



**The Aisling Society
of Sydney**

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ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2019

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2019

PRESIDENT	DR PAMELA O'NEILL
VICE PRESIDENTS	MR PETER GRAY SC
	DR MARIE LEECH
	MR PATRICK TANSEY
HON. SECRETARY	DR JEFF KILDEA
HON. TREASURER	MR PADRAIC HOBAN
ARCHIVIST/LIBRARIAN	MR PETER GRAY SC
PUBLICITY OFFICER	MR TONY EARLS
COUNCILLORS	DR EDDIE JACKSON
	PROF PETER KUCH
	MRS MARY LEE OAM
	PROF RÓNÁN MCDONALD
	MRS TRUDI O'NEIL
	MS SUSAN RYAN AO

Trudi O'Neil continued her long-standing role as our Minutes Secretary, Patrick Tansey continued to perform the lion's share of the work in organising our three main annual functions and Trudi O'Neil and Graham Hoban provided the suppers for our monthly meetings. These substantial additional contributions from Trudi, Patrick and Graham are, as always, very much appreciated.

MEMBERSHIP

At the end of 2019 the Society had 3 honorary life members and 98 ordinary members of whom 53 paid their 2019 subscriptions. This year we welcomed 4 new members: Angela McLoughlin, Jeanette Mollenhauer, Patricia Power and Maureen Robinson. During the year we received the sad news of the death of Honorary Life Member Fr Michael O'Sullivan.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2019 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 27 February at the Irish Consulate, Level 26, 1 Market Street, Sydney. The Annual Report for 2018, 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 Pdraic 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 support and generosity of the Consul-General, Owen Feeney, and the staff of the consulate is most appreciated. Once again we had a variety of talks at our regular monthly meetings:

FEBRUARY	After the Annual General Meeting Dr. Ellie Crookes gave a talk entitled 'Maude Gonne: Ireland's Joan of Arc', in which she examined the alignment of Maud Gonne with Joan of Arc and discussed the significance of her medievalisation.
APRIL	Due to a venue difficulty no meeting was held.
MAY	Dr Jeanette Mollenhauer gave a talk entitled 'Dancing at the Southern Crossroads' on Irish dancing in Australia.
JUNE	In the presence of the Irish Minister of State for the Diaspora, Ciaran Cannon TD, Mary Barthelemy spoke on 'The Song of the Camán – Hurling in Sydney 1884-1910' in which she discussed the development of hurling in Sydney, arguing that it was a strand in a Celtic knot that was intricate and culturally rich rather than an aspect of 'ghettoisation'.
JULY	Sr Vivienne Keely spoke about her recent book on Michael Hayes, a 1798 rebel transported to New South Wales, whose letters home reveal a colourful and tragic life marked by attempts to stem the loss of family and friends.
SEPTEMBER	Eleanor Deep spoke on "'Far from the hills of my own native home": Irish and Scottish Migrants in Colonial New South Wales'
OCTOBER	Dr Eddie Jackson gave a detailed analysis of Brexit and what it means for Ireland and the peace process in Northern Ireland. His address was preceded by a talk by the Consul-General, Owen Feeney, on the Irish government's attitude to the Brexit negotiations.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

St Patrick's Day Dinner

On Friday 22 March, we gathered once more in the splendid Strangers' Dining Room in Parliament House, Macquarie Street, as the guests of David Clarke MLC. There were 63 members and guests present. 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, Dr Pamela O'Neill, introduced our guest speaker, former ABC television presenter Kerry O'Brien, who spoke about his family who emigrated to Australia from Ireland during the Famine. Peter Gray moved the vote of thanks.

Mid-Year Luncheon

The mid-year luncheon was held on Saturday 10 August, at the Sir Stamford Hotel, Sydney. It was attended by 66 members and their guests. Our guest speaker, the Irish Consul-General Owen Feeney, gave an interesting talk on his career and his time in Sydney as well as on the situation in Ireland, including the latest news on Brexit. Eddie Jackson 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, Sydney University and attended by 56 members and guests. Our president, Dr Pamela O'Neil, gave a talk entitled '1500 years of Irish Christmases'. Marie Leech moved the vote of thanks.

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2019

- A very sad milestone this year was the death of Father Michael O'Sullivan, who died in his sleep on 20 July. Fr Michael was an honorary life member of the Aisling Society and served as president in 1972-73 and 1980-81 and as treasurer in 1966.
- A former president of the Aisling Society, Plunkett Sweeney (1974-75) died in June aged 98 years.
- Aisling president, Dr Pamela O'Neill, appeared in a video promoting the Aisling Society that was prepared by the Irish Consulate-General.
- The Aisling Society joined with others in celebrating the 30th anniversary of the *Irish Echo*.

EVENTS IN 2019 IN WHICH AISLING MEMBERS PARTICIPATED

- Dr Pamela O'Neill was a regular attender at Le Chéile workshops convened by the Irish Consul-General to coordinate the activities of the various Irish societies in Sydney.
- Dr Pamela O'Neill and Éilis Hurst continue to assist with the Irish language school at the Gaelic Club in Sydney.
- Sean Flavin was among the organisers of the annual commemoration of the Battle of Vinegar Hill at Rouse Hill.

- Éilis and Greg Hurst were among the organisers of the 12th *Scoil Gheimhridh* (Irish Winter School) in Sydney in June which many members attended.
- Various members attended the Bloomsday Eve event at the State Library in June.
- Julian Neylan and Greg Stewart organised a Bloomsday event at the Gaelic Club in June.
- Dr Perry McIntyre, as the chair of the Great Irish Famine Commemoration Committee, hosted the 20th annual gathering at the Great Irish Famine memorial at Hyde Park in August.
- Various members attended the gathering of the United Irish Ex-Services Association Australia at the City Tattersalls Club in December
- Various members attended and gave papers at the 24th Conference of the Irish Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand held in Adelaide in December.

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. Eleanor Deep of the University of Sydney received an Aisling prize for her essay 'The Irish and Scots in Colonial New South Wales: Comparing Migrants' Experiences of the British Empire'.

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 Dr Pamela O'Neill as President, Padraic Hoban as Treasurer, Trudi O'Neil as Minutes Secretary, Patrick Tansey as our functions organiser. 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, Owen Feeney for his interest in and support of our activities, for speaking at our functions and for generously continuing to host our meetings in the Consulate's conference room at 1 Market Street, Sydney. We look forward to another enjoyable and successful year in 2020.

Jeff Kildea
HON SECRETARY
 January 2020