

THE IRELAND MEDAL - THE FIRST TEN YEARS (2003-13)

by John Connolly, Honorary Secretary

Introduction

Articles have previously appeared in our Journal regarding the award of the Ireland Medal, initially the early awards and thereafter as occasional entries in the Noticeboard section. In discussions with the Editor, it was decided to produce a more comprehensive presentation of the Irish Lifesaving Foundation, its awards and the citations for the awardees. This will appear in two parts and align with the issue of the type 1 and type 2 medals.

The Irish Lifesaving Foundation

The Lifesaving Foundation began as an Overseas Aid Sub-committee of RLSS IRELAND in 1999. The sub-committee raised funds supporting projects in developing countries, especially in Africa, sending equipment and clothing to embryonic lifesaving groups and tutors to train lifesavers. In 2003 the sub-committee was disbanded and reformed as a separate not-for-profit charity registered in Ireland with the name 'The Irish Lifesaving Foundation Ltd.' The name was changed to The Lifesaving Foundation CLG (Company Limited by Guarantee) in 2011 in recognition of an increasing international membership and re-registered in Ireland as a charity.

The Foundation had three key project areas in addition to awarding the Ireland Medal. These were:

- a) the promotion of female swimming instruction worldwide (specifically via the Sri Lanka Women's Swimming Project
- b) Lifeguard Training Project whereby unemployed youths in developing countries were trained as lifeguards for employment
- c) the promotion of drowning research (particularly in the field of suicide by drowning).

It supported projects in Lesotho, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania. The majority of these projects were cancelled in 2016 as a consequence of changes to Irish charity law and new audit practices intended to prevent fraud in large charities. An unintended consequence of these changes was making the provision of small donations to lifesaving groups in developing countries non-viable. Audit charges could exceed the intended donation sum. The charity is now primarily a respected drowning prevention research organisation.

The Ireland Medal

The medal was introduced in 2004 as a joint publicity project between the Irish Lifesaving Foundation (now The Lifesaving Foundation) and The Royal Life Saving Society's Republic of Ireland Branch (RLSS IRELAND) to mark the centenary of RLSS lifesaving in Ireland (1904-2004) and the incorporation in 2003 of The Irish Lifesaving Foundation as a legally independent charity. The Foundation had originated as an RLSS IRELAND overseas aid sub-committee.

A joint decision by the RLSS IRELAND Management Committee and Irish Lifesaving Foundation Board of Directors was required for the first three medals. After RLSS IRELAND withdrew, the remaining medals were awarded by the Foundation Board acting alone.

The medal had initially been specified as gilded sterling silver (in the style of an Olympic Medal), but this did not happen, and the medal was instead stuck in base metal and gilded.

The swimming rescue image shows that it was originally intended as a rescue medal, with long exceptional meritorious service as a secondary fall back option. After the first medal was awarded to An Garda Síochána (Ireland's police service), it was never again specifically awarded as such although some recipients had long service as lifeguards.

This was due to the identified difficulty of distinguishing between the comparative merits of a well-intended reckless act of bravery and that of a calculated safe land based rescue. After the third medal, the link with RLSS IRELAND was broken, and the criteria was formally changed by the Foundation. It would be awarded annually 'to an Irish person or organization or to a person of Irish descent in recognition of a long exceptional contribution to saving lives from drowning'. The medal quickly gained a high status within world lifesaving circles due to the quality and prestige of medal recipients. It often generates valuable publicity for lifesaving, and frequently draws attention to hidden or overlooked aspects of drowning prevention, rescue and aftercare.

Although the Ireland Medal was launched in 2004 a decision was taken to award the first medal retrospectively (2003) to An Garda Síochána (Ireland's Police Force). This was done to facilitate an early presentation in 2004 of the inaugural medal by then Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahearn in Government Buildings.



**Presentation of the first Ireland Medal to the Garda Commissioner.
Front: RLSS IRELAND President Declan Harte, Taoiseach (Prime Minister)
Bertie Ahearn and Garda Commissioner Noel Conroy**

The 2004 medal was awarded to Irish born Surgeon Admiral Frank Golden, MD, PhD (centre) and due to be presented the following year. However, as he was present at a hypothermia seminar in 2004, the opportunity was taken to present his medal, which he received from the flag officer of the Irish Naval Service.

The Medal (Type 1 – 2004-13)**Ireland Medal (Type 1) obverse**

- Obverse:** Image of a swimming rescue between 'IRELAND' and 'MEDAL'. 'IRISH LIFESAVING FOUNDATION' around the top circumference and 'RLSS IRELAND' around the bottom circumference.
- Reverse:** The reverse was blank to allow the details of the awardee to be engraved.
- Dimensions:** 50mm diameter, 4mm thick.
- Composition:** Gilded base metal.
- Naming:** Year of award followed by the name of the recipient engraved on the reverse. The size of the engraved details was dependent on the number of letters in a name.
- Designer:** Lee Brothers, Dublin, based upon a rescue image copied from a RLSS rescue manual.
- Manufacturer:** Lee Brothers, Dublin.
- Case:** The medal in a black baize interior of a black presentation case, (110 x 90 x 30mm).

Note: Eleven medals were originally ordered, ten for presentation and the eleventh medal to be retained as a specimen. However, the eleventh medal was presented to an awardee due to delays in seeking a sponsor for the 'new' medal.

The Medal Parchment

Because the medal had not become a copy of an Olympic Medal, to add 'value' to the medal the Foundation Board decided to award a framed calligraphic parchment A2 size (594 x 420mm) in addition to the medal.

Faces were stamped onto the blank parchment as a reminder that all drowning statistics refer to real people. The parchment contained golden images relevant to a recipient's home, career, and their medal citation handwritten in a *Book of Kells* inspired script.

The medal parchments contained titles and main post-nominals. However, the length of a person's name could be problematic; such being the case for Professor Stephen Langendorfer in 2013, when his post-nominal was omitted on the parchment.

Professor Linda Quan was the first person to receive a parchment with her medal. At each subsequent medal ceremony, a former medal recipient was also presented with their parchment retrospectively.

Examples of the Medal Parchment



Ireland Medal Parchment awarded to Professor Langendorfer with the medal in its presentation case



Foyle Search and Rescue Parchment.
The two standing figures refer to a famous statue in their base in Derry/Londonderry.

Ireland Medal Citations (the first eleven Ireland Medals)

2003 - An Garda Síochána (Ireland)

**Taoiseach Bertie Ahearn
presenting the 2003 Ireland
Medal to Garda Commissioner
Noel Conroy**

The Garda Síochána (Ireland's police service) was founded in 1922. Few historical records relating to swimming rescues by serving officers exist for the majority of the 20th century. It appears to have been taken for granted by government and public that police officers could be called upon to rescue persons from drowning, as part of their normal duties, and therefore swimming and rescue instruction was part of the recruit training programme.

Late 20th century research by the Irish Lifesaving Foundation has established that, despite the existence of numerous water rescue organizations, members of An Garda Síochána are often the first responders to drowning incidents. Research shows that approximately 20 police officers enter deep water annually and make swimming rescues, often in extremely difficult circumstances. The majority of those rescued had deliberately entered the water, are young males, and

have been drinking beforehand. Gardaí usually work in teams and swim in full uniform often displaying great courage and commitment. The medal was presented to Garda Commissioner Noel Conroy by then Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahearn in Government Buildings.

2004 - Surgeon Admiral Frank Golden, MD, PhD (Ireland and United Kingdom)

**Surgeon Admiral Frank Golden,
MD, PhD**

Frank Golden was born and educated in Cork City, Ireland, receiving his medical doctorate from the National University of Ireland (University College Cork) in 1960. He joined the Royal Navy as a medical officer in the early 1960s, retiring in 1993 with the rank of Surgeon Rear Admiral.

During his naval career he directed the Royal Navy's survival medical research department and was a consultant advisor to the Royal Navy in applied physiology. Always willing to include himself in his ongoing experimental work (once voluntarily spending a week adrift in a life raft on the open sea) he received a PhD in 1979 from the University of Leeds for his work on the early rewarming of hypothermic casualties. He now acts as a consultant advisor in human and applied physiology at the University of Portsmouth and is a

trustee of the Royal National Lifeboat Institute (RNLI) and chairman of its Medical and Survival Committee. He has written many articles on hypothermia and survival in water, most recently co-authoring the book *Essentials of Sea Survival* (2002) in conjunction with his University of Portsmouth colleague Professor Michael Tipton. The medal was presented by the Flag Officer of Ireland's Naval Service.

2005 - Major General Professor John Pearn, MD, PhD (Australia)



Surgeon General Professor John Pearn, MD, PhD with the Mayor of Sligo during a mayoral reception

John Pearn is Professor of Pediatrics and Child Health and Deputy Head in the School of Medicine at the University of Queensland, based in the Royal Children's Hospital, Brisbane. A former Surgeon General of the Australian Defence Force, he commanded the Health Service Branches of the Royal Australian Navy, Air Force and Army from 1997 to 2000. During his military career he saw operational service in Papua New Guinea, in the Vietnam War and in post genocide Rwanda. Most recently he served as a paediatrician and tropical medicine physician in post tsunami Sumatra.

He served as National Director of Training for St John Ambulance Australia from 1989 to 1999 during which time he was Editor in Chief of the training manual *Australian First Aid*.

His lifesaving activities go back to the early 1970s. In 1974 he instituted the Brisbane Drowning Study in a ground breaking attempt to address the serious problem of toddler drownings in Australia. In addition to studying this problem he actively worked for the introduction of safety legislation for home swimming pools. He has published over 50 articles and book chapters on drowning related topics in international medical and resuscitation literature. He was appointed a Technical Lecturer and Examiner with Royal Lifesaving Australia in 1976. More recently he served on the World Task Force on the Prevention of Drowning for the Amsterdam Drowning Congress and is a member of International Life Saving Federation's Medical Commission and is chairman of its Ethics Commission.

His medal was presented by Irish Army General O'Sullivan after which he travelled to Sligo for a mayoral reception.

2006 - Garda Commissioner Eamonn Doherty (Ireland)

Eamonn Doherty is a native of Buncrana, Co. Donegal. He joined An Garda Síochána in 1943 rising through the ranks to the position of Garda Commissioner (chief of Ireland's police force) in 1987. On his retirement from the Gardaí he represented Ireland on a European anti-drugs task force for a period of six years. He has also chaired an independent arbitration panel overseeing the drinks industry's code of practice, adjudicating on complaints from the public.

In addition to his many public duties he is patron of The Irish Athletic Boxing Association.

Eamonn's first connection with lifesaving was during his time as President of the Garda Training College when he introduced lifesaving to the curriculum of all Garda trainees. He was appointed chairperson of the Royal Life Saving Society Ireland Region (overseeing the activities of the RLSS Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland Branches) in the early 1980's, while Assistant Garda Commissioner, and continued in this role on his promotion to Deputy Commissioner and Commissioner. He retired from the RLSS when it was restructured in the early 1990's. He facilitated research into Garda rescues enabling the



Garda Commissioner Eamonn Doherty

discovery that serving officers perform over 20 swimming rescues annually. He chairs the Irish Marine Gallantry and Meritorious Service Award body.

In Irish rescue circles he is best known for his chairing of The Doherty Commission which studied Ireland's Air Sea Rescue Service, producing the Doherty Report which led to the transfer of this rescue service from the Irish Air Corp to The Irish Coast Guard. A consequence of this was the stationing of rescue helicopters at a number of regional airports in place of the previously military centralized rescue service.

His medal was presented by the Mayor of Waterford.

2007 - Foyle Search and Rescue (Northern Ireland)



Mayor of Waterford Mary O'Halloran presenting the fifth Ireland Medal to members of Foyle Search and Rescue

Foyle Search and Rescue (FSR) was founded in 1993 in response to the large number of persons successfully committing suicide by drowning in the River Foyle, Co. Londonderry, Northern Ireland. Since then FSR has helped more than 1,000 persons in distress in or near the river. Working with a team of about 40 key volunteers FSR provides 24 hour / 7 day pager response coverage of the River Foyle, River Faughan and waterways around Strabane. Shore Patrols patrol the river walkways and the two bridges over the Foyle between 9pm and 3am, with a fully crewed rescue boat on the river, on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. The service has its own permanent base in Prehen and is considering buying a small hovercraft to provide fast easy access to places difficult to reach with their rescue boat. The *Londonderry Sentinel* reported in July 2007:

Foyle Search and Rescue emergency response team volunteers have been called out 25 times since the beginning of the year and unfortunately, have recovered three bodies in the space of the last three months. They have rescued six people from the river who would otherwise have drowned and assisted in taking a further six people back to safety from the water's edge. They have also rescued a boat with four people on board, which was stranded on rocks off Culmore Point. They have attended a further nine incidents which thankfully did not need any further assistance.

The medal was presented by the Mayor of Waterford.

2008 - The Hon Chief Justice Terence Higgins, AO (Australia)



(l-r) H.E. Bruce Davis (Australian Ambassador),
The Hon Justice Roderick Murphy and
The Hon Chief Justice Terence Higgins

The Honourable Terence Higgins, AO has been President of the Royal Life Saving Society Australia ACT Branch since 1993, has served as National President of RLSSA (1997-2003), after which he served as RLSSA's International Development Liaison Officer until beginning his second term as national President in 2009. He has been Legal Advisor to RLSSA since 1993.

During his first term as National President of the Royal Life Saving Society Australia he presided over a time of unprecedented growth of revenue, which increased by over 500%, and saw close to one million Australians taking part in RLSSA courses annually. He oversaw the development of national sponsorship and fundraising programmes and implemented significant changes to the governance structures of RLSSA which ensured that RLSSA was a driving force in the development and implementation of the Australian Water Safety Plan 1998-2003. In 2003 he was elected as the International Life Saving (ILS) Asia Pacific Regional Development Coordinator and interim chair of the ILS Development Aid Commission (2003-04).

His medal was presented at the Dublin Fire Brigade Training Centre by Justice Murphy representing Ireland's Chief Justice with the Australian Ambassador present.

2009 - Dublin Fire Brigade (Ireland)

In addition to providing a 365 day fire, rescue and ambulance service Dublin Fire Brigade



(l-r) Edward Duffy, President RLSS IRELAND,
Dublin Fire Chief Hugh O'Neill receiving the
Ireland Medal from
The Hon Justice Roderick Murphy

also has water rescue units based at three locations throughout Dublin City. Rescue boats are moored on the River Liffey close to Tara Street Fire Station and all front line fire engines carry two dry suits for use in water rescue situations. The Brigade has 70 fully trained rescue boat crew, 300 Swift Water Rescue Technicians and over 1,000 Swift Water First Responders. All are volunteers and do not receive extra salary for holding water rescue qualifications.

Dublin Fire Brigade responds to approximately 145,000 emergency calls annually. The crews responding to call-outs are fully trained to deal with fire, ambulance and water rescue situations. In the ten years since the water rescue units were established fire fighters in Dublin have attended to over 2,000 water related incidents and over 1,000 persons have been rescued from drowning.

The medal was presented at the Dublin Fire Brigade Training Centre by Justice Murphy representing the Chief Justice in the presence of the President of RLSS IRELAND.

2010 - Patricia Wilcox (South Africa)



John Connolly, Lifesaving Foundation Secretary, eighth Ireland Medal recipient Patricia Wilcox (South Africa) and Michael O'Connell, Lord Mayor of Cork

Mrs Patricia Wilcox's introduction to saving lives began in 1966 with her being awarded First Aid and General Nursing Certificates by the South African Red Cross Society. She qualified as a Swimming Teacher in 1975, as a Lifesaving Instructor in 1989 and as a Senior Lifesaving Examiner in 1990. Following her appointment as an examiner she began working in Soweto as a volunteer teacher and examiner. In her own words:

Things were quite volatile in Soweto then and travel was not

always easy, no road signs, they had been removed to confuse the security forces. General lighting was provided by high security lights, no regular street lights. One of the lifeguards would meet us outside of the hospital and travel with us to the pool. This first visit was quite an eye opener for me as I had never been to a 'township' before. Europeans were still discouraged from going in although permits were no longer needed. I encountered shock and fear for my safety by most people who became aware of what I was doing.

Over time she became aware that there were full and part-time job opportunities for qualified lifeguards in Johannesburg and she began to focus more and more of her swimming and lifesaving training towards achieving this goal for her 'youngsters'. In 1997 she retired early from school teaching to concentrate on her lifesaving work. Since 1990 she has trained hundreds of young unemployed swimmers as lifeguards thereby giving them a job and a position of status, as lifeguards are considered valuable members of the South African community.

In addition to her work in Soweto Patricia has served as Lifesaving South Africa's Director of Education and Training and as a member of the Management Board. In these roles she worked on the publication of a new Stillwater Nipper Handbook, new Lifesaving Manual and new Water Safety Booklet. She is a member of the South African Qualifications Authority in the fields of sport, recreation and fitness.

The medal was presented by the Lord Mayor of Cork in the presence of Pat's family who live in County Cork.

2011 - Professor Linda Quan, MD (United States of America)

Professor of Paediatrics Linda Quan (USA) being presented with the ninth Ireland Medal by the third medal recipient Surgeon General Professor John Pearn (Australia)

Professor Linda Quan is a paediatric emergency medicine physician at Seattle Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center and a professor in the University of Washington's Department of Pediatrics (Center for Child Health, Behaviour and Development). She has been involved in research and the development of guidelines at a national and international level in paediatric resuscitation, emergency medical services and drowning.

She has spent a large part of her career conducting research into drowning, drowning prevention and paediatric resuscitation for which she has received many awards. She combines research, outreach and advocacy to stop drowning and is a recognized world leader in drowning prevention, with a special emphasis on open water such as lakes and rivers.

Her medal was presented by Surgeon General Professor John Pearn, a world famous paediatrician and 2005 medal recipient.

2012 - John Connolly (Ireland)

Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan presenting the tenth Ireland Medal to John Connolly

John Connolly is a retired primary school head teacher and Honorary Secretary of the Lifesaving Foundation. He joined the Royal Life Saving Society in 1973 and was appointed Waterford Area Organiser in 1975. He founded Waterford Lifeguard Club to provide RLSS lifesaving and lifeguard training. The club ceased operating in 2005 by which time over 10,000 adults and children had been taught to swim and 1,000 senior lifesaving awards received. He established Waterford Schools Swimming Association (WSSA) in 1977 to organise and promote swimming instruction in schools. He served as chairperson for 15 years during which time the number of schools providing swimming as part of their curriculum rose from 1 to 31. The association was terminated in 1991 when swimming became part of the revised primary school curriculum in Ireland.

He established a voluntary week-end beach lifeguard service at Dunmore East, Co. Waterford in 1979. A full-time lifeguard service was provided by the council in 1988 to obtain a Blue Flag at which time the voluntary service ended. He founded Bonmahon Lifeguard Club in 1984 to provide a voluntary weekend lifeguard service on a surf beach in Co. Waterford. The service became full-time in 1990 when an in-shore lifeboat service was added. Over 200 persons have been rescued from drowning by club lifeguards.

He was elected to the RLSS IRELAND Branch Management Committee in 1976 serving as Branch President (two terms) and Branch Secretary (five terms), retiring from the committee in 2005 on his appointment as his school's head teacher. In 1980 he established the Irish Lifeguard School (RLSS) to provide RLSS lifeguard training for lifesavers, serving as Director for 15 years, and qualifying over 400 lifeguards. The

school ended in 1998 when changes in the RLSS lifeguard qualification programme made the project unviable.

In 1999 he established the RLSS IRELAND Overseas Aid Sub-committee as a millennium project to provide financial and technical aid to lifesavers in developing countries. The Overseas Aid Sub-committee was converted into the Irish Lifesaving Foundation and incorporated as a charity in 2003. He attended his first international lifesaving conference in 1990 and has regularly contributed to conferences since then presenting papers at various World Drowning Prevention Conferences. In 2009 he organised the first Lifesaving Foundation Drowning Prevention Conference which has continued to grow since then. He has authored a number of drowning prevention documents.

The medal was presented by Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan.

2013 - Professor Stephen Langendorfer, PhD (United States of America)



Irish Defence Forces Chief of Staff Vice Admiral Mark Mellett presenting the eleventh Ireland Medal to Professor Stephen Langendorfer (USA)

Dr Stephen J. Langendorfer, PhD, is Director of the School of Human Movement, Sport, and Leisure Studies and Professor, Exercise Science (formerly Kinesiology), at Bowling Green State University, Ohio, USA. He is a recognized authority in the areas of aquatics and lifespan motor development.

Stephen is the author of numerous scholarly publications in motor development, developmental aquatics and measurement and evaluation, including co-authoring 'Aquatic Readiness: Developing Water Competence in Young Children' (1995), *Human Kinetics*. He has presented several hundred scholarly papers at international, national, regional, and local venues.

Since 1987 he has served as a volunteer consultant to the American Red Cross (Infant and Preschool Aquatic Program 1988, Swimming and Diving 1992 and Water Safety Instructor 1992 for which he was awarded the Golden Whale Award from the Commodore Longfellow Society and Lifesaving Hall of Fame. Currently he serves as a member of the Red Cross' Scientific Advisory Council (aquatic sub-council) that reviews and provides evidenced-based science in support of Red Cross programs. He was selected as the founding editor for the *International Journal in Aquatic Research and Education* (IJARE), a peer-reviewed scholarly publication focusing on dissemination of non-competitive aquatic research from around the world. His scholarly work and service, especially in aquatics, has been recognized nationally and internationally with a number of awards.

The medal was presented by Ireland's Chief of Staff Vice Admiral Mark Mellett.

