



The Aisling Society  
of Sydney

*aislingsociety.org.au*

## **ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2016**

### **THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2016**

PRESIDENT  
VICE PRESIDENTS

HON. SECRETARY  
HON. TREASURER  
ARCHIVIST/LIBRARIAN  
PUBLICITY OFFICER  
COUNCILLORS

MR PETER GRAY SC  
DR MARIE LEECH  
MR PATRICK TANSEY  
MRS MARY LEE  
DR JEFF KILDEA  
MR PADRAIC HOBAN  
MR PETER GRAY SC  
MS ÉILIS HURST  
PROF ANDERS AHLQVIST  
MR TONY EARLS  
DR EDDIE JACKSON  
PROF RÓNÁN MCDONALD  
MR JOHN O'MEALLY AM  
MRS TRUDI O'NEIL

Trudi O'Neil continued her long-standing role as our Minutes Secretary, Jeff Kildea kept our website updated and Patrick Tansey continued to perform the lion's share of the work in organising our three main annual functions. These substantial additional contributions from Trudi, Jeff and Patrick are, as always, very much appreciated.

### **MEMBERSHIP**

The Society has 5 honorary life members and 62 financial members. This year we welcomed 6 new members, namely Jacqueline Belliu, Miriam Meaney, Eva Millington, Julian Neylon, Ann Tomlin and Denis Watchorn.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2016 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 24 February at the Gaelic Club, Devonshire Street, Sydney, whom we thank for their hospitality. The Annual Report for 2015, which had been prepared by Peter Gray and circulated to members beforehand, was presented, as was the Treasurer's report which had been prepared by Padraic Hoban and likewise circulated. Both these reports were accepted. An election of office-bearers was held, resulting as set out above.

## ORDINARY MEETINGS

Except for the February meeting held at the Gaelic Club immediately after the AGM, our ordinary monthly meetings were held in the rooms of the Consulate-General of Ireland, for whose support and generosity we continue to be most grateful. As always we enjoyed the genuine interest of the Consul-General, in the person now of Jane Connolly, and of the Vice-Consul Jonathan Patchell.

- FEBRUARY      After the Annual General Meeting Tony Earls spoke about the Society's plans for a program of events on Easter Monday this year, the centenary of the Easter Rising. There was first to be a reading of the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic, on the steps of the GPO in Martin Place, followed by a screening in the State Library of three films – two archival and one more recent – about aspects of the Rising and its aftermath.
- APRIL            Noel Leggett of the Irish National Association (INA) spoke on the founder of the INA in a talk entitled *"The World of Albert Dryer, Australian-born Irish Patriot"*.
- MAY              Professor Jonathan Wooding, the Sir Warwick Fairfax Professor of Celtic Studies at the University of Sydney, gave a talk entitled *"Abstaining from the heroic: the character of the Otherworld traveller in early Irish literature"*.
- JUNE             High School teacher Rebekah Poole spoke on *"Teaching Irish history in Australian schools through the use of political murals"*.
- AUGUST         In a talk entitled *"An Olympic Vignette: Ireland's First Gold Medallist"*, illustrated with archival footage, Kevin O'Connor AM spoke on Dr Pat O'Callaghan, from Kanturk, County Cork, gold medallist in the hammer throw at the 1928 and 1932 Olympic Games, the first athlete from post-independence Ireland to win an Olympic gold medal.
- SEPTEMBER     Dr Anne Jamison, Lecturer in English at Western Sydney University, spoke on *"The enjoyment of a good story': Irish school readers and children's literature in nineteenth-century Australia"*, with particular emphasis on the Irish author Maria Edgeworth and the Australian author Catherine Helen Spence.
- OCTOBER        Dr Perry McIntyre gave a talk *"Building a Memorial and sustaining the rage"*, in which she examined the history and legacy of the Monument to the Great Irish Famine, which was unveiled at the Hyde Park Barracks in August 1999. She explored questions such as whether in a modern technical world a physical presence is necessary and whether we need to gather and remember past victories and tragedies.

## **SOCIAL FUNCTIONS**

### **ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER**

On Friday 4 March, we gathered once more in the splendid Strangers' Dining Room in Parliament House in Macquarie Street, as the guests of Damien Tudehope MLA. 73 members and their guests attended. The national anthems of Ireland and Australia were sung, to accompaniment by Arlene Tansey, and the message from the President of Ireland was read. After dinner, our President, Mr Peter Gray, introduced our speaker, Professor Ronan McDonald, who gave a fascinating talk on Yeats' poetry, including expositions of "Easter 1916" and "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death".

### **MID-YEAR LUNCHEON**

The mid-year luncheon was held on Saturday 23 July, at the Grand Dining Room of the former St Patrick's Seminary at Manly (now the International College of Management). It was attended by 58 members and their guests. His Excellency Noel White, Ireland's Ambassador to Australia, whose term was coming to an end spoke about his time in Australia. Vote of thanks by Jeff Kildea.

### **CHRISTMAS PARTY**

This was as usual a very enjoyable and convivial evening, held on Wednesday 30 November at Sancta Sophia College at Sydney University (of which our Vice-President Marie Leech is the Principal) and attended by 52 members and friends. Claire Dunne read a Christmas-themed short story by Irish writer Clare Boylan, and Kevin O'Connor entertained the gathering with some fine fiddle-playing.

## **AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2016**

- In the Australia Day Honours, Brendan O'Connell was awarded a Medal in the General Division of the Order of Australia for service to the community through a range of organisations.
- The Aisling Society marked the centenary of the Easter Rising with a commemoration starting at the Sydney GPO on Easter Monday, which attracted a gathering of more than 300. The programme of events, organised by Tony Earls, included a reading of the Proclamation by Maeliosa Stafford and a film screening at the Mitchell Library.
- In December it was announced that Marie Leech would receive a 2017 Brigid Award in the Community Hero Category for her contribution to strengthening cultural links between Australia and Ireland.
- Deaths include: Muriel Daly

## **EVENTS DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATED**

- Peter Gray interviewed on "*Ireland Calling*" radio programme, on 7 May
- Irish Film festival in April
- UNSW Symposium in June - Ronan McDonald and Jeff Kildea
- Famine Memorial commemoration in August - Perry McIntyre
- 9<sup>th</sup> annual Celtic Conference (U Syd) in September – Pamela O'Neill

## **AISLING SOCIETY PRIZES**

Prizes of \$150 were again offered to students from the University of Sydney, Macquarie University, Western Sydney University, the University of Wollongong and the Australian Catholic University. This year's recipient was Chloe Haywood-Anderson, a history student at Macquarie University, for the best essay in Irish or Irish-Australian history or literature.

## **CONCLUSION**

My thanks to the members of the Aisling Society for the honour they have given me by entrusting me with the Secretary's role. Thanks also to Peter Gray as President, Padraic Hoban as Treasurer, Trudi O'Neil as Minutes Secretary and Patrick Tansey as our functions organiser and to all the Council members for the help and support which I have received during the year. I again record the Society's sincere thanks to the Consul-General of Ireland, Jane Connolly for her interest in and support of our activities and for continuing so generously to host our meetings in the Consulate's rooms at 1 Market Street. I look forward to another enjoyable and successful year in 2017.

**Jeff Kildea**  
**HON SECRETARY**  
January 2017