



**The Aisling Society
of Sydney**

aislingsociety.org.au

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2013

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2013

**PRESIDENT
VICE PRESIDENTS**

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

**DR MARIE LEECH
MR PATRICK TANSEY
DR JEFF KILDEA
MRS MARY LEE
MR PETER GRAY
MR PADRAIC HOBAN
MR PETER GRAY
MR DAVID VAUGHAN
MS ÉILIS HURST
PROF RÓNÁN MCDONALD
MRS TRUDI O'NEIL
MR TONY EARLS
PROF ANDERS AHLQVIST**

Brendan O'Connell also kindly continued his long-standing role as our Honorary Auditor, as did Trudi O'Neil as Minutes Secretary, and past President Patrick Tansey once again generously continued to perform the lion's share of the work in relation to organising our three main annual functions, with the assistance of course of Maureen McLoughlin. These contributions from Brendan, Trudi and Patrick are very much appreciated.

MEMBERSHIP

The Society has 80 financial members and 4 honorary life members. This year there were also two honorary members, being the 2012 winners of the Aisling Society Prize at the University of Sydney and Macquarie University, and we welcomed seven new members, namely Gemma Clark, Maeliosa Stafford, Greg Hurst, Connie McNamee, Sean O'Connor, Genevieve Slattery and Eileen Kennedy.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2013 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 27 February. The Annual Report for 2012, 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.

Three of our most esteemed members, all of whom have served with great distinction on the Council for many years, did not seek re-election. They are Anne Stevens and John Ryan, both past Presidents, and Maureen McLoughlin, who was of course our Treasurer for nearly 40 years. The Aisling owes each of Anne, John and Maureen an enormous debt, we thank them wholeheartedly for all that they have contributed to the Society, and we look forward to continuing to enjoy their company as members in the years ahead.

ORDINARY MEETINGS

Our ordinary monthly meetings were held once more in the rooms of the Consulate-General of Ireland, for whose support and generosity we are again most grateful. Again we had the advantage of the genuine interest of the Consul-General, Caitriona Ingoldsby, and of the new Vice-Consul, George O'Keeffe (to whom we again extend a very warm welcome).

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| FEBRUARY | The February Ordinary Meeting followed on the Annual General Meeting, and featured a powerful Talk by Kerry Casey , teacher, poet and writer, entitled " <i>A Hidden History: the Diggers and the 'old' IRA</i> ". Kerry explored the involvement of Australian World War 1 soldiers in Ireland's war of independence. |
| APRIL | Our immediate past President Dr Jeff Kildea , spoke to us with his inimitable enthusiasm about " <i>Hugh Mahon: Irish-Australian Patriot</i> ". In 1920 Hugh Mahon was expelled from the Commonwealth Parliament for criticising British rule in Ireland, the only person to have suffered that ignominy. Jeff's talk examined the background to this momentous event. |
| MAY | Timothy Causbrook majored in Celtic Studies while studying for his Bachelor of Arts at Sydney University, and he undertook an honours year under Professor Anders Ahlqvist's tuition. His erudite Talk was entitled " <i>Norse Loanwords and the dating of early Irish texts</i> ". |
| JUNE | Dr Perry McIntyre , Chair of the Great Irish Famine Commemoration Committee, explored some of the reasons why this particular event in Irish history has been remembered so strongly in recent years in the Irish diaspora, in " <i>Why commemorate <u>an gorta mór</u> in Sydney in 2013?</i> " |
| AUGUST | Visiting Irish novelist Evelyn Conlon , whose most recent novel, <i>Not the Same Sky</i> , was launched in Sydney in August by our own Jeff Kildea, gave us a Talk centred on this new novel, described as " <i>elegant, subtle, and suffused with humour</i> ", which tells the story of four Irish famine girls and their voyage to Australia in 1848. |
| SEPTEMBER | John Kirk , founder of the Clonakilla vineyard and winery near Canberra, gave us an enthralling Talk - about his childhood memories of his grandfather's farm, Clonakilla in West Clare, and of the Hydro Hotel owned by his family in Lisdoonvarna (where he first came to learn about wine), about becoming a scientist and moving to Australia in 1968 to join the CSIRO and in due course to establish his now-famous vineyard, and |

about his first cousin Sean Ó Riada (whom he knew in his early days), and his significance for Irish music. John's Talk was entitled "*Clonakilla, Lisdoonvarna, Sean Ó Riada and Clonakilla*".

OCTOBER Teacher and educator **Kevin Fitzpatrick** spoke with great flair and commitment on the remarkable story of "*Ernest Shackleton, Irish Antarctic Explorer: Barrier Breaker and Leader Of Men*".

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER:

On Friday 22 March, we again enjoyed the splendid Strangers Dining Room in Parliament House in Macquarie Street, again as the guests of the Attorney-General of NSW, the Hon Greg Smith SC. 76 members and their guests attended. Our President, Dr Marie Leech, welcomed the guests, and introduced our speaker. 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, **His Excellency Noel White**, Ambassador of Ireland, gave a delightful address, and the vote of thanks was proposed by Anders Ahlqvist.

MID-YEAR LUNCHEON

52 members and their guests attended the luncheon, which was held on Saturday 27 July, this year for the first time at **The Gardens on Forest** at Peakhurst.

Sligo man **David Daly**, the EU Ambassador to Australia and New Zealand, delivered the 19th *Joan Ward Memorial Address*, in which he gave us some fascinating insights into the world of the European Union and its relevance to Australia. Peter Gray moved the vote of thanks.

CHRISTMAS PARTY

This was as usual a very enjoyable and convivial evening, held on Wednesday 27 November at Sancta Sophia College at Sydney University and attended by 66 members and friends. A memorable feature this year was a celebration of the life of Seamus Heaney, and a toast to the memory of the great poet, with readings and reminiscences beautifully led by our member Maurice Whelan.

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2013

- Michael Quinlan took up his appointment as Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Law at The University of Notre Dame in Sydney
- Much-loved Irish priest Fr John McSweeney, giver of some fine Talks to the Society, died in January
- Anne Stevens, John Ryan and Maureen McLoughlin graciously stepped down as Councillors in February after many years distinguished service, as noted above
- Gerard Windsor's latest book, *Angels Before Me: The Road to Santiago*, was published in December

EVENTS DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATED

- Padraic Hoban co-ordinated the organisation of the traditional "Aisling car", and phalanx of supporting decorators and walkers, for our participation in the annual St Patrick's Day Parade in March
- The Society again made donations to the St Patrick's Day Mass Committee and to the St Patrick's Day Parade Committee
- Tony Earls and Pamela O'Neill represented the Society at the Dean's Annual Reception for Alumni and Friends at Sydney University in April

- On 1 May, under the joint auspices of the Consulate-General of Ireland and the NSW Parliamentary Friends of Ireland Group, an event was held at Parliament House to commemorate Anzac Day, at which Jeff Kildea gave a Talk on the contribution of the Irish to the ANZACs and the forging of the Australian nation during World War I
- Marie Leech represented the Society at a ceremony held by the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry at Sydney University in May, when our prize was awarded to Philip Hayton
- Bloomsday celebrations on 16 June were again centred this year on the Bondi Pavilion, and again our member Rónán McDonald was prominent in the arrangements for the event, which was enjoyed by many of our members
- The Great Irish Famine Commemoration Committee, led by our member Dr Perry McIntyre, held a series of events in August in which various of our members participated (including a Dinner, a Seminar and the annual gathering at the monument at Hyde Park Barracks) in the course of hosting the International Famine Commemoration in Sydney
- Evelyn Conlon's most recent novel, *Not the Same Sky*, was launched by Jeff Kildea at Parliament House in Macquarie Street on 24 August - just a few days before Evelyn's Talk to the Society, about her book, at our August meeting
- Many Aisling members attended the 2013 Irish Studies Parliament House Dinner on 1 November. This Dinner marked the re-establishment of the drive to ensure the availability of ongoing funding for the UNSW Global Irish Studies Centre, and our members Rónán McDonald (Director of the Centre) and John O'Meally were among those prominent in spearheading an extremely successful evening.
- Aisling members were also present to hear Professor Joanna Bourke of the University of London deliver the third annual Patrick O'Farrell Memorial Lecture at the Global Irish Studies Centre at UNSW on 4 December, entitled '*A Diabolical Crime*': *Sexual Violence in Irish History*. The lecture launched a major four-day international conference entitled "*The Ends of Ireland*"

AISLING SOCIETY PRIZES

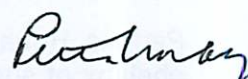
Prizes of \$150 were again offered to students from the University of Sydney, Macquarie University, the University of Western Sydney, the University of Wollongong and the Australian Catholic University. Prizewinners announced in 2013 were:

University of Sydney
Macquarie University

Philip Hayton
Saartje Tack

CONCLUSION

My thanks again to the members of the Aisling Society for the honour they give me by entrusting me with the Secretary's role. Thanks also to Marie Leech as President, Padraic Hoban, Trudi O'Neil and Patrick Tansey in particular, and all the Council members generally, for the help and support which I have received during the year. I again record also the Society's sincere thanks to the Consulate-General of Ireland, especially Caitriona Ingoldsby and George O'Keeffe, for their interest in and support of our activities and for continuing so generously to host our meetings in their rooms at 1 Market Street. I look forward to another enjoyable and successful year in 2014.



Peter Gray
HON SECRETARY

January 2014