



**The Aisling Society
of Sydney**

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2001

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2001

PRESIDENT	MRS MARY LEE
LIFE VICE-PRESIDENTS	FR PATRICK O'ROURKE MR VINCENT PIKE
VICE PRESIDENTS	MR JOHN RYAN MS EVE ROSS DR PETER KUCH
HON. SECRETARY	MR PETER GRAY
HON. TREASURER	MISS MAUREEN McLOUGHLIN
ARCHIVIST/LIBRARIAN	MR PETER GRAY
PUBLICITY OFFICER	DR MARIE LEECH
COUNCILLORS	MR DAVID VAUGHAN MRS AILSA HOBAN MRS KATH STEWART MR BRENDAN O'CONNELL MR PHILIP LEE MR TOM POWER
HON. AUDITOR	MR BRENDAN O'CONNELL

Marie Leech also continued her invaluable work in an unofficial capacity as Minutes Secretary, which is very much appreciated.

MEMBERSHIP

The Society has 73 financial members and 3 honorary life members. This year there were also 2 honorary members, being the winners of the Aisling Society Prize at Macquarie University and Sydney University respectively for 2001. In 2001 we welcomed a number of new members namely William Condon (Irish Tourist Board), Teresa Keating (IDA Ireland), The Hon Susan Ryan, Julie Tapper, Blanca de Plaisted, Ann Prendergast, Brendan Birtwhistle and John Fawl.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2001 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 28 February.

The Annual Report for 2000, which had been prepared by Peter Gray and circulated to members beforehand, was presented. Maureen McLoughlin tabled the Treasurer's report which disclosed that our financial situation continues to be healthy. The President, Peter Kuch, thanked Maureen for her continued hard work. Both these reports were ACCEPTED.

An Election of Office-Bearers was held, resulting as set out above. Sincere thanks were expressed to Peter Kuch for his outstanding service during his two years as our President, and a warm welcome was extended to Mary Lee as she took the reins for her second term as President.

ORDINARY MEETINGS

- FEBRUARY** The February Ordinary Meeting followed on the Annual General Meeting and consisted of general business and correspondence, followed by an entertaining talk by **David Vaughan** about some of his experiences as a Rugby referee over many years, which had culminated in 2000 in his being awarded the Australian Sports Medal. We then saw a charming video of Ireland provided by **Mary Lee**.
- APRIL** **Perry McIntyre**'s moving Talk, intriguingly titled "*Drank too deep the cup of affliction': Reunion of Convict Families*", was based on her genealogical research in relation to women who travelled from Ireland to Australia in the first half of the 19th century.
- MAY** We were delighted to welcome **Dr Jack Munday**, distinguished trade unionist and environmentalist, who gave us some engagingly personal reflections on "*The Irish influence on the Trade Union movement in New South Wales*".
- JUNE** **Mr David Mulcahy**, Director-General of the Land Titles Office of New South Wales, presented a most engrossing and wide-ranging Talk on "*The Torrens Title system: Ireland's gift to Australia and the world*".
- AUGUST** It was a privilege to have with us **Professor Terence Brown**, Professor of Anglo-Irish Literature at Trinity College, Dublin and the Inaugural Visiting Professor of Modern Irish Studies at UNSW. Professor Brown is among other things the author of "*The Life of W.B. Yeats: a Critical Biography*". His outstanding Talk was entitled "*The fascination of what's difficult: Writing Yeats' Biography*".
- SEPTEMBER** **Dr Catriona St John** travelled from Canberra to talk to us about "*Early Celtic Christianity and Spirituality*", a topic which generated a particularly lively question time and discussion over supper.
- OCTOBER** We were treated to a fascinating account by **Anne Cunningham** of the sensations of 1881 when a member of the NSW Legislative Assembly, Michael Fitzpatrick, a devout Catholic, was refused the burial rights of

the Catholic Church. Anne's Talk was entitled "*The unfortunate man has lost his soul': The 1881 funeral debacle of Michael Fitzpatrick MLA*".

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER:

Our St Patrick's Day celebration was a wonderful night, again held in the Strangers' Dining Room at Parliament House, Macquarie Street. This is a superb venue, which was thoroughly appreciated by the 96 members and their guests who attended. The President, Peter Kuch, welcomed the guests, who included Mr Ruaidhri Dowling, Deputy Consul-General of Ireland, our host Mr Johnno Johnson MLC and our life member Professor Patrick O'Farrell. The National Anthems of Ireland and Australia were sung to accompaniment by Stephanie Walker. Grace was said by Fr Michael O'Sullivan, and an excellent meal was enjoyed by all.

Patrick Dodson, former Chair of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and Commissioner on the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, was our speaker for the evening, and he gave us a powerful and thought-provoking analysis of some of the many resonances between the experiences of Irish and Irish-Australian people on the one hand, and Aboriginal Australians on the other hand. The vote of thanks was proposed by Peter Gray.

MID-YEAR LUNCHEON:

This year, as has become customary, the venue for the luncheon was the Sydney Rowing Club at Abbotsford with its dramatic views of the Parramatta River. 62 members and their guests attended.

Jeff Kildea, barrister and historian, delivered the seventh annual Joan Ward Memorial Address, entitled "*1916 And all that: The Irish struggle for independence and Australian nationalism*". This was a meticulously researched and splendidly presented Talk, densely packed with information and analysis, and delivered with verve and conviction. The vote of thanks was proposed by Judge John O'Meally.

CHRISTMAS PARTY:

This year's party was another very happy event, again held at the splendid venue offered by The Australian Graduate School of Management (AGSM) at the University of New South Wales.

59 members and friends attended and enjoyed a relaxing, informal occasion. A splendid supper was served, and Maureen McLoughlin again produced a beautiful Christmas cake.

AISSLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2001

- Two of the Society's most distinguished members, both former Presidents and both Life Vice-Presidents, died in 2001. They were of course Fr Patrick O'Rourke, who died on 13 July, and Vincent Pike, who died on 27 November. Both these men were towering figures in the Aisling Society, and elsewhere, and they are greatly missed. May they rest in peace.
- Three other longstanding and much loved members also died during the year, namely Josie Ryan (in February) and Marie Day and Mary Angel (in September). May they also rest in peace.
- Each year the Lansdowne Club has an Awards night when outstanding contributions to Irish-Australian affairs are recognised and honoured. This year the Individual Achievement Award went to our President Mary Lee.
- Brendan O'Connell resigned as a Council member of the Society after many years service; happily he still continues as the Society's honorary auditor. The Council

appointed Patrick Tansey to replace Brendan. We welcome Patrick and thank him for his willingness to serve.

- Claire Dunne published her book “*Carl Jung: Wounded Healer of the Soul*”
- Plunkett Sweeney, Past President, has regretfully brought his long membership of the Society to an end, owing to ill-health.
- In the Australia Day Honours List our member Judge John O’Meally became a member of the Order of Australia. Warm congratulations to Judge O’Meally AM.

EVENTS DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATED

- St Patrick's Day Parade: In 2001, Peter Gray and family, together with Marie Leech and family, and Peter Kuch and Maureen McLoughlin, drove and populated the 'Aisling Car' in the Parade. The Society again donated \$100 to the Parade Committee, and also gave \$100 to each of the Irish Week Committee and the St Patrick's Day Mass Committee, on both of which Mrs Kath Stewart was the Aisling Society representative.
- The third annual dinner of the John Hubert Plunkett Society, formed to support the establishment of the Chair of Modern Irish Studies at UNSW, was held at Parliament House on 8 June, the speaker being Christopher Koch, AO, author of "*The Year of Living Dangerously*" and "*Out of Ireland*". Many Aisling members were present.
- Bloomsday. The Society again supported the James Joyce Foundation, which is responsible for the Bloomsday celebrations, with a donation of \$200, and many of our members were able to attend some of the numerous events which now mark the day in Sydney.
- The St Patrick's Day Parade Committee held a fund-raising Trivia Night in July, and an Aisling table comprising David and Roleen Vaughan, Josie Ahern and Marie Leech displayed exceptional trivial skills.
- The Society was well represented at the fourth annual dinner of the UNSW Chair of Modern Irish Studies Endowment Committee in November, again organised by the President of that Committee, Mary Lee.
- The Irish Welfare Board's fund-raising "Night at the Trots" at Harold Park in December was supported by a dozen or more Aisling members.

AISLING SOCIETY PRIZES

In 2001, Prizes of \$150 were again offered to students from the University of New South Wales, the University of Sydney, the University of Wollongong, Macquarie University, the University of Western Sydney and the Australian Catholic University. Prizewinners whose names have been announced at the time of writing are:

Macquarie University
University of Sydney

Ms Mary MacPherson
Ms Bronwyn Ledgard

CONCLUSION

I would again like to thank the members of the Aisling Society for the honour they have given me by allowing me to serve as Secretary. I wish to thank also Mary Lee as President, Maureen McLoughlin, Peter Kuch, Eve Ross, Marie Leech and Tom Power in particular, and all the Council members generally, for the help and support which I have received during the year. I again record also the Society's sincere thanks to the Consulate-General of Ireland, especially Tom Brady and Ruaidhri Dowling, for their interest in and support of our activities and for continuing to allow us to hold our meetings in their splendid premises at 400 George Street. I look forward to another enjoyable and successful year in 2002.

Peter Gray
HON SECRETARY