Four medals awarded to County Tyrone man, Sir George Magrath, M.D., one of Lord Nelson's personal surgeons - Order of the Bath, the Royal Guelphic Order, the Naval General Service and the Order of Christ.

Northern Ireland’s founding fathers of Navy medicine

Ship’s surgeons from Northern Ireland form a rich vein in the history of medicine in the Royal Navy.

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Navy. One saved Captain Cook’s life, and another was held in the highest esteem by Lord Nelson.

Foremost amongst explorers was a Belfast man, **James Patten** who was surgeon in Resolution during Captain Cook’s second of three long voyages around the world. Due to Patten’s advice and influence Cook had remarkable success in preserving the health of his seamen.

Cook reserves the highest of praise for his surgeon on this outstandingly successful voyage. In February, 1774, when the *Resolution* was cruising in the vicinity of Juan Fernandez's Land, Cook, to the grief and alarm of the whole ship's company, was taken very seriously ill with a “bilious colic.” For the patient's benefit, on the advice of Patten, Mr. Forster's dog—the only fresh meat aboard—was killed and made into soup, and after several days of careful treatment the most dangerous symptoms of the disorder were removed.

On his recovery Cook wrote: “Mr. Patten, the surgeon, was to me not only a skilful physician but an affectionate nurse and I should ill deserve...
the care he bestowed on me if I did not make this public acknowledgment.” Forster the naturalist, also recorded, “our worthy surgeon, Mr Patten, took the best precautions possible to preserve the health of all on board, by suggesting the proper methods to Captain Cook, and by watching over us with unremitting assiduity. I will venture to affirm, that it is to him alone under Providence, that many of us are indebted to our lives…”

James Patten was born in 1748, the son of the Reverend William Patten, a North of Ireland clergyman, and joined Resolution on 12/12/1778, leaving the Navy after the voyage to practice surgery and midwifery in Dublin.

A contemporary almanac shows that in 1779 James Patten was established as a Surgeon and Practitioner in Midwifery at 47 King Street, in the City of Dublin. His collection of specimens from the South Pacific made while serving in the Resolution he had presented to Trinity College at least two years earlier. In the Minutes of the Board of Trinity College for July 22, 1777, there appears the following resolution: “That a room be prepared for a Museum, and that Dr. Wilson receive under his care the curiosities collected in
the South Sea by Dr. Patten, and presented by him to the College. Ordered also that the College Architect give his opinion whether the great room over the gate be fit for that purpose, and, if he shall find it fit, that he shall give in plans of glass cases for it.” Thus commenced the Polynesian Collection at TCD.

Patten was rewarded for his gift. An entry in the Register of Trinity College dated August 2, 1780, records that “On the 31st of July it was agreed upon to grant an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Physick to James Patten.”

Sir George Magrath joined HMS Victory in July 1803 to serve Lord Nelson, who described him in a letter as "by far the most able medical man I have seen".

He worked in Gibraltar's naval hospital and later wrote of his disappointment that he did not rejoin Lord Nelson before the Battle of Trafalgar.

Born in 1775 in County Tyrone, he began his naval career as an 18-year-old surgeon's third mate.
Despite losing the sight in one eye after contracting yellow fever, he became a surgeon in his early 20s and sailed for Great Yarmouth with wounded sailors from the Battle of Camperdown in 1797.

He was praised for tending to Dutch prisoners of war in Great Yarmouth.

It is believed he spent two years in civil practice before joining HMS Victory.

Lord Nelson, writing to the Commissioner for Sick and Wounded Seamen, said of him: "Mr Magrath, who I admire for his great abilities every day I live, gives me excellent remedies."

In 1804, when an outbreak of yellow fever swept Gibraltar, ultimately causing almost 6,000 deaths, Lord Nelson discharged Sir George from HMS Victory and appointed him superintendent of the territory's naval hospital.

He spent five months there before being discharged home to shore on half pay.

Sir George later wrote of his disappointment on not rejoining Lord Nelson and the "additional
mortification of not not sharing in the glory of the Battle of Trafalgar”.

He became surgeon to prisoners of war at Plymouth for nine years, and was later surgeon in charge of the hospital at Dartmoor

The Surgeon Probationers of World War 1

During the First World War, as the Fleet increased in size there was an acute shortage of regular serving medical officers - naval surgeons available for service at sea as ship/flotilla doctors. There was also the need to provide some medical cover for the crews of small ships such as destroyers and sloops, for which qualified doctors could not then be spared. There was a progressive increase in the number of such small ships after the outbreak of war, and neither destroyers nor sloops carried a sick bay attendant.

Consequently, third and fourth-year medical students were permitted to interrupt their studies and enroll into the Navy as Surgeon

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Probationers, given some further practical training and then despatched around the Fleet.

RS Allison is well known as the author of “A History of HMS Caroline”. His book on Surgeon Probationers is seminal.

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They came from the medical schools of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales and some of the dominions. Their calling-up for service was approved by the General Medical Council and the Medical Department of the Royal Navy.

Surgeon probationers were requested to provide evidence of good character and to have passed the second medical examination in anatomy and physiology at an established medical school.
All appointments were RNVR as Temporary Surgeon Probationers. The first group was entered on 28 September 1914. The rank was terminated at war's end.

Some thirty students came from the Belfast Medical School (QUB) and the Royal Victoria Hospital.

The students were entered into the RNVR and at first given the rank of surgeon probationer. During the last years of the war with the upgrading of medical officers and in line with the executive branch, they were promoted to sub.lieutenant or surgeon sub.lieutenant.

An Officers’ Training Corps had been forced at QUB in 1911-12, its contingent forming part of the Territorial Army and in playing an important role in the foundation of the Ulster Division.

However, there was no RNVR Division in Northern Ireland. This was remarkable since the Divisions in Britain corresponded to the principal ports. When the Ulster Division was established and HMS Caroline became its base, former student probationers were again to the fore in the
ship, and several who had served in the First World War also served in the Second.

**SURGEON PROBATIONERS ROLL OF HONOUR**

**FERRIS, David Henry**
RN. Surgeon Probationer. HMS Broke. Died 31/05/1916. Age 22. During the Battle of Jutland, Broke, a Faulknor class destroyer, was leading her half-flotilla, when she came close to a German ship on her starboard bow. Simultaneously, the Germans opened fire. An 11 inch shell struck the lower bridge, killing those on duty, smashing the engine room telegraph and wheel. The helm was over to starboard, the telegraph at full speed, while the port engine was only running at half speed. Consequently, Broke came round, striking the unfortunate destroyer Sparrowhawk just before the bridge, cutting off her bow and pressing her round. Another of the flotilla came ahead first at the noseless boat and chopped off her stern also. The remainder drifted helplessly until sighted in the morning by Marksman, which rescued the remaining crew and sank the wreck as being too far gone for salvage.

Half the crew of Broke were wounded or killed, the doctor amongst them, and the sick-bay steward did splendid work amongst the sufferers, being afterwards awarded the DSM. There was 1 officer and 36 men killed in Broke. 3 officers and 33 men were wounded. Son of David and Sarah Ferris, Drumboe, Rostrevor. Commemorated at Rostrevor (Knotty Ash) cemetery. Portsmouth Naval Memorial, Panel 24. Newry, Downshire Road - PCI RH

**RN Northern Ireland - In Remembrance**
STORY, Louis Percival St John
RNVR. Surgeon Probationer. HMS Opal. Died 12/01/1918. Aged 22. Both the Opal, and HMS Narborough ran aground during a snowstorm, on South Ronaldsay, Orkney. They were on a night patrol to hunt German warships suspected to be laying mines on the Scottish coast. By 5.30 pm the weather had deteriorated to such an extreme degree that the destroyers were in danger of swamping and foundering and visibility was near zero. The Opal and Narborough were sent back to Scapa Flow. For the next four hours Opal regularly sent reports indicating her course and intention to return, but at 9.27 pm, a garbled message stating "have run aground" was received, followed by silence. The weather was so atrocious that no vessels could be despatched until the following morning, and it was two days before the Opal was found, battered, broken and empty on the Clett of Crura. The single survivor, who had been on board the Narborough, reported that the ships had suddenly crashed headlong into the rocks, probably due to a navigation error by the Opal's captain. Both wrecks were abandoned and broken up by the sea over the next few weeks taking the bodies of both crews, bar the single survivor, with them. Son of the Reverend Lawrence Parsons Story and Katharine Evelyn Story, Ulsterville Avenue, Belfast. Faculty of Medicine QUB, 1913 - 1915. Portsmouth Naval Memorial, Panel 31. RBAI WM. QUB WM. Christ Church, Durham St., Belfast WM

SURGEON PROBATIONERS
THEY SERVED

ALLISON, Richard Sydney
RN. Surgeon Probationer. Served on HMS Acorn, a destroyer, in the Mediterranean. HMS Caroline. RNVR. Surgeon -

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Captain. VRD Appointed in October 1939 to RNAH Newton Abbot as medical spec. Promoted Surgeon-Commander December 1949. First account of 'Blast Injuries to Chest' 1940. 1941 i/c Neurological Ward, RNAH Barrow Gurney (Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital for RN). 1942 appointed to staff of Medical Director General to devise means for retaining ratings with peptic ulcer in the service who otherwise would be invalided. Established special gastric units in HMS Goodson and Ferret, the crews of which ships were employed in maintenance, shore and harbour duties although living on board in a special mess. (Quarterly Journal of Medicine.) Promoted Acting Surgeon-Captain 1944 to Royal Naval Hospital, Stonehouse as SMO i/c Medical Division and additional as Medical Consultant to Western Approaches Command. On Admiralty Board of Naval Medical Consultants. Served in the Division post war. MD QUB 1921

**BECK, William Alexander**

**BECK, W. Edmund**

**BROWNE, William Aiken**
RN. Surgeon probationer in the destroyer HMS Versatile in 1918. Graduated 1922 and ultimately became Senior Administrative Medial Officer, Northern Ireland Hospitals Authority.

**RN Northern Ireland - In Remembrance**
CAITHNESS, Will
RN. Surgeon Probationer. Whitabbey. Whiteabbey - PCI RH

CAMPBELL, Thomas
RN. Surgeon Probationer. Kircubbin - PCI RH

CHRISTIAN, Charles Ronald

CROZIER, Thomas Howard

DODDS, ROBERT L
RNVR. Surgeon Probationer. Son of Rev. RW Dodds, Belfast. PCI-RH

DUKE, John Herbert
RNVR. Surgeon Probationer. Served in the destroyer HMS Vendetta, stationed at Scapa Floe and served in the North Sea with the Grand Fleet. He qualified in 1921 and subsequently held appointments as Consulting Physician in Geriatric Medicine at St. Andrew’s Hospital, Bow, London.

DUNN, Hubert John
RN. Surgeon Probationer. Entered the navy late 1917. Served in the destroyer HMS Triton, stationed at Scapa Floe, through part of 1918. After graduation and holding the offices of house physician at the Belfast Infirmary and Greenwich Hospital, he became RMO to the National Heart Hospital. Between the wars he became a well-known physician in London. In the second

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war he served with the RAMC with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and for a time was Medical Adviser to the Malta Command. He was awarded OBE. Holywood. High Street - PCI RH

**EATON, Arthur Hugh McCullough**

**FERRIS, Harry**
RN. Surgeon Probationer. Masonic Lodge 83, Newry

**JOHNSTON, James T**
RN. Surgeon Probationer. Drumsara. First Kilrea - PCI RH

**JOHNSTON, Robert**

**LASCELLES, Walter**
RNVR. Surgeon Probationer. Volunteered in the latter half of 1918 and served for a time at sea, subsequently returning to qualify in Belfast, and later going into general practice.

**LEMON, Charles A**
RNR. Surgeon Probationer. Masonic Lodge 83, Newry

**LYLE, John Scott**
RN. Surgeon Probationer. Entered RN 1918. After a short period at RNH Haslar, became Surgeon Probationer in HMS Alarm, a destroyer. Son of a doctor in Newtownstewart. After

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graduation he went in to general practice. Newtownstewart - PCI RH

LYTTLTE, William James

MADILL, Thomas
RNVR. Surgeon probationer. Youngest of three Madill brothers who served. Son of Rev. Thomas Madill, who was for over 50 years minister of 1st Garvagh Presbyterian Church. First Garvagh - PCI RH

McCARTAN, William
RN. Surgeon probationer. Served on sloop HMS Penstemon in the Mediterranean, seeing service in the Levant, in co-operation with the military forces under General Allenby. Graduated QUB 1922. Subsequently became Medical Officer in Charge of the Sussex County Hospital. Haywards Heath, Sussex. From Castlewellan

McFADDEN, George Dixon Fisher
RNVR. Surgeon Probationer. Born Newtownstewart, 28/6/1892. One of nine children born to the Rev. Jackson McFadden and Mary L McFadden. Jackson McFadden, was Minster of Badoney Presbyterian Church from May 1881 until his death in May 1936.

In order that his family of five sons and four daughters received the best education possible, Jackson McFadden took a house in Melrose Street, Belfast, so that they could attend schools in Belfast. George McFadden was educated at Royal Belfast Academical Institution and the 1911 Ireland Census lists an 18-

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year-old GDF McFadden as the head of the household at 60 Melrose Street – the other listed occupants are two sisters (Mary, 17, and Evelyn, 15) and a brother (Kenneth, 13). In October 1911, he enrolled as a medical student at Queen’s University, Belfast, where he won a Hockey Blue and was a member of the Officers’ Training Corps from November 1913.

George McFadden’s elder brother, John, had also been a member of the Queen’s University Officers’ Training Corps between November 1908 and September 1911. He was already a qualified doctor at the start of the war and he enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps in October 1914, serving as a Captain attached to the 12th Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

In February 1916, George McFadden interrupted his studies when he was appointed as a Probationary Surgeon, with the rank of Sub Lieutenant, RNVR. Following a preliminary period of training at the Royal Naval Hospital in Haslar (during which he contracted typhoid fever), McFadden was appointed to HMS Archer, an Acheron-class destroyer based in the Firth of Forth. In the spring of 1916, HMS Archer was transferred to the 3rd Battle Squadron, operating in the Mediterranean.

Whilst serving with HMS Archer in the North Sea, George McFadden had the terrifying experience of being washed overboard:
“I was lifted like a cork and carried on a wave out to sea. I could see the ship silhouetted against the horizon ... I thought, “This is the end, death cometh sooner or later, and the wardroom will be thinking in the morning that the doctor is having a long sleep.” The next thing I remember was seeing a light in the stern of the ship and I realised that I must be closer to it. Managing to grab the sides, as the ship rolled over I

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managed finally to clamber on deck. I think that it was the backlash of the sea that carried me off the deck, which was my salvation; but I do not like to think or talk about the episode, though I shall never forget it.” -From “The Surgeon Probationers” by R. S. Allison.

The PCI RH entry records that George McFadden served with HMS Victory, a Shore Barracks Establishment, during the Great War.

After the war George McFadden completed his medical studies, graduating with Honours as a Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery and Bachelor of Obstetrics in 1919. He obtained his Masters in Surgery (with Gold Medal) in 1923 and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1924. He developed an expertise in children’s surgery when he was a resident surgical officer at the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children.

In 1927 he married Gasparina Dos Santos in Newberry, Berkshire. He returned to Northern Ireland to take up a position at the Ulster Hospital for Children and Women in Templemore Avenue and was appointed as a surgeon at the Belfast Infirmary in 1939. He gained an international reputation for performing hare-lip and cleft-palate corrective surgery on children.

He was President of the Ulster Medical Society in 1956/57, at which time he was also Senior Surgeon at both the Belfast Infirmary and the Ulster Hospital for Children and Women.

George McFadden was a member of the Fitzroy Avenue Kirk Session in 1949 and remained at Fitzroy until his retirement to England, where he devoted himself to painting (a self portrait was presented to the Belfast City Hospital). He died, aged 88.

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Fitzroy Avenue Presbyterian Church WM and PCI RH.  Badoney PCI RH.

**PEDLOW, Robert**  
RN. Surgeon Probationer. Market Street. Later was a general practitioner in Lurgan. First Lurgan - PCI RH

**STEWART, James D**  
RN. Surgeon Lieutenant. “Mr JD Stewart eldest son of Dr. Stewart, Portglenone has volunteered for and been accepted for service in the Royal Navy as a probationer surgeon” - Ballymena Observer 05/04/1918. Portglenone. Third Portglenone - PCI RH

**THOMPSON, George**  
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A later issue will cover Surgeons who served in the World Wars.

**Acknowledgments:** RS Allison; Stanley Hawkins, former neuro-surgeon and Hon Archivist at RVH, posts held by Allison; Col WA Eakins; Instonians in the Great War; Fitzroy Presbyterian Church; Masonic Order RH; Presbyterian Church in Ireland RH.  
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**HELP REQUESTED**  
Please send names of Ex RN/RM/WRNS who served in either of the world wars. Details also appreciated.

**CIRCULATION** - Please share ‘Brave Report’ with your former service colleagues - and we will post direct to them if they simply send an e-mail to:

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houston.mckelvey@btinternet.com, placing Brave Report in the message bar, and give their name and former arm of service, and if they are members of the RNA or RBL, having knowledge of their branch would be appreciated. There are specific areas where we need information from!

**PUBLICATION NOTES**

Please note all the material in Brave Report is copyright.

Brave Report is collated and published by The Very Rev. Dr Houston McKelvey, OBE QVRM TD.

Dr McKelvey served as chaplain for 29 years with 102/105 (Ulster & Scottish) Regiment, Royal Artillery TA; for 20 years as Chaplain to the RBL - Northern Ireland Area, and for a period as chaplain to the Belfast Branch of the Burma Star Association. He was involved in the life of HMS Caroline and HMS Hibernia. He was appointed an Honorary Chaplain to the RNR. He is a Past President of QUB Combined Services Club.