

## Commemorating the first woman veterinary surgeon in Ireland or Britain

A commemorative plaque remembering Irishwoman Aleen Cust (1868 – 1937) the first female veterinary surgeon in Ireland or Britain was unveiled at the site of her former surgery - Castlestrange House in Athleague, Co Roscommon by the President of Veterinary Ireland Ms Ciara Feeney MRCVS, the first female president of the organisation.

Aleen Cust was born into a male dominated era where very few women supported the women's rights movement. Determined to be a veterinarian Aleen faced much discrimination. By 1918 only certain women over the age of 30 had the right to vote. Not until 1928 did women obtain the same voting rights as men.

A woman ahead of her time Aleen was born in Tipperary in 1868. She entered the New Veterinary College in Edinburgh in 1894 to study veterinary science. In 1897 the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) refused to give her permission to sit its professional exams. This precluded from working as a veterinary surgeon in Britain. In 1900 she did complete her veterinary education coming first in several classes that included winning the New Veterinary College medal for junior anatomy in 1895.

She then returned to Ireland to practice as an assistant to William Byrne at Castlestrange House, Athleague, Co. Roscommon, having been recommended to the practice by Professor William Williams, Principal of the New Veterinary College. It would take another 20 years before Aleen received the recognition she deserved. At the time she was the only female vet working in much of Europe.

In 1919 the enactment of the 'Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act' did not allow the exclusion of women from any profession purely on account of their sex. So in 1922 the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons relented and gave her permission to sit the final examination. At the age of 54 Aleen finally gained her Diploma and became the first woman to hold the title of MRCVS and qualify as a Veterinary Surgeon in either Britain or Ireland. She funded a scholarship administered by the RCVS and died in Jamaica in



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**"It's not the sticky floor or the glass ceiling that stops women progressing it is the thick layer of men in-between"** Commissioner Margot Wallström, Vice President of the European Commission

**On average women get paid 15% less than men for the same job.**

**NOTICE OF AGM**  
**Women in Technology & Science Ireland,**  
invite all members to attend our **AGM**  
at **10.30am**  
**(Registration 9.30)**  
on  
**November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008**  
in  
**The Trinity Centre**  
Health Sciences Building  
St James Hospital  
Dublin

## *WITS Re-enter Programme update Nov. 2008*

The WITS Re-Enter project, which was launched in February 2008, currently has 20 participants. All 20 participants successfully completed the Open University – Return to Science, Engineering and technology (T161) 10 week course in mid-July 2008.

In September 2008 the mentoring phase of the programme was kicked-off with a series of workshops in Dublin, Belfast and Cork. Seventeen of the Re-Enter participants opted to participate in the mentoring. The mentors, who are all voluntary, come from a wide variety of backgrounds and industries and a number are WITS members. There are now seventeen mentor pairs up and running across the island.

Re-Enter mentoring is a formal structured process which includes elements of coaching and being a role model. Mentoring is a confidential one-to-one activity initiated and driven by the mentee. Both mentors and mentees are required to complete a 'Mentoring Agreement' at the outset which clearly states the areas of focus and the expectations. The mentor provides advice, support and focus to the mentee in specific areas. The mentoring period has a maximum time frame of six months at which stage the mentoring pair will review progress against the original goals.

The Re-Enter participants are actively looking for jobs, one participant has already successfully returned to work, some of the participants are pursuing courses to update their existing skills and a number of work placements have also been set-up.

If you are in a position to offer employment or the opportunity for a work placement please contact the Re-Enter programme manager – Ann Fitzpatrick on [re-enter@witsireland.com](mailto:re-enter@witsireland.com). For more information on the Re-Enter Programme see [www.witsireland.com/re-enter](http://www.witsireland.com/re-enter)



The WITS Re-enter participants with the re-enter project manager Ann Fitzpatrick

**SCIENCE WEEK IRELAND:** REBELLIOUS DOCTORS, early rock stars and a pioneer of plant viruses were among the Irish women scientists of yesteryear celebrated in a series of weekend talks in Dublin as part of Science Week.

The event, Lab Coats and Lace, highlighted unsung heroines in Irish science, and ties in with a book of the same name on the subject to be published next year.

"It's about celebrating the work that has been done by a great number of Irish women scientists over the last couple of centuries who have not generally been given the recognition," said science writer and broadcaster Mary Mulvihill, the book's editor.

She was speaking ahead of the talks on Saturday, hosted by the Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin, Dublin, and Women in Technology and Science (Wits).

"These women ploughed difficult furrows. In the 20th century you had a lot of institutional and social barriers to women doing science," said Ms Mulvihill.

"It was even harder for Victorian women. If you even think how difficult it was, given the clothes they wore, to work in a lab or go out and do fieldwork, they did tremendous things despite the conventions of the day, and it's great to honour them."

Saturday's talks covered a round-up of rebellious women doctors who had been involved in the 1916 Rising. One, Dorothy Price, was later involved in introducing a vaccine against TB in Ireland.

"She really did tremendous work in the fight against TB but she has been overlooked in the rush to credit Noel Browne and the other medical men, and we want to reclaim some of that," said Ms Mulvihill.

Of other women who pioneered in geology, she added: "They were active in the late 1800s when it would have been very unusual to be out with a hammer, getting lumps of rock and putting together a picture of how Ireland was shaped during the Ice Age."

And among the scientific sisters being celebrated were two actual sisters - daughters of the Irish mathematician George Boole. Lucy was one of the first women professors of chemistry, while Alicia characterised a mathematical shape called a polytope.

Attendees also heard the biography of plant-virus expert Phyllis Clinch, who became the only woman to win the prestigious Boyle Medal for scientific excellence.

"The crop breeders of Ireland owe her a tremendous debt, yet her name isn't really well known," said Ms Mulvihill.

Lab Coats and Lace, which includes contributions from Irish Times journalists, is published by Wits next March.



**100 million children receive no education of those 60-70% are Girls**

## Upcoming events:

HP's Diversity initiative on the **5th of November in HP Laxlip**. This initiative has three strands:

1. Gender representation
2. General assessability (disability)
3. Inclusiveness (nationalities)

WITS will have a stand at the event.

**SLIGO IT, Role Model Day.**

The event is going to take place on the **10th of December in IT Sligo**. It will be a half day event, from 10 or 10:30am until 3pm.

The event will start with some career women talking about their experience and after a break the attendants will be divided into groups based on domains like computing or engineering. The groups will be formed of career Women, IT Representatives, college students and secondary year students. This is when the students will get the chance to ask questions and talk about the advantages and disadvantages of women in technology and the career Women will act as role models.



women in technology  
and science

# 2009 Membership & Renewal Form

*Membership is open to women and men throughout Ireland who work, have worked or who are studying in any area of science, engineering or technology*

## Membership Fees

Individual €50  Concessions €20 (retired, unemployed and student members)

Receipt Required: Y  N:

## Membership Details

Title (Dr, Mr, Mrs, Ms) .....

Surname: .....First Name: .....

Job/Dept (optional): .....

### Preferred mailing address:

Address: .....

.....

Contact telephone(s): home .....work .....mobile .....

## Other Information

WITS will run 3-4 events in 2008. Any particular areas/activities you feel WITS should cover?

Suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_

WITS is interested in hearing from members with training skills:

Training Skills (please indicate subject area): \_\_\_\_\_

## For Office Use Only

a) New member  b) Renewal for 2009

Cash/Cheque/PO Received  Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Processed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return 2009 subscriptions and completed forms to: **WITS, PO Box 3783, Dublin 4**