



The Aisling Society
of Sydney

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ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2025

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2025

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

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

In 2025 the Aisling Society celebrated the 70th anniversary of its foundation at a meeting held on 16 March 1955. This was the fulfilment of an idea advanced in November 1954 by three friends, Mary Hegarty, a classical scholar and teacher, Brian McGrath, a distinguished Sydney lawyer, and Fr Nicholas McNally, for a new society to celebrate Irish culture and history, with particular emphasis on the study of Irish influence on Australian life.

During this year the Society held seven ordinary monthly meetings 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 2025 were held using the hybrid in-person/Zoom format. Those meetings were conducted with the assistance of a technical consultant Natalie O'Neill. 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. Due to the decline in number of members attending meetings in person the council of the society

resolved in December 2024 to seek the views of members as to whether we should revert to in-person meetings only or continue with the hybrid format. A survey was sent to financial members, the result of which was that there was strong support for a continuation of online meetings. With an improvement in the numbers of members attending meetings in person during 2025, the council at its meeting in December 2025 resolved to continue with the hybrid format.

MEMBERSHIP

At the end of 2025 the Society had three honorary life members, Bishop David Cremin, Anne Stevens, and, from August 2025, Peter Gray SC, and 93 ordinary members. During the year we received the sad news of the deaths of two long-term Aisling members: Deirdre O'Farrell and Marian Flynn. This year we welcomed Matt Nolan, Finn O'Branagain, Louise O'Haiher, and Leigh Toomey as new members.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2025 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 26 February at the Consulate General of Ireland in Sydney and via Zoom video conference. The annual report for 2024, which had been prepared by the honorary secretary Dr Jeff Kildea and circulated to members beforehand, was presented, as was the financial report for 2024 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 2025 were held on the fourth Wednesday of the month using the hybrid format. The in-person component of those meetings was held at the Consulate General. The number of participants at the ordinary monthly meetings averaged 35, with 19 at the consulate and 16 online. Those who participated in this year's meetings were rewarded with a series of high-quality talks on a diverse range of topics. Many of the talks were given by Aisling members, evidencing the fact that the Society is richly endowed with members who are well versed in Irish and Irish-Australian history, literature, and culture.

FEBRUARY	Dr Jeff Kildea, Aisling Secretary and Honorary Professor in Irish Studies at UNSW, gave a talk on his latest book <i>Sister Liguori: The Nun who Divided a Nation</i> , and using the wonders of Artificial Intelligence, interviewed the main characters in this 1920-21 saga, Bridget Partridge (Sister Liguori) and her bishop, Dr Joseph Dwyer.
APRIL	Hugh Myers, Book Collector and Aisling Council Member, spoke about the 'lives' of Roger Casement in the light of a new biography by Roland Philipps, <i>Broken Archangel: The Tempestuous Lives of Roger Casement</i> .
MAY	Irish novelist and short-story writer Mary Morrissy gave a talk on her literary output and her latest project, a biography of Dublin painter, Una Watters (1918-1965), whose work, due to an oversight, disappeared from public view for more than 60 years.

JUNE	Dr Perry McIntyre AM, historian and Aisling Council Member, gave a talk entitled 'Who were the workhouse single women?' discussing the destitute young women who were brought to Australia from the workhouses of Ireland during the Great Irish Famine.
JULY	Celtic scholar and Aisling Vice-President Dr Pamela O'Neill spoke about the 'Lost Early Medieval Manuscripts of Ireland', which, though quoted in later documents, have seemingly disappeared.
SEPTEMBER	Melissa Pavihi, teacher and postgraduate law candidate, gave a talk on 'Restorative Principles in Transitional Justice: Lessons from the Good Friday Agreement' in which she examined the lessons the Good Friday Agreement offers international criminal law.
OCTOBER	Aisling member Dr Mel Keenan, a solicitor and Celtic Studies student, gave a talk entitled 'Re-divided Gaels: The historiographical rise and fall of the Gaelic realm of Dál Riata' in which he discussed the close linguistic, cultural and familial links of the Gaels on either side of the North Channel.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

St Patrick's Day Dinner

On Friday 21 March, we gathered at Santa Sophia College, University of Sydney to celebrate the feast day of St Patrick. 48 members and guests attended. After dinner we were entertained by award-winning author, podcaster and academic Siobhán McHugh, who in a talk entitled 'Turf to Surf – A Hybrid Life' reflected on the major cultural and societal changes she has witnessed in Ireland and Australia in the four decades since she left her native Dublin for Sydney in 1985.

Mid-Year Luncheon

The mid-year lunch was held on Saturday 23 August at the Gaelic Club, Devonshire Street, Surry Hills. At the lunch we celebrated the Society's 70th anniversary with readings, a photographic display of past Aisling events, and talks by Peter Gray SC, Tony Baine, and Aisling president Mary Barthelemy reflecting on how the Society has evolved since its earliest days and what the future may hold. At the lunch the president presented to Peter Gray SC a certificate of life membership in recognition of his many years of service to the Society. The event was attended by 64 members and their guests. During the lunch we were entertained by musicians Jack Conrick and Orla Donohoe.

Christmas Party

This year's Christmas party was a very enjoyable and convivial affair held on Wednesday 19 November at a new venue The Surry Rooftop at Rydges Sydney Central Hotel, attended by 46 members and their guests. Instead of a guest speaker we were once more entertained by Irish musicians Doireann Nic Mhathúna and Dominic Breen with some of the attendees joining in singing Irish ballads.

We are grateful to Dr Pamela O'Neill, for organising this year's social functions and for brightening up the dining halls with Irish decorations adding to the atmosphere of joy and gaiety provided by those attending.

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2025

- The Aisling Society celebrated the 70th anniversary of its foundation.
- On Saturday 1 March the president Mary Barthelemy and the secretary Jeff Kildea represented the Society at the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) NSW exhibition match at Whalan Reserve.
- The Aisling Society was represented by the president Mary Barthelemy and council members Anne Bryce and Marie Leach at the commemoration of the anniversary of Sydney's 'Battle of Vinegar Hill' held on Sunday, 2 March at the Vinegar Hill Monument, Castlebrook Memorial Park, Rouse Hill.
- In April a survey of members was conducted to ascertain the opinions of members regarding the continued use of the hybrid form of meeting and other aspects of the Society's activities.
- The Aisling Society was a sponsor of the Irish Film Festival held across Australia in October and November. Aisling members attended the opening and some of the screenings.
- On 27 October at the Four Seasons Hotel, Sydney the president Mary Barthelemy, the secretary Jeff Kildea, vice-presidents Tony Earls and Pamela O'Neill, and council member Anne Bryce met with a delegation from the European Parliament, which was visiting Australia to hear from various organisations in relation to cultural links with Europe.
- During the year the Society's archivist Peter Gray SC arranged for some of the Society's paper records, such as annual reports and talks for which we have typescripts to be scanned. Steps are also underway to digitise and transcribe the Society's audio recordings of talks and oral histories. In due course it is hoped to upload these records to the Society's website.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES OF AISLING MEMBERS IN 2025

- Vice-president Dr Pamela O'Neill continued her role as Sir Warwick Fairfax Lecturer in Celtic Studies at Sydney University and to conduct classes at the Australian School of Celtic Learning. She is also involved with the Celtic Council of Australia, the Irish National Association, and the Gaelic Club.
- Council member Prof. Peter Kuch had a chapter entitled 'The "Sinn Feins" of New Zealand's Press and William Massey's Governments' published in Dermot Keogh, et al (eds), *The Irish Revolution: Diplomacy and Reactions, 1919-1923*, Cork University Press, Cork, 2025. He also gave a paper on W.B. Yeats at the 2025 Conference of the International Yeats Society at Trinity College, Dublin, 30 October – 1 November 2025 and a paper 'Why does Bloom want his fantasy villa "Flowerville" built in either Dundrum or Sutton?' at the 27th ISAANZ Conference held at Otago University, 20-22 November 2025.
- Secretary Dr Jeff Kildea gave the annual address at the Hyde Park Barracks commemorating the Great Irish Famine on 27 August, with a talk entitled "'This monstrous injustice": Colonial resistance to the Earl Grey famine immigration scheme'. He also had a chapter entitled 'Australia and the Irish Revolution' published in Dermot Keogh, et al (eds), *The Irish Revolution: Diplomacy and Reactions, 1919-1923*.
- The Society continued its strong association with the Irish Consulate General with our president Mary Barthelemy and other members attending La Cheile gatherings and Irish community consultations at the consulate. During the year, our publicity officer Anne

Bryce contributed articles on the Society to the consulate's Irish community newsletter. In July several Aisling members attended the farewell to Consul General Rosie Keane and her deputy Lorraine Healy at the Gaelic Club.

- Members of the Society were involved in organising various Irish-related events during the year including Bloomsday, Irish language classes at the Gaelic Club, and the Irish Language Winter School.

AISLING SOCIETY PRIZE

The Aisling Society donates prizes to the various universities in Sydney for the best essay on Irish or Irish-Australian history, literature, or culture. There were no nominations for the Aisling society prize this year.

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 Mary Barthelemy, our treasurer Padraic Hoban, our events organiser Pamela O'Neill, and to all the members of the Aisling Council for their help and support during the year. Mention should also be made of Anne Bryce who designed and conducted the member survey and who provided the suppers at our ordinary monthly meetings, and of Peter Gray SC, who made the John Hubert Plunket Room in his chambers available for Aisling council meetings.

I record the society's sincere gratitude to the Consul General of Ireland Lorraine Christian and her predecessor Rosie Keane for their 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.

In 2025 the Aisling Society celebrated the 70th anniversary of its founding. As we move beyond this anniversary and look ahead to our 75th anniversary in 2030, we will continue to advance the vision of the founders 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 2026