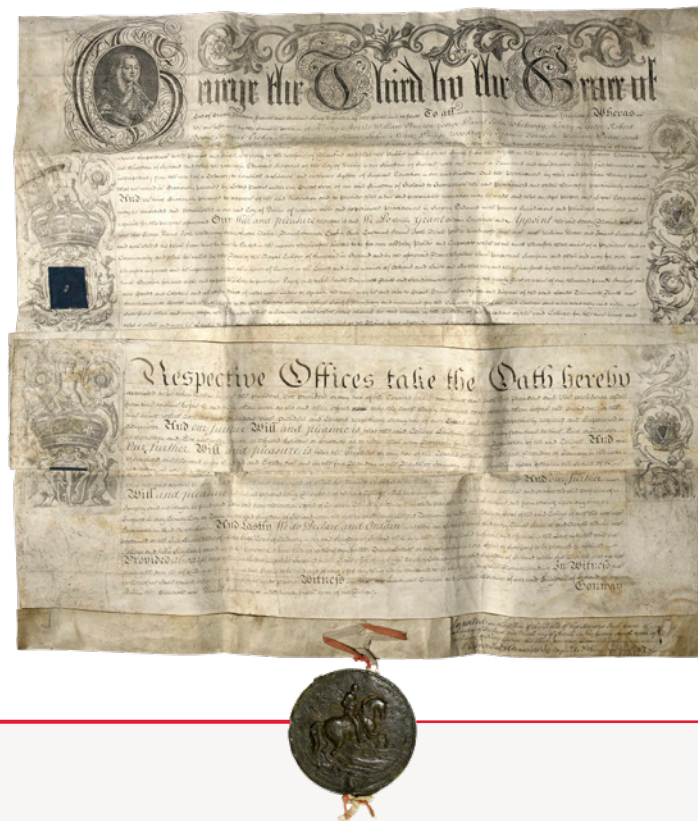


AN  
APPENDIX  
CONTAINING  
*Proposals for the ADVANCEMENT of  
SURGERY in IRELAND;  
With a retrospective View of the ANTIENT  
STATE of PHYSIC amongst us.*  
PRESENTED  
With Great DEFEERENCE and high ESTEEM to  
LUCIUS O'BRIEN, Esq;  
REPRESENTATIVE in PARLIAMENT for the  
BOROUGH of ENNIS.

ALTHOUGH it be universally admitted, that the profession of surgery is of the greatest utility to the state in time of war, and to the public at all times; and as scarce a man from the prince to the peasant, but must fall under the hands of surgery, at some period or other of his life, it must necessarily







otherwise intolerable. In the public perception, gifted and diligent surgeons – of which, happily, there were some – were lumped in with slapdash butchers – of which, alas, there were many more.

O'Halloran saw things differently. He was, after all, a pioneering ophthalmologist, particularly interested in the delicate and dangerous art of cataract removal. Clear-sightedness, you could say, was his specialty. And in Paris and elsewhere he had witnessed how surgery could remain a practical art and at the same time be established on a newly scientific footing. So he wrote a short text, *Proposals for the Advancement of Surgery in Ireland* (1765), in which he called for the creation of a list of competent surgeons, the

appointment of examining professors, and the establishment in Dublin of 'a decent and convenient edifice'.

O'Halloran's challenge was taken up by the Dublin Society of Surgeons, and in 1784 they received a Royal Charter extricating themselves from the Barber-Surgeons Guild and 'incorporating them separately and distinctly upon liberal and scientific principles'. For surgery in Ireland, the age of enlightenment had arrived. Its home – its head and its heart, and the place from which it reaches out to encompass the globe – is at Number 123, St Stephen's Green.

***Welcome to RCSI. Welcome to 123.  
Let's take a look around.***



# a Decent & Convenient *edifice*



While funds were being raised to make a reality of O'Halloran's vision, the College's first professors began teaching classes in their homes. A little later, a two-storey building was acquired in nearby Mercer Street, a location with medical connections dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century and still part of the RCSI campus. There was a lecture theatre, a museum and some offices here, as well as – discreetly connected to the street by a narrow lane – a dissecting room, for in that period anatomists were obliged to buy their subjects from so-called 'resurrection men': grave-robbers.

From the start, the College flourished, thanks in large part to the need for surgeons on the battlefields of Europe. The College then purchased an old Quaker burial-ground on the corner of York Street and St Stephen's Green, and in 1810 RCSI opened its door at Number 123. You can still see that early façade, but you have to know where to look.



Initially, the building was styled as an elegant three-bay Roman temple. But very soon the College was outgrowing those original dimensions. What happened next, in the 1820s, involved an extraordinary architectural coup. The premises more than doubled in size, extending to the familiar seven bays, and as part of the process the front door and the entire stone pediment were moved several metres to the right. The new roofline introduced sculptural figures to watch over the College and the city: at the apex, Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, with his serpent-entwined staff; to his left, Hygeia, goddess of health and cleanliness; on his right, the goddess of wisdom and war, Athena.



1750



1810



1830



2010



*Please, step inside...*

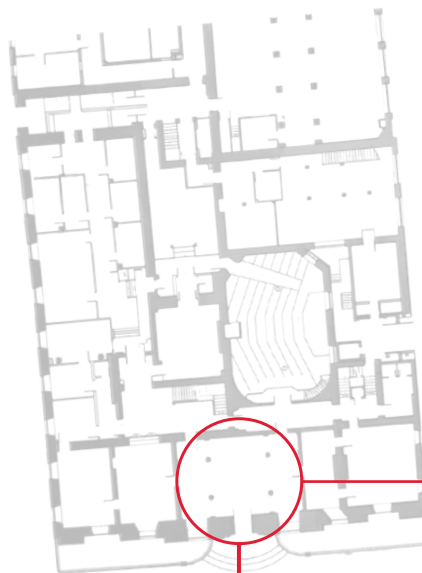
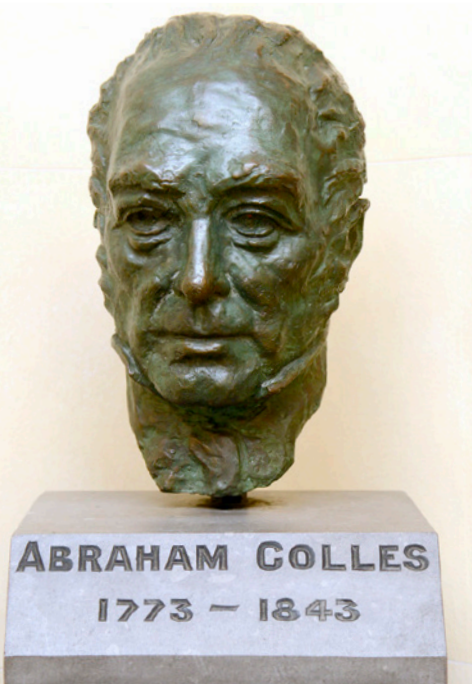


## Entrance Hall



Asclepius keeps a close eye on those who come and go by the front door of Number 123. Below his keystone image is a pale-blue-banded clock, a later addition, immortalised in James Joyce's *Dubliners* ('it was on the stroke of ten'). To pass through this doorway is to find oneself in a sort of time machine. Georgian shades into high Victorian. The great flagstones are polished and gently hollowed by the countless others who have come before you, and whether passing through or here to stay, you add your imprint. But make no mistake: behind the doors of the Robert Smith Room, or in the Abraham Colles Room (the President's suite), or in the stained-glass splendour of the Albert Theatre, the talk will be of the future, of the next impossible problem for surgery to solve.





Pause a moment here to meet Sir William Dease. A founder of the College and our first Professor of Surgery, Dease was also intimately associated with the radical United Irish movement. When he heard of his impending arrest he is said to have taken his own life by opening his femoral artery. Now look closely at the statue's left leg: the crack there follows the line of the same artery. At RCSI we prize science and rationalism – but that does not stop us enjoying a little dramatic irony when it literally lands in our laps...

*Take the doorway on the left,  
marked 'Main Stairs'.*



# the Library & its Treasures





In the hallway at the foot of the stairs, look up: there are plaster acorns and oak leaves in the ceiling rose, unperturbed since they dried in 1810. Various meeting-rooms branch off this space, but we'll push through the tall doors in front us, formerly the entrance to the Library. The few steps down, dating from the 1870s, had the neat effect of raising the ceiling here. Nowadays, our Library is across the road, in the gleaming, contemporary surrounds of Number 26 York Street. But we still hold many treasures bequeathed by time, notably a 14<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript by the early English surgeon John of Arderne. Taking pride of place too are rare editions of works by Avicenna (1544), Hippocrates (1554) and Vesalius (1555).



At the end of the corridor, turn right, towards where the Prize Boards begin. The names here date from the College's earliest days and continue right through to the present. Our corridors are long and winding, so there will always be room for the next generation of high achievers.





# the Anatomy Room



We're now outside the Anatomy Room – in many respects the heart of RCSI.

As we have seen, anatomy was a murky subject when the College began teaching, but after the Anatomy Act of 1832, the resurrectionists' trade was wiped out. Thereafter, doctors, anatomists and medical students had legal provision to dissect the unclaimed bodies of those who died in hospitals, prisons or workhouses. The Act also allowed for the donation of bodies by next of kin – the sole practice RCSI engages in today. Every autumn, our White Coat Ceremony reminds incoming students of the extraordinary generosity of such a gift: these subjects will be the students' first patients and in a way, too, their first teachers. The profound impact of this experience is never forgotten.

Access to the Anatomy Room is strictly controlled, of course, so you may have to imagine its high-ceilinged, light-filled space. Remarkably, too, it is also a gallery of contemporary Irish art. Sculptures, busts and paintings line the walls at an elevated height, and tumbling figures are suspended from the rafters. This is entirely appropriate, as art and anatomy have been entwined since the Renaissance – a connection fostered to this day by our annual RCSI Art Awards. Why do we value this connection so strongly? Quite simply because – as our Professor of Anatomy, Clive Lee, will tell you –

*While medicine makes life possible,  
art makes it worthwhile.*







*Under  
Glass in  
the Atrium*





In the chequerboard-floored Atrium we find a rotating selection of weird and wonderful artefacts from the College's Heritage Collections. Today it may be a specimen in a jar, a frog or puffer fish, or an anatomical wax model from the days before preservation. It may be a gas mask from World War I, or a battlefield amputation kit from fifty years before that. Or an ornate porcelain jar... for leeches. Many of the items date from the College's long-gone Museum, which might best be thought of as the research laboratory of the time. On another day, the display might be themed around medical instruments, particularly those associated with

figures from the College: you may have O'Halloran's cataract knives, Samuel Croker-King's improved trepan for drilling a hole in the cranium, or Francis Rynd's forerunner of the hypodermic syringe. There could be Arthur Leared's binaural stethoscope, or Robert McDonnell's blood transfusion apparatus (a possible influence on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*). Another time it could be medals, or menus, or tiny bottles with the oddest of contents: anyone for a drop of Valentine's Meat Juice?





*the*  
**Main**  
*Staircase*







We're going upstairs – take the main staircase off the Entrance Hall. Watch your step – the motifs in the carpet depict the crowned harp and a fleam, an ancient bloodletting tool – but also keep an eye out for the curious Venetian Gothic opening above you, a Victorian-era addition. And envisage, if you can, the skeleton of what was called a cameleopard – a giraffe – that once rose up in this stairwell. Give a nod to Professor John Kirby on the return; back when things were very different, Kirby had a novel technique for teaching military surgery – using cadavers – as one contemporary recorded:

*For the purpose of demonstrating the destructive effects of firearms upon the human frame... the lecturer entered with his pistol in his hand, and levelling the mortiferous weapon at the enemy, magnanimously discharged several rounds, each followed by repeated bursts of applause...*

At the top of the stairs is the Sir Thomas Myles Room, where we display the College's ornate silver Mace and our Barber-Surgeons' Poles. The red and white striped poles, signifying blood and bandaging, remind us of our medieval origins, and it is for this reason that our livery today, including our staff and student cards, features the same bright red and brilliant white.





# College Hall

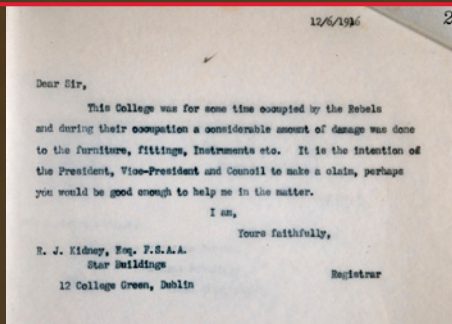




Once a large museum, this great room was remodelled in 1905 for use as an examination hall. From that time it has been used for social occasions too – parties, dances and Charter Day dinners. But it is also a key location in Ireland's national narrative, for it was here that Michael Mallin and Constance Markievicz established a garrison during the 1916 Rising. Previously they had been stationed in St Stephen's Green, but when they came under fire from the rooftop of the Shelbourne Hotel, they retreated to the College by pushing past a bewildered professor going in the door. Protected by the stout windowless walls, the rebels holed up in the Hall for almost a week before the general surrender was announced. Within weeks, students were once again sitting their exams here.



At the time, the College authorities were distinctly unimpressed by the rebels' occupation of their premises, but today we celebrate the association: we take pride in the bullet-marked façade of 123 and RCSI's central place in the birth of modern Ireland. We take pride too in the recovered histories of RCSI surgeons who treated the wounded in surrounding hospitals regardless of whether they were civilians, soldiers or insurgents. And at the same time, in that period of terrible upheaval, we remember the staff and students – more than half of the College population – who played their part in the conflagration of 1914 – 18.



*the*  
**Board  
Room**





Our walk through 123 finishes in the Board Room. Though renovated in recent times – note the mirroring carpet and ceiling – this airy and elegant space is one of the least-altered parts of College. The three great windows overlooking the Green date from our 1810 incarnation – the plans for which are in the portrait of George Renny, the man who drew together so much of the original funding that made RCSI a reality. Until recently, all the portraits here were uniformly sombre, uniformly male and, truth be told, often rather uninspiring (see below). But that cannot be said of our latest canvases. As part of the wider Women on Walls initiative, RCSI commissioned eight new

portraits of women associated with the College whose ground-breaking achievements had previously been overlooked. Pictured here, clockwise from top left, are Dr Emily Winifred Dickson, the first female Fellow of the College; Dr Barbara Maive Stokes, a tireless advocate for children and adults with special needs; Mary Frances Crowley, founding Dean of the Faculty of Nursing; and Sr Dr Maura Lynch, who improved the lives of thousands of women in Angola and Uganda. By enhancing the visibility of historical female leaders in healthcare, we hope to inspire current and future generations to take their rightful place at the forefront of medical endeavour.











Outside, the tramway clangs to rest. Locals and visitors disperse about their business. The treetops sway, and the sun warms the stone of 123, or the rain washes it, yet again. And in here, we are doing what we have always done, and what we will continue to do: we are looking to the future, pushing the boundaries of the next healthcare frontier – all the while taking inspiration from those in whose footsteps we follow.

Thank you for visiting RCSI.

# References

## The Advancement of Surgery

Left to right: Watercolour in the Library of the Meath Hospital, Dublin, artist unknown, 1817 ('A surgical operation to remove a malignant tumour from a man's left breast and armpit in a Dublin drawing room, 1817', Wellcome Collection, CC BY). The surgeon performing the operation is Rawdon Macnamara, President of RCSI, 1831. The caption records: 'R. Power, operated on July 28<sup>th</sup>, died this Aug[ust] 11<sup>th</sup>, 1817'. Sylvester O'Halloran, *Proposals for the advancement of surgery in Ireland* (1765). Map showing RCSI property on Lots 8 and 9, St Stephen's Green, 1832 (The King's Hospital Archives). Portrait of Sylvester O'Halloran (1728 – 1807), artist unknown. RCSI Royal Charter granted by George III on 11 February 1784, RCSI/Charter/01.

## A Decent and Convenient Edifice

Bottom left: Watercolour of RCSI (1810), artist unknown. Watermark: drawing by William Murray for base and capital of columns in museum, 13 December 1826, RCSI/Arch/1/1. Upper right: Image of St. Stephen's Green from *Dublin, One Thousand Years* by Stephen Conlin, published by The O'Brien Press Ltd., Dublin © Stephen Conlin.

## Entrance Hall

Watermark, William Murray drawing of doorway, RCSI/Arch/1/1. Bust of Abraham Colles, artist unknown (late 20<sup>th</sup> century). Colles became a licentiate of RCSI in 1795 and was appointed to two chairs in 1804: anatomy and physiology, and surgery. He served as President of the College in 1802 and 1830, and is perhaps best known for describing, and giving his name to, the Colles fracture.

## The Library and its Treasures

Clockwise from top: portrait of Dr Victoria Coffey (1911 – 1999) by Molly Judd. In this portrait – part of the 2019 RCSI Women on Walls campaign – Dr Coffey is depicted in the old library. Avicenna, *Liber canonis, de medicinis cordialibus, et cantica* (1544). The old library, c. 1950. Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica libri septum* (second edition, 1555). Watermark, *Practica Magistri Johannis Arderne* ('The Lentaigine Manuscript'), RCSI/MS/97.

## The Anatomy Room

Top left: Robert Jackson, *The Anatomy Lesson of the Irish College of Surgeons*, oil on canvas (2009). Bottom left: Mick O'Dea, *The Ever Present Dead*, mixed media (on loan from the artist); in background, Avril Hutch, *Purkinje*, acrylic on polycarbonate (2017). Inset: Wax model of the head, Jacques Talrich, part of a gift of 44 wax models donated by the Duke of Northumberland, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, in 1830. Right: Eithne Jordan, *Anatomy Room I*, acrylic and gouache on paper (2017).

## Under Glass in the Atrium

Left to right: spider in jar, RCSI/B/10. Set of amputation instruments used in the Crimean War, RCSI/MI/1545/02. Valentine's meat juice (a tonic made from beef juice, popular in the 1870s), RCSI/MI/1544.







RCSI museum, c. 1890. The museum went into decline in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its collections disbanded by the 1980s. For more on the medical tools, see the RCSI booklet and online exhibition, *Instruments & Innovations*. The bust is of Prof John Kirby (1781 – 1853) by Thomas Kirk (commissioned 1833); some of Kirby's exploits are noted on the next page.

### The Main Staircase

The quotation here comes from *Erinensis*, 'Sketches of the surgical profession in Ireland, no. IV, Mr Kirby', *The Lancet* (1824). The silver mace was commissioned from West & Sons, College Green, for £110 in 1854. Traditionally, the poles are carried on state occasions by the two most junior members of the College Council.

### College Hall

Clockwise from top: College Hall in 1916, RCSI/VS/Photo/11; the first aid station was set up behind the white screen. Exterior of RCSI, 1916 (National Museum of Ireland, HE: EW.1606.1). College Hall set for Charter Day dinner, 11 February 1912, RCSI Heritage Collections. Insurance letter, RCSI/LET/22, p. 217.

### The Board Room

Clockwise from top-left: Dr Emily Winifred Dickson (1866 – 1944) by Mick O'Dea; Dr Barbara Maive Stokes (1922 – 2009) by Catherine Creaney; Dean Mary Frances Crowley (1906 – 1990) by William Nathans; Sr Dr Maura Lynch (1938 – 2017) by Enda Griffin. Right: Dr Dickson's Preliminary Education certificate, RCSI/IP/Dickson/1/1/1 (note how 'Mr' has been amended by hand to 'Miss').

### Last Page

The artwork behind the students in their white coats is a 'Time Capsule' installation in 26 York St by the artist Vanessa Donoso López and curator Clodagh Kenny. It consists of clay bullae made from the soil of three locations: the site of the Elephant Tavern in Essex St, where the first RCSI meeting took place; the Rotunda Hospital, where those meetings were held until 1810, when 123 opened its doors; and 26 York St. Inside each capsule is a message etched on wafer-thin metal scrolls by each of the students of the graduating class of 2017. The capsules will be opened, and the messages within – the students' hopes and ambitions – will be revealed, in 2057.

### Reference Pages

The central image here is from a stained glass window in the Abraham Colles Room, one of a pair gifted to the College by Thomas Ottiwell Graham, FRCSI and President of RCSI, 1942–44.

### Project Credits and Select Bibliography

Drawing by William Murray for base and capital of columns in museum, 13 December 1826, RCSI/Arch/1/1.

### Slipcase image

For discussion of the pediment statuary and keystone, see Alan Browne and Beatrice Doran, 'The external statuary of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland', *Journal of the Irish Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons* (1988), vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 177 – 179.



## project credits

*Footsteps: a walk through 123* was researched and written by Dr Ronan Kelly, RCSI Library, in collaboration with Philip Curtis, Director of Admissions, Recruitment and Student Services.

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Design: Barry Mac Evilly at [insideoutconsulting.ie](http://insideoutconsulting.ie)

Photography: David Davison, [www.davisonphoto.com](http://www.davisonphoto.com)

Additional photography: Barry Mac Evilly, Ronan Kelly

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*Footsteps: a walk through 123* © RCSI 2020







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