

THE IRISH AUSTRALIAN AISLING SOCIETY.

PRESIDENT.

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ANNUAL REPORT 1976.

The Annual General Meeting of the Aisling Society of Sydney was held in the Clubrooms, 150-152 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, on Wednesday, 25th February 1976 at 8 p.m. The election of officers for 1976 resulted as follows:-

|                       |                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| President -           | Rev. Fr. Patrick O'Rourke.                                                                                          |
| Life Vice-President - | Mr. Vincent Pike.<br>Miss Mary M. Haggarty. (Elected 1975).                                                         |
| Vice President -      | Rev. Fr. Michael O'Sullivan.<br>Mr. Brendan O'Connell.<br>Dr. Plunkett Sweeney.                                     |
| Hon. Secretary -      | Mrs. Anne Stevens.                                                                                                  |
| Asst. Secretary -     | Miss Dorothy Payten.                                                                                                |
| Hon. Treasurer -      | Miss Maureen McLoughlin.                                                                                            |
| Council -             | Miss Carmel O'Connor.<br>Miss Gwen Gilligan.<br>Miss Rosemary Nugent.<br>Mrs. Lorna Dixon.<br>Mrs. Dorothy Coleman. |

Tribute was paid to the retiring President, Dr. Plunkett Sweeney (who had served the two year term permitted under Article 9 of the Society's Constitution) by the incoming President, Fr. O'Rourke. Dr. Sweeney proposed that Mr. Vincent Pike, a founder member, Past President and Vice President of the Society, should be declared a Life Vice President as a recognition of the contribution he had made over many years and in appreciation of his generous help, advice and support at all time. This was seconded by Fr. O'Sullivan and carried by acclamation.

The Annual Report and the Hon. Treasurer's Statement were taken as read (all present having copies), and adopted. The Annual General Meeting was then closed.

At the Ordinary Meeting of the Aisling Society of Sydney for the month of February, held immediately after the Annual General Meeting, the Society considered the motion that the name of the Society be altered to become the Irish Australian Society. Several members spoke in support of the change of name believing with Mr. Brendan O'Connell who moved the motion that the insertion of the words "Irish Australian" would be of benefit, in promoting the progress of the Society and thereby better Irish-Australian feelings and cultural links. It was felt that the obscurity of the word "Aisling" to the public at large, may militate against these objectives and the reaching of new members.

Consequently following the guidelines and laws of the Constitution of the Aisling Society of Sydney the name "The Irish Australian Society" became the new name of the Society following an affirmative vote on the motion of more than two-thirds majority of financial members present at the meeting of 28th April 1976 - all members having been circulated with the proposed changes seven days prior to the Meeting.

The twentysecond Annual St. Patrick's Day Dinner at Kei-Ron Waverley on Sunday 14th March was a bright and enjoyable occasion with 86 members and friends honouring the Day. His Lordship Bishop David Cremin proposed the toast "The Day we celebrate" and in doing so gave us some examples of the delightful myths that have grown up around St. Patrick - particularly those dealing with his associations with the heroes of the Old Irish Sagas. Our President Father O'Rourke proposed the toast - and as it happened the last toast to the Society under the name it had carried for 22 years - "The Aisling Society of Sydney". Musical items were given by Mr. & Mrs. Tom McTaggart and dancing followed the conclusion of the meal. Miss Maureen McLoughlin ran a successful raffle and the evening concluded with the singing in Irish and English of the Soldiers Song.

In April Mrs. Dorothy Coleman spoke about Fr. Dunlea, "The Priest of the Highway". This was a subject of great interest to many of our members who like Mrs. Coleman have vivid and affectionate memories of this great humanitarian priest.

Great interest was also engendered by the subject "Orangeism and Sectarianism in the 19th Century N.S.W." which was the title of the talk given with scholarship and humour at our May meeting, by Dr. Mark Lyons, Lecturer in Politics at Kurangai College of Advanced Education.

In June, Mrs. Anne Stevens spoke on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the British bombardment on the Somme, of that battle and the Irish Units involved, in a talk entitled - "Irishmen on the Somme, 1916".

The July meeting heard a talk entitled "I followed O'Sullivan Beare" delivered by Father Michael O'Sullivan. This dealt, of course,

with the great fighting retreat of Donal Cam O'Sullivan Beare in 1603 from his native West Cork through hostile country to the North of Ireland. Father O'Sullivan himself followed the route in 1975 and was able to illustrate his talk with the many beautiful colour slides of eight counties he had taken on the way.

Miss Dorothy Payten of Aer Lingus kindly supplied us with the beautiful new film "Sights and Sounds of Ireland" and another equally enjoyable film "Ireland" for our August Meeting.

In September the Society was indeed fortunate to hear Sister Catherine O'Carrigan of the Sisters of Charity speak on the history of her Order in New South Wales. This was a fascinating story dealing as it did with so much of the early history of Sydney, the early notables, religious and lay, the great Darlinghurst estates, the social work in Darlinghurst jail and the founding of the great medical, nursing and educational institutions of the Sisters of Charity. It was also extremely well illustrated by coloured slides.

Our October meeting heard Fr. Patrick O'Rourke talk on the distinguished Irish poet, novelist, playwright and biographer, Padraic Colum. An interesting feature of this talk was the playing of a taped interview with the Poet on his 85th birthday which had been broadcast on Irish radio. Fr. O'Rourke brought out very well the effect of Colum's early life experiences on his work and also many fascinating glimpses of the other great figures of Irish Literature and Drama associated with Colum in the Irish Literary revival.

The Annual Christmas Party was held at the Knights of the Southern Cross Club, Elizabeth Street, Sydney on Sunday, 5th December 1976. 85 members and friends attended the function, including Sister Catherine O'Carrigan, the speaker at our September Meeting, who was our special guest. Sister Catherine also assisted us in drawing the lucky door and raffle prizes for us, organised by our treasurer, Miss Maureen McLoughlin. Although most of those who attended the party declared it enjoyable, it was obviously below the very high standard of comfort and elegance afforded by "Kei-Ron" in surroundings and also in the quality and service of the meal. It was of course also considerably less expensive. The council of the Society concerned that members might not desire to pay for two yearly dinners at Kei-Ron, because of rising costs, put the matter before the August and September Meetings. At the latter meeting, members present voted to hold the 1976 Christmas Part at the "Knights of the Southern Cross" but to continue to have the St. Patrick's Dinner at Kei-Ron, Waverley. The President and Council are most anxious to hear the views of all members regarding the Christmas Party. Members will now be better informed as to what

can be obtained within the price range and it is hoped will offer opinions and suggestions at the Annual Meeting, so that the Council can more accurately fulfil their wishes with regard to social functions. The Council itself feels it cannot recommend the cheaper function.

Welcome new members this year are:-

Mrs. Lillian Pike, Mrs. Win Shewan, Miss Sheila Collican, Mr. John Harris, Mrs. E. Falvey, Mr. & Mrs. Seamus Kelly, Mr. & Mrs. Reg. O'Brien, Mr. Joseph O'Shea, Mr. Eugene Sullivan, Mrs. Erin Chapman, Mrs. Mary Davis, Miss Nora Sullivan, Mr. Thomas Harte, Mrs. Josephine Denning, Mr. William McCarthy.

- The current financial membership stands at 60.

In addition to Aisling functions, many Aisling members contributed most generously to the Collins Memorial Foundation, furthering education in Ireland by participating in the \$500 cheque sent to Dublin by Mrs. Anne Stevens from funds collected in Sydney.

We record with great regret the deaths of four long standing and very valued members of the Society during 1976.

The death of Founder Member, Ex-President and long time Honorary Secretary, Miss Mary M. Hegarty on 2nd April 1976, was a sad and deeply felt loss to the Society as a body and to all the individual members privileged to have known Mary as a friend. An appreciation of Mary's life and work was read at the April Meeting of the Society and is attached to this Report. To Mary's sisters we offer our sincere sympathy - in particular to Joan - Mrs. Joan Ward - who like Mary has been associated with the Aisling Society since its inception.

The Society was also very sorry to hear of the death in Ireland on Easter Sunday of a very long standing member, Father Martin Crehan, who had retired to Ireland in ill health in 1974. Father Crehan had been a loyal and valued member attending meetings and functions whenever possible up until the onset of his last illness. He will be much missed by friends in Australia and Ireland. The Society was well represented at the Concelebrated Requiem Mass held at St. Therese Church, Mascot at which the principal celebrant was his Eminence Cardinal Freeman, assisted by their Lordships, Bishop Carroll, Bishop Clancy, Bishop Cremin and many priests.

Sad news also came from Perth during 1976 with the death of Mr. Bill McSweeney, a longtime and enthusiastic member until he left Sydney for Western Australia. He kept contact however with many friends in the Society who will miss him greatly.

In September again members were distressed to hear of the death in hospital after a short illness of Miss Peg. Parkinson. Peg was also a longtime member of the Society and many of our members valued her as a personal friend. We will all miss Peg, particularly at our social functions which she never missed.

May they all rest in peace.

We should like to congratulate our Vice-President, Fr. M.J. O'Sullivan on his appointment to St. Therese Church Mascot as Parish Priest.

Our sincere thanks to Mrs. Madge Nevin, who came to our rescue in altering the name of our Society on our letterhead in the lovely design she had first produced for the Aisling Society of Sydney twenty-two years ago.

We send our thanks also to Fr. O'Sullivan and the Sisters of St. Therese Mascot, who have so kindly printed the notices of our monthly meetings and also this report since the closing of our regular printers "Southland Printing". To Southland who have been associated with the Aisling Society for very many years, we send our appreciation of their efficiency and helpfulness.

We record also with regret the resignation of longtime member and ex-member of Council, Mr. Bill Gough.

We would like to thank the I.N.A. and Gaelic Club for displaying notices of our functions and also Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann for noting our activities in their monthly bulletins.

Our sincere thanks to Mr. Senan Ryan, our honorary Auditor, for his work for us over very many years.

To them all, and to everyone who has helped over the past year we send thanks and best wishes.

We are pleased also to thank the Knights of the Southern Cross for the courtesy and helpfulness they have shown us at all times.

The Hon. Secretary, Anne Stevens, would like to record her thanks to the other members, particularly Miss McLoughlin, Miss Payten and Fr. M. O'Sullivan who took over the secretarial duties during the time she was unable to fulfil them, due to illness.

We end by thanking all our speakers who have made our meetings so interesting and informative. Without their efforts we would have, of course, no Irish Australian Aisling Society.

Signed on behalf of the Council,

Anne Stevens,  
Hon. Secretary.

February 1977.

## MARY M. HEGARTY - AN APPRECIATION.

It was with real sorrow that the members of the Aisling Society learned of the death on April 2nd 1976 of one of its most loved and distinguished Founder members - and at the time of her death a life Vice-President - Mary Hegarty. The loss of Mary will be felt deeply and personally by the many Aisling members to whom she had become a true and devoted friend and grievously by the Society which owed so much from its inception twenty-two years ago, to her enthusiasm, her scholarship and her organising ability. In very many ways we spoke the truth when we said "Mary Hegarty is the Aisling Society". Certainly its survival to this time has rested very much on her efforts and of those over the years that she has inspired to work with her.

The eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Hegarty of County Kerry, Mary was born in Western Australia and came to Sydney as a child with her parents in 1916. She attended Bethlehem College in Ashfield and completed her education at Sydney University with a first class honours degree in Latin and with the Diploma of Education, Mary taught then for a number of years in country schools in Bowral, Taree, Grafton and at Maitland Girls High School. She returned to the city to teach Ancient History and Latin at Homebush Boys High School where she also held the position of Librarian. From there Mary joined the staff of Birrong High School as Deputy Principal until she retired from teaching in 1961 at the age of 53.

Retirement for Mary did not mean retirement from life, rather the increased time available was filled with her many activities and interests which she had time to expand and explore. No one meeting Mary Hegarty could fail to be impressed by the breadth of her knowledge on so many subjects - the classics, history, (not only of Ireland and Australia although to this she was especially devoted), literature, current events - everything in fact that years of living and reading had put in the way of her lively and retentive mind.

Travel was a delight to her and it was a joy to all her friends to see her able to spend six months out of the last twelve abroad, returning to Rome - in many ways "her spiritual home" because of her Catholic faith which was deep and unshakeable and because of her life long study of the history and language of Ancient Rome. It was typical of Mary that she prepared herself for her trip by an up-to-date course in Italian. During that journey also again visited Ireland, a country and people she truly loved and the love and knowledge of the country of her ancestors was something she sought to preserve and expand in her own Australia through the Aisling Society.

Mary was Secretary of the Aisling Society at its foundation and held that post until 1975 except for two short periods, once when she was overseas and once when she was very appropriately President of the Society in 1968 and 1969.

Mary was a member of the Royal Historical Society, a Vice-President of the Catholic Historical Society, she belonged to the St. Johns Alliance, and was a life member of the Irish National Association.

Concelebrated Requiem Mass was held at Mary's Parish Church in Summer Hill on the 5th April. The principal celebrant was Monsignor Leonard of Ashfield and other priests included Fr. J. Walsh, Fr. P. O'Rourke (President of the Aisling Society), Fr. H.J. O'Sullivan (Vice-President of the Aisling Society), Monsignor Duffy (Catholic Historical Society), Monsignor Cronin and Fr. Brendan Shiel.

His Lordship Bishop David Cremin was also present and assisted in the service. The large congregation of friends who attended gave witness to the high regard in which she was held in the community. We shall miss her gaiety, her kindness, her unfailing interest in others, her intellectual curiosity and liveliness which she retained to her last days. People die as they lived. They express the qualities that they showed in their lives for dying is part of life; Mary was brave, gay and steadfast to the end.

"Blessed are the dead who have died in the Lord. Let them rest from their labours for their good deeds go with them". St. John.

*This lovely tribute to Mary was written by  
Anne Stevens and Mary's sisters and other relatives  
are deeply grateful to Anne for its compilation.  
Joan Ward (Hegarty)*