



The Aisling Society
of Sydney

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ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2021

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2021

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	MS ANGELA MCLOUGHLIN
COUNCILLORS	DR EDDIE JACKSON
	PROF PETER KUCH
	MR TONY EARLS
	DR PERRY MCINTYRE AM
	DR JEANETTE MOLLENHAUER
	MS MARY BARTHELEMY

Those who hoped that 2021 would see the end of the Covid-19 pandemic were to be sadly disappointed. Green shoots early in the year saw us hold hybrid face-to-face/Zoom meetings in April and May, but those shoots failed to thrive, overwhelmed by the Delta variant. In June the state entered a new lockdown that was to last until October. But even then, caution and fear of disappointment dictated that our last two meetings for the year would be Zoom only. Nevertheless, we managed to hold an informal Christmas drinks session at P.J. O'Brien's hotel in early December for those willing and able to venture out into the Covid wild. It was a reminder of the 'good old days', but it too might prove to be a

false dawn. The year ended with the spread of the Omicron variant, which raised the spectre of a third year of virtual meetings and cancelled events. If so, the experience of the last two years instils confidence that in 2022 the Aisling Society will continue to function and grow notwithstanding the limitations Covid might place on our ability to meet in person.

MEMBERSHIP

At the end of 2021 the Society had 3 honorary life members and 105 ordinary members. This year we welcomed Hugh Myers as a new member. During the year we received the sad news of the death of long-time Aisling member Brian McAteer, who died aged 92. Also, some members announced their retirement from the Society, including Sandra Coogan.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2021 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 24 February via Zoom video conference. The Annual Report for 2020, which had been prepared by the Secretary Dr Jeff Kildea and circulated to members beforehand, was presented, as was the Treasurer's report which had been prepared by Treasurer Padraic Hoban and likewise circulated. Both these reports were accepted by the meeting. An election of office-bearers and Council members was held, resulting in the membership as set out above.

ORDINARY MEETINGS

Apart from the ordinary meetings in April and May, which were held in the conference room of the Consulate-General of Ireland and livestreamed via Zoom, our ordinary monthly meetings on the fourth Wednesday of the month were this year held remotely using Zoom videoconferencing software. Most active members have managed to avail themselves of the technology. As a result, the number of participants at Zoom meetings was about the same as we have been accustomed to see in previous years at in-person meetings. We ended up holding two more ordinary meetings than is normally the case, in March, when we would normally have held the St Patrick's Day dinner, and in August instead of the mid-year lunch. Those participating in this year's meetings were rewarded with a variety of high-quality talks:

FEBRUARY	Anne Casey, an award-winning poet and writer who emigrated to Australia from County Clare, gave a talk entitled 'An Emigrant's Story' about the experience of emigration. The talk included readings from her poetry.
MARCH	Professor Francis Campbell, the Irish-born Vice-Chancellor of the University of Notre Dame, spoke to the society about the legacy of the partition of Ireland, which took place a century ago. His talk was entitled 'Is the Legacy of Partition Preventing the Future and the Common Good?'. Commentary was provided by Irish Ambassador Breandán Ó Caollaí.
APRIL	In the first of our hybrid In-person/Zoom meetings, Dr Robert Lindsey, Cultural Historian, gave a talk about a little-known Irish-Australian artist, engineer and writer, Vincent Joseph Hearnés (1903-1986).
MAY	In the second of our hybrid meetings, Elisabeth Edwards spoke about

	her book, <i>Wearing the Green: The Daltons and the Irish Cause</i> , which tells the remarkable history of the Dalton family and their ‘rags to riches’ story, from their struggles in Ireland during the Great Famine to their outstanding success in their vast business interests in Orange and Sydney.
JUNE	Dr Jeff Kildea gave a talk entitled ‘A Victory Comparable to Jutland: the Royal Navy’s Hijacking of Archbishop Daniel Mannix in 1920’.
JULY	Thomas Cafe, the 2020 Aisling prize winner from Sydney University, spoke on the subject of his essay, ‘Clerical Fascism in the interwar Irish Free State: Eoin O’Duffy and the Irish Brigade’.
AUGUST	Dr Greg Stewart and Dr Julian Neylan, Aisling members who for many years have organised Bloomsday events in Sydney, informed and entertained members and friends with a talk on the history of the city’s celebration of the day.
SEPTEMBER	Aisling member Hugh Myers, Special Collections Advisor at the Australian Catholic University, spoke about the university’s collection of books, pamphlets and ephemera that cast light on the Catholic mission to the Irish convicts and nineteenth-century sectarianism.
OCTOBER	Gregory Byrnes, MPhil in Celtic Studies at Sydney University, gave a talk entitled ‘Wandering around Innisfree’ in which he analysed Yeat’s poem ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’ and drew allusions to earlier Irish poetry.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Owing to public health restrictions we had to cancel this year’s St Patrick’s Day Dinner scheduled for March and the Mid-Year Lunch scheduled for August, both of which were to be held at the Sir Stamford Hotel. As noted above, ordinary meetings were held in each of those months in place of the cancelled events. The usual Aisling Christmas party, scheduled to be held on 24 November at Sancta Sophia College, University of Sydney, was also cancelled owing to public health restrictions. However, in its place the society celebrated the festive season on that date with an online Christmas party at which members entertained each other with poetry, stories, and talks on their research activities.

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2021

- A very big milestone was that the Aisling Society survived and thrived in 2021 despite the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Aisling 20/20 Vision project was included on the Ireland Reaching Out website: <https://irelandxo.com/ireland-xo/history-and-genealogy/ancestor-database/bella-guerin>.
- In July the council of the Aisling Society met with the outgoing Consul-General for Ireland, Owen Feeney, via video link to farewell him on his departure from Sydney.
- At our October Zoom meeting members of the Aisling Society met with the new Consul-General for Ireland, Rosie Keane, and welcomed her to Sydney. We were able to meet her in person at the Christmas drinks in December.

EVENTS IN 2021 IN WHICH AISLING MEMBERS PARTICIPATED

- Dr Perry McIntyre was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in this year's Australia Day honours list.
- Dr Pamela O'Neill and Éilis Hurst continued assisting with Irish language classes remotely.
- Dr Pamela O'Neill continued to conduct classes at the Australian School of Celtic Learning, before and after moving to Glen Innes, the capital of Celtic Australia.
- Professor Peter Kuch, Professor Emeritus of University of Otago, contributed a number of chapters and articles for publication in books and journals.
- Dr Jeff Kildea, who was appointed an honorary professor at the University of New South Wales, participated in Tourism Ireland's St Patrick's Day function taking travel agents and travel writers on a walking tour of Irish sites in the Rocks and was interviewed by Radio97 (Tweed Heads) about the Aisling Society.
- In March a number of Aisling members took part in a guided tour of the Parramatta Female Factory organised by Irish consulate.
- On Easter Sunday Dr Jeff Kildea gave the address at the Irish National Association's Easter Rising commemoration at the 1798 Memorial at Waverley Cemetery.
- Dr Jeanette Mollenhauer's book *Dancing at the Southern Crossroads: A History of Irish Step Dance in Australia 1880-1940* was launched in May at both the Koroit Irish Festival and Her Place Museum in Melbourne.
- In June a number of Aisling members attended the Bloomsday event at the Seymour Centre, co-hosted by the Irish consulate and the University of Sydney.
- The Melbourne Irish Studies Seminar program included a talk in June by Dr Perry McIntyre AM and Dr Jeff Kildea on their history of the Irish National Association and in September by Professor Peter Kuch on Sydney theatre and the Irish play in the 1830s.

AISLING SOCIETY PRIZES

Monetary prizes were again offered to students from the University of Sydney, Macquarie University, Western Sydney University, the University of Wollongong and the Australian Catholic University. Thomas Cafe of the University of Sydney received an Aisling prize for his essay, 'Clerical Fascism in the interwar Irish Free State: Eoin O'Duffy and the Irish Brigade'. Mr Cafe spoke to the society about his essay at the meeting in July 2021.

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 our President Dr Pamela O'Neill, who for the past two years has chaired our online meetings with amazing skill and patience, and to our Treasurer Padraic Hoban, and to all the Council members for their help and support during the year.

I record the Society's sincere gratitude to the Consul-General of Ireland, Rosie Keane, and her predecessor Owen Feeney, for their interest in and support of our activities and for generously offering the Consulate's conference room at Ireland House, 1 Market Street,

Sydney for our hybrid meetings this year and into the future once we return to face-to-face gatherings.

Through the difficult year of 2021 we have managed to keep the Aisling spirit alive through the enthusiasm of our members and their willingness to adapt to the changed circumstances forced upon us by the pandemic. I look forward with hope that whatever 2022 may bring we will continue to maintain that spirit whether it be online or in person or both.

Jeff Kildea
Honorary Secretary
January 2022