



The Aisling Society  
of Sydney

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## **ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2022**

### **THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2022**

PRESIDENT	MR TONY EARLS
VICE PRESIDENTS	DR PAMELA O'NEILL
	MR PETER GRAY SC
	DR MARIE LEECH
HONORARY SECRETARY	DR JEFF KILDEA
HONORARY TREASURER	MR PADRAIC HOBAN
ARCHIVIST/LIBRARIAN	MR PETER GRAY SC
PUBLICITY OFFICER	MS ANGELA MCLOUGHLIN
COUNCILLORS	DR EDDIE JACKSON
	PROF PETER KUCH
	MR PATRICK TANSEY
	DR PERRY MCINTYRE AM
	DR JEANETTE MOLLENHAUER
	MS MARY BARTHELEMY

### **THE YEAR IN REVIEW**

Although Covid-19 continued to linger through 2022, we managed during the year to hold all our regular monthly meetings and our three social functions: St Patrick's Day Dinner, Mid-Year Lunch, and Christmas Party. It was a real treat to be able to mingle once more with our Aisling members and friends after two years in the grip of the pandemic. The monthly meetings for 2022 were held using the hybrid in-person/Zoom format we had trialled in April and May 2021. Apart from the AGM, those meetings were conducted using our own resources rather than relying on a paid technical consultant. I wish to acknowledge the contribution of Aisling member Greg Hurst who was instrumental in putting the system together and maintaining it throughout the year.

In 2020 we adopted Zoom out of necessity in order to keep the Aisling spirit alive during the pandemic when prudence and government restrictions prevented us from meeting in person. Although restrictions were lifted at the end of 2021 and inhibitions concerning social engagement diminished gradually over time, we continued through 2022 to offer

members the option of participating in our monthly meetings via Zoom through the hybrid format. This option proved popular, particularly for less mobile members and those living far from the city, and at its meeting in November the council of the society resolved to continue the format in 2023. Nevertheless, while the ability to attend Aisling meetings from the comfort of one’s home is appealing, there is a risk that the measure introduced to keep the Aisling spirit alive might contribute to its decline if the camaraderie that comes from face-to-face engagement is lost. Food for thought as we move into 2023.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

At the end of 2022 the Society had two honorary life members, Bishop David Cremin and Anne Stevens, and 100 ordinary members. During the year we received the sad news of the death of honorary life member Brendan O’Connell OAM and of long-time Aisling members Sean O’Connor, John Kavanagh, Mary O’Brien (née O’Connor), and James Rush. Also, several members announced their retirement from the Society. This year we welcomed Geoff Barker, Tomás De Bhaldraithe, and Mel Keenan as new members.

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The 2022 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 23 February via Zoom at the Consulate General for Ireland in Sydney and via Zoom video conference. The annual report for 2021, which had been prepared by the honorary secretary Dr Jeff Kildea and circulated to members beforehand, was presented, as was the financial report for 2021 which had been prepared by the honorary 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 set out above.

## **ORDINARY MEETINGS**

All our regular monthly meetings for 2022 were held on the fourth Wednesday of the month using the hybrid format. Apart from May, the in-person component of those meetings was held at the Consulate General for Ireland in Sydney. As the consulate was unavailable in May, that meeting was held at the chambers of Peter Gray SC in Phillip Street, Sydney. The number of participants at the monthly meetings averaged 32, about the same as we used to see pre-Covid, evidence that the Aisling spirit has continued despite the pandemic. The year also saw a couple of firsts for the Aisling Society: in May the president and honorary secretary attended the meeting from Ireland and Finland, respectively, and in September the guest speaker addressed the meeting from Dublin, indicating the potential of the new technology. Those who participated in this year’s meetings were rewarded with a variety of high-quality talks:

FEBRUARY	Dr Damian Gleeson, the 2022 winner of the Australian Religious History Fellowship at the State Library of New South Wales, gave a talk entitled ‘Bigamy, clandestine marriage, and the “seven-year rule” in penal NSW’, in which he discussed how English marriage law and Irish marriage practice intersected and collided in the penal colony of New South Wales.
APRIL	Aisling vice-president Peter Gray SC gave a talk on Ireland and cricket, enlightening members as to the long, and at times, spectacular, history of the game in Ireland.

MAY	Professor James Franklin, vice-president of the Australian Catholic Historical Society and editor of the <i>Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society</i> , gave a talk entitled 'Irish Australian Catholics: the tribal faith of a semi-enclosed community' in which he spoke about some of the unique features and colourful characters of the Irish-Australian Catholic community.
JUNE	Aisling vice-president Dr Pamela O'Neill gave a talk entitled 'Eleanor Knott: a case study of the value of retrieving Irish women's stories' in which she discussed Knott's contribution to the study of early Irish.
JULY	Thomas Cafe, the 2021 Aisling prize winner from Sydney University, spoke on the subject of his essay, 'What do the Country Houses of eighteenth-century Protestant Irish Ascendancy reveal about the political culture of Ireland at the time?'.
SEPTEMBER	Speaking from Dublin, the Irish playwright, poet, and broadcaster Vincent Woods gave a talk entitled 'Freedom's Laureate: The Poetry and Legacy of Francis MacNamara' about the Irish convict known as Frank the Poet, who was transported to New South Wales in 1832.
OCTOBER	Dublin-born Sydney lawyer Donal Griffin spoke about his recent book <i>An Irish Book of Living and Dying: A Migrant's Tale</i> , which has been described as an 'hilarious, charming and occasionally melancholy memoir'.

## SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

### St Patrick's Day Dinner

On Friday 11 March, we gathered at the Sir Stamford Hotel, Circular Quay to celebrate the feast day of St Patrick for the first time since 2019. Unfortunately, our events-organiser, Patrick Tansey and his family were unable to attend due to an outbreak of Covid earlier in the week. Nevertheless, a few of us came off the reserves bench to ensure that the function went ahead with the usual decorations, raffles, and lucky door prizes. After a three-year gap, the joy and enthusiasm of those attending confirmed that the spirit of the Aisling Society had well and truly survived the isolating effect of the pandemic. Sixty-three members and guests attended, the same number as in 2019. After dinner our new president, Tony Earls, introduced the guest speaker, the Consul General for Ireland, Rosie Keane, who told us of her early life in County Galway and of her work in the private sector and then in the Departments of Finance and Foreign Affairs. Peter Gray SC moved the vote of thanks.

### Mid-Year Luncheon

The mid-year luncheon was held on Saturday 20 August at the Sir Stamford Hotel, Sydney. It was attended by 54 members and their guests. Once again, Patrick Tansey was absent, not due to Covid but because he was cycling in Europe. Fortunately, he delegated his duties to members of his family and we are very grateful to Arlene, Kate, Phillip and Julie Tansey for standing in. Our guest speaker was the Irish Ambassador to Australia Tim Mawe, who gave an interesting talk on the situation in Ireland, including the latest news on Brexit. Dr Pamela O'Neill moved the vote of thanks.

## **Christmas Party**

This year's Christmas party, the first since 2019, was a very enjoyable and convivial affair held on Wednesday 30 November at Sancta Sophia College, Sydney University, attended by fifty members and their guests. The weather was kind to us and we were able to gather on the lawn of the quadrangle for a pre-dinner drink before moving inside for a sumptuous buffet-style banquet. Peter Kuch and Marie Leech provided the entertainment with readings from James Joyce's *Ulysses*. We are grateful to Patrick Tansey, who managed to attend the function, for organising the event. We are also grateful to the Tansey family for decorating the dining hall with Irish and Christmas bunting that added to the atmosphere of joy and gaiety provided by those attending.

## **AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2022**

- A very big milestone was that the Aisling Society survived and thrived in 2022 despite the lingering Covid-19 pandemic.
- The September meeting included for the first time a talk by a speaker located outside Australia with Vincent Wood addressing us from Dublin via Zoom.
- A sad milestone was the death of Brendan O'Connell OAM. Brendan was a much-loved, long-time member of the Aisling Society and was its honorary auditor for many years. In 2010 the council of the society conferred on Brendan honorary life membership in recognition of his service to the society.
- Dr Marie Leech was awarded University Colleges Australia Life Membership and the University of Sydney Union Fellowship.
- In November Dr Pamela O'Neill was elected Convener of the Celtic Council of Australia.

## **EVENTS IN 2022 IN WHICH AISLING MEMBERS PARTICIPATED**

- Dr Pamela O'Neill and Éilis Hurst continued assisting with Irish language classes at the Gaelic Club and remotely.
- Dr Pamela O'Neill continued to conduct classes at the Australian School of Celtic Learning from Glen Innes, the capital of Celtic Australia.
- Mary Barthelemy contributed two articles to *Heritage*, the magazine of the Marrickville Heritage Society. They were 'Tempe Hurling Club and the Gannon's Paddock affair of 1899' and 'Portraits of Fanny Durack'.
- Professor Peter Kuch, Professor Emeritus of University of Otago, contributed a number of chapters and articles for publication in books and journals.
- In March Dr Jeff Kildea gave a talk via Zoom to the Irish online lecture series *Trasna na Tíre* on Anzacs and Ireland and in May contributed an article on the Northern Ireland elections to *Pearls and Irritations*, an online public policy journal.
- In November Dr Perry McIntyre AM and Dr Jeff Kildea gave papers at the *Return to Tipperary* conference at Galong.

## **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. In May Dr Perry McIntyre AM presented Thomas Cafe with an Aisling prize at the awards ceremony at the University of Sydney for his essay, 'What do the Country Houses of eighteenth-century Protestant Irish Ascendancy reveal about the political

culture of Ireland at the time?'. Mr Cafe spoke to the society about his essay at our meeting in July.

## **CONCLUSION**

My thanks once again to the members of the Aisling Society for the honour they have given me by entrusting me with the role of honorary secretary. Thanks also to our president Tony Earls and to our treasurer Padraic Hoban, and to all the members of the Aisling Council for their help and support during the year.

I record the society's sincere gratitude to the Consul General for Ireland Rosie Keane for her interest in and support of the society and its activities and for generously offering the consulate's conference room at Ireland House, 1 Market Street, Sydney for our meetings.

Despite the disruption of Covid-19 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 2023 may bring we will maintain that spirit and continue to pursue our love of Ireland, its history, literature, and culture.

**Jeff Kildea**  
**Honorary Secretary**  
January 2023