



**The Aisling Society
of Sydney**

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ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2014

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2014

**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
MS ÉILIS HURST
PROF RÓNÁN MCDONALD
MRS TRUDI O'NEIL
MR TONY EARLS
PROF ANDERS AHLQVIST
MR JOHN O'MEALLY AM**

Trudi O'Neil also kindly continued her long-standing role as our Minutes Secretary, Jeff Kildea again undertook the role of improving our website and keeping it updated, and Patrick Tansey again generously 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 very much appreciated.

MEMBERSHIP

The Society has 64 financial members and 4 honorary life members. There are no current honorary members, as there are no current University prize-winners. This year we welcomed six new members, namely Bill and Rebecca Power, Helen Reed, Nora White, John Gooley and Marion Flynn.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2014 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 26 February. The Annual Report for 2013, 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.

David Vaughan, who had been a most valued member of the Council for many years, including in more recent times as Publicity Officer, did not seek re-election. Brendan O'Connell also stepped down as our long-standing honorary auditor. The Aisling owes each of David and Brendan a great 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.

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 enjoyed the genuine interest of the Consul-General - first Caitriona Ingoldsby (to whom we bade farewell during the year at the conclusion of her highly successful term here in Sydney), and then her successor Jane Connolly (to whom we extend a very warm welcome) - and of the Vice-Consul, George O'Keeffe.

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| FEBRUARY | The February Ordinary Meeting followed the Annual General Meeting, and featured a Talk by our member and past President Jeff Kildea , about some of the anticipated highlights of his fascinating forthcoming year as holder of the Chair of Australian History at University College Dublin. |
| APRIL | Gerard Windsor , Aisling member and eminent writer, spoke with characteristic elegance about his most recent walk along the <i>camino</i> , the famous pilgrim's way, in a Talk entitled " <i>On Pilgrimage with the Irish - Bathurst Street to Santiago de Compostela</i> ". |
| MAY | Historian Anne Cunningham based her lively Talk on her latest book " <i>The price of a wife: The priest and the divorce trial</i> ", which examines the remarkable 1900 divorce case in which Australian Test cricketer, Arthur Coningham, accused Fr Denis O'Haran, private secretary to Australia's first Cardinal, Patrick Moran, of having an affair with his wife, and demanded £5000 compensation for loss of his conjugal rights. |
| JUNE | We welcomed Consul-General Caitriona Ingoldsby , for sadly the last time before she finished her Sydney posting, who spoke engagingly of " <i>The Irish in Australia: past, present and future</i> ". |
| AUGUST | Dr Gemma Clark , Research Fellow at the UNSW Global Irish Studies Centre, analysed the local-community violence associated with the 1922-23 conflict over the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the subject of her new book, " <i>Everyday violence in the Irish civil war</i> ". |
| SEPTEMBER | We were delighted to welcome back Professor Barra Boydell , retired Professor of Music History at the NUI Maynooth and joint editor of the "Encyclopedia of Music in Ireland", who gave us another sparkling Talk, illuminated by a series of fascinating contemporaneous drawings and pictures, entitled " <i>The politics of Irish music in 18th and 19th century art</i> ". |

OCTOBER

Prolific author **Babette Smith** spoke about the remarkable story told in her recently-published *"The luck of the Irish"*. 250 Irish convicts, whose ship sank off the NSW coast in 1835, miraculously all survived, guided to safety by local Aboriginal people, and most later worked on farms or in businesses, building a better life than they could possibly have experienced in Ireland.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER:

On Friday 21 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. 64 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, **Jonathan Wooding**, the newly appointed Sir Warwick Fairfax Professor of Celtic Studies at the University of Sydney (successor to Anders Ahlqvist), gave an erudite address, *"A Pilgrim on Earth: St Patrick and the vision of the early church"*. The vote of thanks was proposed by Rónán McDonald.

MID-YEAR LUNCHEON

45 members and their guests attended the luncheon, which was held on Saturday 26 July, this year for the first time at P J O'Brien's Irish Pub, in the Grace Hotel in the city.

In a break from tradition, there was no guest speaker this year; instead, **Kelly's Heroes**, three traditional musicians, entertained us with gusto and warmth on a cold winter's day, and a rollicking afternoon unfolded.

CHRISTMAS PARTY

This was as usual a very enjoyable and convivial evening, held on Wednesday 3 December at Sancta Sophia College at Sydney University (of which our President Marie Leech is the Principal) and attended by 60 members and friends. A feature this year was the marvellous music we were given by **Kevin O'Connor** on the fiddle (supplemented later on by a ballad or two from the Two Tenors, Tony Baine and Peter Gray).

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2014

- Fr Tom Devereux returned to Ireland in late 2013 after many years based in "County Bondi" as the Chaplain to the young Sydney Irish
- Tom Power's work with Sydney's Irish community, especially in connection with the commissioning and installation of the world renowned Famine Memorial at Hyde Park Barracks in 1998, was recognised with the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in the Australia Day honours
- Jeff Kildea held the Keith Cameron Chair of Australian History at University College Dublin for 2014, a role he fulfilled with distinction
- Maeliosa Stafford played the lead in Tom Murphy's *The Gigli Concert* in April - May, at the beautiful new Eternity Playhouse in East Sydney
- Maureen McLoughlin, our wonderful Treasurer for nearly 40 years, has moved to Ferndale Gardens in Mortdale, after a fall at home left her with reduced mobility. She is unable to attend meetings at least for the time being. We send her our warmest good wishes.
- Our former member John Sgouromallis died in December. May he rest in peace.

- The Irish ANZACs Project, of which Jeff Kildea is the director, was simultaneously launched in Ireland and Australia in October. The database aims to identify all Irish-born enlistments in the AIF during World War I.

EVENTS DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATED

- Jeff Kildea, Perry McIntyre, Patrick Tansey and Tony Earls were among those who helped create the content of a new smart phone app for an 'Old Irish Sydney' Walking Tour. The app was developed by the Dictionary of Sydney, with funding from the Irish Government (co-ordinated by the Irish Consulate under Caitriona Ingoldsby), and launched by Minister Simon Coveney during his visit to Australia in March. It is now available for free download for Android and Apple phones: see <http://trust.dictionaryofsydney.org/projects/old-irish-sydney-walk/>
- 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
- Aisling members were among those who attended the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Vinegar Hill in March
- Marie Leech represented the Society at the Dean's Annual Reception for Alumni and Friends at Sydney University in April
- Many Aisling members attended the Australian Ireland Fund's gala Dinner for former Irish President Mary McAleese in September. The Dinner raised funds for the UNSW Global Irish Studies Centre, and our member Rónán McDonald (Director of the Centre) spoke with his customary flair and enthusiasm about the work of the Centre.

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. However, no prizewinners were announced in 2013 or 2014.

CONCLUSION

My thanks again to the members of the Aisling Society for the honour they have given me for so long 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, Jane Connolly 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 2015.



Peter Gray
HON SECRETARY

January 2015