



The Aisling Society
of Sydney

aislingsociety.org.au

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2017

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2017

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DR MARIE LEECH
MR PATRICK TANSEY
MRS MARY LEE

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MR TONY EARLS
DR EDDIE JACKSON
PROF RÓNÁN MCDONALD
MRS TRUDI O'NEIL
MS REBECCA POWER

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 4 honorary life members and 96 members of whom 60 have paid their 2017 subscriptions. This year we welcomed 4 new members, Jonathan Wooding, James Rush, Kathleen Marie Harty, and Eithne McSwiney.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2017 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 22 February at the Irish Consulate, Level 26, 1 Market Street, Sydney. The Annual Report for 2016, which had been prepared by the Secretary Jeff Kildea 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

This year our ordinary monthly meetings were held in the rooms of the Consulate-General of Ireland. The continued support and generosity of the Consul-General, Jane Connolly and her staff is most appreciated. Once again we had a variety of talks at our regular monthly meetings:

- FEBRUARY** After the Annual General Meeting Tony Earls gave a talk entitled "Hollywood's Irish mother: An Irish Australian Tragedy" in which he discussed the life and career of one of Ireland's finest actresses, Sara Allgood (1879-1950), who appeared in numerous Hollywood movies and was nominated for an Academy Award in 1941.
- APRIL** Aisling member and Irish Air Corps veteran Myles Mooney gave a talk entitled "Missionaries, Mercenaries and Musicians: Africa the Irish Connection" in which he looked at the history of Ireland's contact with the continent, including the role of Irish peacekeepers in the Congo in the 1960s, and spoke of his personal experiences there.
- MAY** Aisling Hon. Secretary Jeff Kildea spoke about his latest book, *Hugh Mahon: Patriot, Pressman, Politician*, the first volume of a two-volume biography of controversial Irish-Australian politician Hugh Mahon, who in 1920 was expelled from the Commonwealth parliament for his criticism of British rule in Ireland.
- JUNE** Chloe Haywood-Anderson, winner of the Macquarie University Aisling Society prize for 2016, gave a talk entitled "From Home Rule to Republicanism: 'Striking for Freedom' in Easter 1916"
- AUGUST** Historian Dr Richard Reid spoke about Lord Belmore, governor of NSW 1868-1872, who was in office at the time of Henry O'Farrell's attempted assassination of Prince Alfred, the second son of Queen Victoria, at Clontarf, Sydney and who during his term travelled extensively throughout the colony.
- SEPTEMBER** Renowned Irish-Australian actor Maeliosa Stafford gave us a talk entitled, "Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: A Family Story" in which he spoke about his alma mater, St Ignatius College, Galway and some of its teachers and alumni, including William Joyce, aka Lord Haw Haw.
- OCTOBER** Professor Ronan McDonald, a member of the Aisling council, who held the Australian Ireland Fund Chair in Modern Irish Studies at the University of New South Wales from 2010 to 2015, and has recently been appointed to the Gerry Higgins Chair in Irish Studies at the University of Melbourne spoke on the world-acclaimed Irish poet Seamus Heaney and the concept of "credit" in Heaney's work, as both an ascription of value to art and a wily negotiation of faith and belief.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER

On Friday 24 March, we gathered once more in the splendid Strangers' Dining Room in Parliament House in Macquarie Street, as the guests of Damien Tudehope MLA. 84 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 guest speaker, His Excellency Breandan Ó Caollaí, Ambassador of Ireland to Australia.

MID-YEAR LUNCHEON

The mid-year luncheon was held on Saturday 22 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 55 members and their guests. Our guest speaker, Mark Tedeschi AM QC, NSW Senior Crown Prosecutor, spoke about his latest book *Murder at Myall Creek* which gives a detailed account of the murder of 28 Aboriginal men, women and children at Myall Creek in 1838, and the prosecution of the perpetrators by Irish-born Attorney-General John Hubert Plunkett.

CHRISTMAS PARTY

This was as usual a very enjoyable and convivial evening, held on Wednesday 22 November at Sancta Sophia College at Sydney University (of which our Vice-President Marie Leech is the Principal) and attended by 61 members and friends. Our guest speaker, Professor Peter Kuch, Eamon Cleary Professor of Irish Studies at the University of Otago and a former president of the Aisling Society spoke about his latest book *Irish Divorce / Joyce's Ulysses*. Once again Kevin O'Connor entertained the gathering with some fine fiddle-playing.

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2017

- Marie Leech received a Brigid Award from the Irish Friends of Labor for strengthening cultural links between Australia and Ireland
- Ronan McDonald was appointed to the Gerry Higgins Chair of Irish Studies at the University of Melbourne
- Maeliosa Stafford directed Conor McPherson's *The Night Alive* at the Old Fitz Theatre
- Members had books published including Peter Kuch (*Irish Divorce / Joyce's Ulysses*), Gerard Windsor (*The Tempest-Tossed Church: Being a Catholic Today*), Jack Best (*The Sheep of Erromanga*) and Jeff Kildea (*Hugh Mahon: Patriot, Pressman, Politician Vol 1*).
- Deaths included long-time Aisling member and treasurer Maureen McLoughlin.

EVENTS IN 2017 IN WHICH AISLING MEMBERS PARTICIPATED

- Various members attended the Irish Film Festival from 29 March to 2 April
- Jeff Kildea gave the Anzac Day address at the Dawn Service at Grangegorman Military Cemetery, Dublin
- Anders Ahlqvist chaired the all-Irish section at the Irish Winter School in June
- Jeff Kildea gave the 18th Annual Gathering address at the Irish Famine Monument at Sydney's Hyde Park Barracks on 27 August.
- Trudi O'Neill, Rebecca Power, Eva Millington, Monica Heary and Graeme Hoban took part in the inaugural Irish Community Expo at Burwood Park on 23 September.
- Ronan McDonald presided at the keynote address given by President Michael D. Higgins at the University of New South Wales on 19 October
- Myles Mooney attended the United Nations Day wreath laying ceremony on 24 October as part of the United Irish Ex-Services Association Australia contingent

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. Anna Usmar of Sydney University received an Aisling prize for her essay on Insular Art in the Early Middle Ages (with particular emphasis on the Books of Durrow and Kells and the Columban family of monasteries). Representing the Aisling Society at the prize-giving on 8 May, Madeleine Gray presented the Aisling prize to Ms Usmar.

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, Patrick Tansey as our functions organiser and Éilis Hurst for publicising our meetings and events. Thanks also to Trudi O'Neill and Graham Hoban for preparing the suppers and to Greg Hurst for recording our meetings 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 gratitude 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. We look forward to another enjoyable and successful year in 2018.

Jeff Kildea
HON SECRETARY
January 2018