



The Aisling Society
of Sydney

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ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2023

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2023

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

In 2023 the Aisling Society held six ordinary monthly meetings, a special meeting in conjunction with Celtic Studies at the University of Sydney, and our usual three social functions: St Patrick's Day Dinner, Mid-Year Lunch, and Christmas Party. Details of the meetings and social functions are provided in the body of the report.

The ordinary monthly meetings for 2023 were held using the hybrid in-person/Zoom format. Those meetings were conducted with the assistance of a technical consultant, Ves Campion. The option of participating in our ordinary monthly meetings via Zoom continues to be popular, particularly for less mobile members and those living far from the city. At its meeting in December, the council of the society resolved to continue the format in 2024. Concerns that the hybrid format might reduce the camaraderie that comes from face-to-face engagement were allayed somewhat as reasonable numbers continued to attend meetings in person.

MEMBERSHIP

At the end of 2023 the Society had two honorary life members, Bishop David Cremin and Anne Stevens, and 101 ordinary members. During the year we received the sad news of the deaths of Aisling members Dr John Kennedy McLaughlin, AM, KCSG, Maelíosa Stafford, and Dorothy Payten. This year we welcomed Jean de Hosson, Martin Doyle, and Peter Moore as new members.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2023 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 22 February at the Consulate General of Ireland in Sydney and via Zoom video conference. The annual report for 2022, which had been prepared by the honorary secretary Dr Jeff Kildea and circulated to members beforehand, was presented, as was the financial report for 2022 which had been prepared by the honorary treasurer Padraic Hoban and likewise circulated. Both these reports were accepted by the meeting. Elections for office-bearers and Council members were held, resulting in the membership set out above.

ORDINARY MEETINGS

All our regular monthly meetings for 2023 were held on the fourth Wednesday of the month using the hybrid format. Apart from September, the in-person component of those meetings was held at the Consulate General of Ireland in Sydney. The September meeting was held in conjunction with the 10th Australian Conference of Celtic Studies at the University of Sydney. The number of participants at the ordinary monthly meetings averaged 26, with 15 at the consulate and 11 online. Those who participated in this year's meetings were rewarded with a series of high-quality talks. Except for the special meeting in September, all of this year's talks were given by Aisling members, indicating the depth and variety of talent that exists within the membership.

FEBRUARY	Former Aisling president Professor Peter Kuch gave a talk on 'The Irish play in the Colonial Theatre, 1821–33' in which he looked at the development of colonial theatre under Governors Brisbane and Darling and examined the ways Irishness was represented on the colonial stage.
APRIL	In a talk entitled 'The Design and Construction of Castletown House, Co, Kildare', Aisling member Geoff Barker spoke about the mystery surrounding the design of Castletown House, built in the early 18 th century for William Conolly, Speaker of the Irish House of Commons.
MAY	Aisling Member John Coombs gave a talk on 'The Romans in Ireland' in which he discussed the influence the Romans had on Ireland despite their empire not extending that far.
JUNE	In a talk entitled 'The Easter Rising and Six Degrees of Separation: Grace Gifford Plunkett', Aisling Council member Mary Barthelemy spoke of a family connection with Grace Gifford through a postcard she found amongst documents in her family's archive.
JULY	Historian and Aisling Member Dr Neville Potter gave a talk on 'The Lass from Loch Léin: Ellen Powell, an Irish Orphan in the Victorian Gold Rushes' in which he told the story of Ellen Powell, an Irish famine orphan from County Kerry who travelled the goldfields of Victoria.

SEPTEMBER	In place of the normal format of our ordinary monthly meetings, members of the Aisling Society attended in person and via Zoom a talk given by Dr Elizabeth Boyle of Maynooth University at the 10th Australian Conference of Celtic Studies at the University of Sydney.
OCTOBER	Aisling Member Hugh Myers gave a talk on Richard Madden, an Irish Catholic surgeon who served as colonial secretary in the Swan River colony (Western Australia) in 1848-49, later becoming a prominent historian and biographer of the 1798 movement.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

St Patrick's Day Dinner

On Friday 10 March, we gathered at the Sir Stamford Hotel, Circular Quay to celebrate the feast day of St Patrick. Sixty members and guests attended. After dinner our president, Tony Earls, introduced the guest speaker, Father Frank Brennan, Jesuit priest and human rights lawyer, who has been involved for many years in seeking justice for Australia's first peoples. Father Brennan spoke about the Voice to Parliament, the subject of the constitutional referendum held in October. Honorary secretary Dr Jeff Kildea moved the vote of thanks.

Mid-Year Luncheon

The mid-year luncheon was held on Saturday 19 August at the Sir Stamford Hotel, Circular Quay. It was attended by 41 members and their guests. Our guest speaker was Teresa Keating, Executive Director of The Ireland Funds Australia, who gave the annual Joan Ward Memorial Address in which she spoke of the work of the Ireland Funds. Dr Pamela O'Neill moved the vote of thanks.

Christmas Party

This year's Christmas party was a very enjoyable and convivial affair held on Wednesday 29 November at Sancta Sophia College, Sydney University, attended by 52 members and their guests. The attendances would have been higher but for wild weather during the day which made it difficult for some to attend. Nevertheless, a break in the weather during the pre-dinner drinks saw a few hearty souls venture out onto the lawn of the quadrangle before moving inside for a sumptuous buffet-style banquet. The guest speaker was Judi Toms, Chair of the Australian Standing Stones Management Committee, who spoke about Glen Innes, the Celtic capital of Australia, and the Celtic Festival planned for 2024.

We are grateful to Patrick Tansey, for organising this year's social functions. We are also grateful to the Tansey family for brightening up the dining halls with Irish decorations (and in November with Christmas bunting), adding to the atmosphere of joy and gaiety provided by those attending. This is the last year in which Patrick will be organising our social functions as he has decided to spend the next few years sailing the seven seas.

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2023

- The Aisling Society was a sponsor of the 10th Australian Conference of Celtic Studies at the University of Sydney, with which we collaborated for our September meeting.
- Two sad milestones this year were the deaths of Maelíosa Stafford, a great Irish-Australian actor and theatre director, and Dr John Kennedy McLaughlin, AM, KCSG, a former associate justice of the Supreme Court of New South Wales.

- The Aisling Society nominated Natalie O'Neill for the Celtic Council's award of *Duine Uasal*, which was presented to her in November.

EVENTS IN 2023 IN WHICH AISLING MEMBERS PARTICIPATED

- Dr Pamela O'Neill and Éilis Hurst continued assisting with Irish language classes at the Gaelic Club and online.
- Dr Pamela O'Neill continued to conduct classes at the Australian School of Celtic Learning from Glen Innes, the capital of Celtic Australia.
- *Pearls and Irritations*, an online public policy journal, published articles by Dr Jeff Kildea on current events in Ireland and Northern Ireland.
- Teresa Keating's work with the Ireland Funds was recognised in February when she was presented with the prestigious Social Impact Award in the *Business Post's* Global Irish Diaspora Awards.
- Teresa Keating, Professor Peter Kuch, and Dr Jeff Kildea helped organise a talk by Fintan O'Toole at the Mitchell Library in March as part of the UNSW Irish Studies program.
- In April *Tinteán* published an article by Mary Barthelemy entitled 'Grace Gifford: Just Ephemera? A new discovery in Sydney'.
- Dr Jeff Kildea gave the keynote address to the 2023 International Famine Commemoration at Hyde Park Barracks in July.
- In September *Tinteán* published an article by Dr Jeanette Mollenhauer, 'A Platinum Anniversary: Seventy Years of teaching Irish Dance in Australia'.
- Mary Barthelemy and Dr Jeff Kildea contributed articles to the *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* on the Magdalene laundry at Tempe.
- In December several Aisling members gave papers at the conference in Melbourne of the Irish Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand.

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 our president Tony Earls attended the awards ceremony at the University of Sydney and presented an Aisling prize to joint winners Alex Panzarino and Thomas Cafe. Alex received the Aisling prize for his essay 'Eighteenth century English maps of Leinster (rural Ireland) and their (mis)representation of Catholic land-owning practices', while Thomas received his award for his project with the Irish Support Agency, in which he organised and digitised their historical records, developed a detailed time line of and a report on the organisation's important early history, and developed plans to conduct oral interviews with aging founding members.

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, our treasurer Padraic Hoban, our events' organiser Patrick Tansey, and to all the members of the Aisling Council for their help and support during the year. Mention should also be made of Aisling members Anne Bryce and Hugh Myers, who provided the suppers at our ordinary monthly meetings, and Peter Gray, who makes the John Hubert Plunket Room in his chambers available for Aisling council meetings.

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.

We look forward to consolidating and advancing in 2024 the work of the Aisling Society and the role it plays in promoting awareness amongst the Irish diaspora and the wider community of the role the Irish have played in the history, culture, and development of Australia.

Jeff Kildea
Honorary Secretary
January 2024