



## History of the Dun's Library of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland

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The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland has had a library for almost 300 years. There is evidence in the College minutes of the College owning books since at least 1710, but the true foundation of the College's library is considered to be the bequest of the large personal library of Sir Patrick Dun, one of the most distinguished early Presidents, who died in 1713. The College Library has had the official title of "*Dun's Library*" ever since. Plans are already underway to mark the tercentenary of the Library in appropriate style in 2013. Read more about the history of the Dun's Library here. ([link to PDF page](#))

The College, unfortunately, did not have a permanent home of its own for over 100 years after leaving Trinity in 1692. The Library led a nomadic existence, passing among the homes of various Presidents, with books being added but many more going missing. Not until 1815, with the opening of Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital, which became the College's headquarters, did the Library find a permanent abode.

Almost 50 years later, the College acquired its present building in Kildare Street. The premises of the Kildare Street Club were purchased by the College in 1860 and, shortly afterwards, these buildings were destroyed by fire. The College then had a new building built to their own design. This was opened in 1864.

The upper front room, stretching the full length of the building, was designed as the library and has remained so ever since. Its bookcases, running the full length of the inner wall, were later augmented with an upper level, reached via an iron spiral staircase and gallery. Extra shelving and bookcases were added over the years in other rooms of the building to accommodate the ever-increasing numbers of books. A most comprehensive collection of all the major medical works from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards was built up and regularly added to until the 1960s when the College decided that it was no longer feasible, both financially and practically, to purchase copies of all new medical publications. Since then, the collection has been maintained as a medical-historical library and is much used by those researching medical and social history at all levels.

Pressures on space in the building, particularly in the last twenty years or so, to accommodate the increasing activities of the College in the field of postgraduate medical training resulted in various attempts to utilise extra space below street level where the Club's old wine cellars were situated. These attempts culminated in the latest, and most ambitious, scheme to transform the College building.

The decision was taken to move all the College's administrative staff to a new location and convert the Kildare Street building into a modern, state of the art, conference centre where College official functions, such as conferring ceremonies, major meetings and dinners, could be held and, at other times, the rooms could be hired out to other bodies and organisations for conferences, meetings, presentations etc

The momentous scale of the planned renovation necessitated the total clearing of the building of all moveable objects and personnel. This meant that the entire contents of the library that were housed in the College building (some 15,000 volumes) and the College's large collection of archives had to be packed into boxes and removed to secure storage. Another 15,000 volumes were already in off-site storage.

For over two years, passers-by would have seen the College building boarded up and inaccessible while the renovation work was carried on. Finally, in October 2005, the building re-opened to unanimous praise for its totally re-furbished rooms, state of the art audio-visual facilities, up-graded central heating and air-conditioning and a new lift for mobility impaired access.

The books of the Library have been restored to their traditional home in their elegantly re-decorated room. For additional security, wire mesh doors have been fitted to the bookcases as the room will now be used for meetings and lectures while readers will be accommodated in a special study section in the newly created Librarian's Office in the lower part of the building.

Particular attention has been paid to the College's extensive archive collection. This contains material dating back to the formation of the College, including an unbroken sequence of minute books from 1692 to the present. Other material includes the records of several Dublin hospitals and personal papers of prominent physicians. Of particular value is the vast collection of biographical information on Irish-born doctors formed by the distinguished medical historian, Dr. T. P. C. Kirkpatrick.

As part of the renovation of the building, a new archive store, with moveable shelving and environmental controls, has been created in the basement. These priceless documents can now, for the first time, be kept together in safety in one location and systematically organised so that they will be much more easily accessible.

The Library has undergone considerable turmoil and upheaval over the past three years but the result has been well worth waiting for. The Library is once again housed in a safe and elegant setting and an electronic catalogue of its holdings is in the course of preparation and should shortly be available on-line. The archives are now secure and accessible.