



**WITS**

women in technology  
and science

# WITS UPDATE

## Autumn 2004

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### A Tour of Ingenious Dublin

In June, WITS member and science journalist Mary Mulvihill hosted a tour around Dublin based on her award-winning book about Ireland's scientific heritage *Ingenious Ireland*. During the tour we explored the hidden history of some of the people, places and institutions from Dublin's rich scientific tradition. The tour kicked off at Buswell's Hotel which was formerly the Queen's Institute for the Training & Employment of Educated Women, the 1st such college in Europe.

The 'Dublin School of Medicine', at the Meath Hospital, became world-renowned when two of its physicians, Robert Graves and William Stokes, introduced bedside teaching to the English-speaking world. It was also where physicians came up with medical innovations such as the binaural stethoscope, the first practical endoscope, and the first hypodermic injection. At the back of Newman House, the Catholic University of Ireland's (or UCD's) first home, we discovered the delights of the Iveagh Gardens where a World Trade Fair was held in 1865.

From the perspective of SET and the government, it was heartening to learn that the statues that look down on the Taoisigh as they enter Government Buildings are of 2 famous Irish scientists, Robert Boyle on the right, and Sir William Rowan Hamilton on the left. This building was originally built as



the Royal College of Science in 1911. 2005 marks the bicentenary of Hamilton's birth and has been designated 'Hamilton Year 2005: Celebrating Irish Science' by the Tanaiste. One of his many advances in mathematics includes quaternions. He struggled to find a relevant practical application of quaternions at the time, today there are many applications including computer graphics, game programming and virtual reality.

Our final stop was Trinity College, Ireland's 1st university, established in 1592. There we heard about many of the college's famous scholars, including William Molyneux who asked a legendary question "If a man, blind since birth, suddenly regained sight, could he distinguish objects (globes from cubes) by sight *alone*?" This is now known internationally as the Molyneux problem. We also heard about Samuel Haughton who developed the humane hangman's drop. Prior to this, the length of the drop was variable and drops that were too short produced strangulation whereas drops that were too long produced decapitation. Haughton devised a table that gave the appropriate size of rope and drop length for a given weight of a prisoner.

*Ingenious Ireland* is a celebration of brilliant people, natural wonders, stunning landscapes, clever inventions and historic industries, and brings the reader on a fascinating tour of Ireland. It contains over 500 stories that have been meticulously researched and is available in bookshops and at [www.eason.ie](http://www.eason.ie) and [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

### AGM

WITS will hold their AGM on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2005, at Chester Beatty Library Dublin.. The AGM will be a celebration of the start of 15 years of WITS and will include the achievements of the previous chairs and executive committee members. We encourage all current and former WITS members to attend as this is a time of change in WITS.



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### Role Model Project Update

A very effective way of encouraging girls into science, engineering and technology (SET) is through Role Models. WITS was commissioned by the Department of Education and Science to carry out the Role Model project with the aim of attracting secondary school girls to a career in SET by:

1) Producing a CD-ROM which contains profiles of 40 women working in SET. This has been distributed to career guidance counsellors and teachers in secondary schools and has been so successful that an extra 1000 copies of the CD have been pressed by the Dept of Education!

The role model CD can be accessed through <http://www.witsireland.com/rolemodelcd/main.html>

2) Developing a role model pack to be used by third level institutes. It provides detailed information about how to plan for and run a role model day. Waterford had a very successful one last year. They hope to repeat the success this year, along with Tallaght IT, UL and DIT.

### The Samuel's Initiative

To hear about the British experience, and to identify and prioritise appropriate initiatives for Ireland, WITS organised a high-level facilitated forum in December 2003. The guest speaker was Dr Gill Samuels CBE, one of the *SET Fair* authors, and director of science policy at Pfizer Global Research Laboratories, England. The 40 invited participants included senior Irish science policy makers and stakeholders, politicians and researchers, and representatives from the public and private sectors, research and industry. In focusing specifically on the leaky

pipeline in scientific and engineering careers, this initiative complemented the earlier Forfás workshop, *Women: an untapped resource*.

The forum recommended a range of measures including: Return-to-work fellowships; Professional updating courses for scientists; Gender-proofing of publication criteria; and Mentoring schemes. Following the meeting, these findings were presented to representatives from the Tanaiste, Mary Harney's office and the Office of Science & Technology.

A number of these recommendations are now being pursued. WITS has now won agreement from SFI to study the extent of women's participation in Irish SET research. A proposal for an SFI fellowship scheme for women researchers is being actively considered. And Pfizer's 'Agender' initiative is being adopted for use with Irish firms.

Finally, as a direct result of this initiative, Dr Gill Samuels has proposed to the Tanaiste, Mary Harney, that she establish a return-to-work fellowship scheme for researchers (male and female) as part of the drive to increase the EU's R&D activity and to make Europe the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010. **It has been proposed to call it *The Lonsdale Fellowship* after Kathleen Lonsdale who was a crystallography pioneer.** We will keep you posted as this progresses.

These practical initiatives, the forum, and the public lecture on the global challenge of HIV/AIDS, are a direct result of Dr Samuels' Dublin visit. For this, WITS is indebted to the **British Council Ireland, the Higher Education Authority, the Enterprise Ireland Biotechnology Directorate and Science Foundation Ireland** who supported the initiative. The summary report, **Getting the Balance Right in Irish Science** is currently being circulated

**WANTED!** - Articles of Interest for future WITS updates. Have any interesting articles or newsworthy items you wish to share? If yes, please contact Ruth McMahan at [Ruth.McMahon@tcd.ie](mailto:Ruth.McMahon@tcd.ie)



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### Joan Mason remembered

Joan Mason, founder of AWISE (Association for Women in Science and Engineering), WISENET's British counterpart, and a former member of WISENET, died earlier this year.



She was honoured with the award of an MBE for her services to women in Science. She is a chemist by training and attended Cambridge University, she

previously provided the following outline of her career: "After postdoccing in California and London, then dropping out (husband-following, 3 children) our family returned to London (my husband moved to a chair at King's). This was just as the Open University was starting up, and I got a job on the Chemistry staff of the Open University... I'd known the Professor at Cambridge, so perhaps I plugged into the old boy network ... the OU needed some female faces on its TV in science. I then encountered the usual problems, seeing younger colleagues promoted over my head (since my husband could keep me). So I complained to the Vice-Chancellor; who noticed my publication record and told me to apply for a Cambridge D.Sc., then I'd be promoted. So I did and I was. They made me a Reader, and if I had had another year or two before the retiring age, they'd have made me a Professor".

Joan was the Secretary of the Working Party on Women in Science, Engineering and Technology for the Cabinet Office of the UK Government. They eventually published the landmark report '**The Rising Tide' a Report on Women in Science, Engineering and Technology**, published by the UK Government (HMSO) in 1994. Its remit was to advise the Government on ways in which the potential, skills and expertise of women could best be secured.

*Joan Mason will be greatly missed. WITS everywhere and we express our sincere sympathy to her family and friends.*

### WITS BITES

- The WITS talent bank is near completion and has been formally handed over to the Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. A WITS members event is being planned to help celebrate this event and details will follow soon.
- Interim report from the Task Force for Female Participation in Third level SET Courses is due out in October to the Minister for Ed and Science. Focused on curriculum and getting girls interested in the physical sciences, and boys in biology. Return to work, Final Report due in May 2005.
- WITS is now a referencing body for nominations to the RIA life Sciences Committee
- Plaques project- looking for nominees, currently have Delap in Valentia, Lonsdale in Newbridge, Agnes Clerin in Skibereen, Ross in Birr and Margaret Huggins.
- Frances Buggy and Anne McClennan are nominees for WITS at NWCI . New Horizons for Equality in Women (Raddison Limerick)
- **British Association for the Advancement of Science and WITS** : WITS has been asked to host an event at the British Association Festival of Science in Trinity College in 2005. This is one of the UK's biggest and most prestigious science festivals. It attracts 400 of the best scientists and science communicators from home and abroad who reveal the latest developments in research to a general audience. WITS is currently putting together an agenda, all suggestions (and help) are welcome!