



The Aisling Society  
of Sydney

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2002

### THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2002

PRESIDENT	MRS MARY LEE
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	MR DAVID VAUGHAN
COUNCILLORS	DR MARIE LEECH MRS AILSA HOBAN MRS KATH STEWART MR PATRICK TANSEY 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 79 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 2002. In 2002 we welcomed a number of new members namely Judge Kevin O'Connor, John Agius, Nihill and Jenny Somers, Sr Dymphna O'Brien RSJ, Frances McMahan, Patricia O'Leary and Cecilia Hannon.

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2002 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 28 February.

The Annual Report for 2001, 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 remains healthy. The President, Mary Lee, thanked Maureen for her continued hard work. Both these reports were ACCEPTED.

An Election of Office-Bearers was held, resulting as set out above.

## ORDINARY MEETINGS

**FEBRUARY** The February Ordinary Meeting followed on the Annual General Meeting and consisted of general business and correspondence, followed by a recording of Oliver MacDonagh's charming reminiscences of an Irish upbringing, originally broadcast on the ABC.

**APRIL** **Anne Henderson's** Talk, entitled "*Writing 'The Killing of Sister McCormack'*", was presented soon after the launch of her book, and provided some intriguing glimpses into both the life and death of the courageous Australian nun who was murdered by the 'Shining Path' guerillas of Peru, and the many issues to be confronted in the writing of that story.

**MAY** We were delighted to welcome our friend **Tom Brady**, Ireland's departing Consul-General, whose intriguing Talk entitled "*Gross Ile: Canada's Irish Island*", told the story of the former quarantine island, on the St Lawrence River 50 miles from Quebec, which was the first North American landing point for thousands of refugees from the Irish famine.

**JUNE** **Professor Mary Hickman**, Visiting Professor at the Europe-Australia Institute, Victoria University, identified and traced some of the radical changes over the last two centuries in the way the Irish in Britain have seen themselves, entitled "*Differences, Boundaries, Identities: the Irish Community in Britain*".

**AUGUST** **Siobhan McHugh's** engaging Talk was entitled "*The Adventures of an Accidental Migrant*", and dealt beguilingly with the competing currents, for one who has moved from shore to shore, of the old land and the new.

**SEPTEMBER** With "*The Poetry of Brother Elgar*", **Chris McCaffery** gave us a beautiful Aisling evening. His poignant reflections on the life and works of his family friend Redmond Murphy, the gifted writer and Marist Brother known as Br Elgar, fittingly attracted a more than usually eclectic audience.

**OCTOBER** In a stimulating Talk just a couple of months before the Beckett extravaganza offered by the Sydney Festival, **Clara Mason** presented a typically original, if not iconoclastic, take on Beckett's place in the canon with "*Samuel Beckett: an Unbroken Tradition*".

## SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

**ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER:**

Our St Patrick's Day celebration on Friday 15 March was a memorable evening, held as usual in the splendid Strangers' Dining Room at Parliament House, Macquarie Street. 106 members and their guests attended. The President, Mary Lee, welcomed the guests, who included our guest speaker Justice Michael Kirby and Johan van Vloten, Irish Ambassador Richard O'Brien, our host Mr Tony Kelly MLC and our life member Professor Patrick O'Farrell. The National Anthems of Ireland and Australia were sung, grace was said by Fr Michael O'Sullivan, and an excellent meal was enjoyed by all.

**Michael Kirby**, a Justice of the High Court, was our speaker for the evening, and he gave us a moving and powerful address in which, after some gentle reflections on his family's roots in Ulster, he told the stories of two indomitable Irish activists for homosexual law reform, Jeffrey Dudgeon in the North and David Norris in the Republic. The vote of thanks was proposed by Judge John O'Meally, and carried by acclamation.

#### **MID-YEAR LUNCHEON (JULY):**

This year, as is now customary, the venue for the luncheon was the Sydney Rowing Club at Abbotsford with its dramatic views of the Parramatta River. 56 members and their guests attended.

**Christopher Koch**, the distinguished writer and Aisling member, delivered the eighth annual Joan Ward Memorial Address, in the course of which he read to us from his new book entitled "*The Many-Coloured Land: a Return to Ireland*". The vote of thanks was proposed by Eve Ross.

#### **CHRISTMAS PARTY:**

This year's party was another very happy event, again held at the ideal venue offered by The Australian Graduate School of Management (AGSM) at the University of New South Wales. 69 members and friends attended and enjoyed a relaxing, informal occasion. An excellent supper was served, and Maureen McLoughlin again produced a delicious Christmas cake.

### **AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2002**

- Mary O'Connell, a great Irish-Australian, a giver of some unforgettable Talks to the Society, and the beloved wife of our long-time Councillor and auditor Brendan, died in February. Then Professor Oliver MacDonagh, distinguished scholar, devoted Aisling member and innate gentleman, died in May. We all miss them. May they rest in peace.
- Averil Walder, one of our longest-serving members, and John Fawl, a comparatively recent member, also died during the year, as did Tom Feely, a former member who died back in Ireland where he had retired. May they rest in peace.
- Work has begun on the preparation for publication of a book of selected Aisling Talks, a project stimulated by the bequest to the Society for that purpose by the late Vincent Pike.
- Macquarie University and Sydney University announced winners of the Aisling Society Prize for 2002. Eve Ross attended the Macquarie prize-giving ceremony on our behalf, and Philip Lee did likewise for the Sydney prize-giving.
- Anne Henderson's latest book, "*The Killing of Sister McCormack*" was launched by Sir William Deane in March.
- During the year Fr Michael O'Sullivan celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his ordination, and later retired as Parish Priest of St Therese's Mascot.
- The Society's new brochure, a handsome colour production, was brought to fruition by a sub-committee led by Eve Ross.
- Devadas Krishnadas, winner of the Aisling Society Prize at Sydney University in 1998, has had an interesting career path since then, among other things becoming Assistant

Superintendent of Police in the Singapore Police Force and more recently being invested as honorary aide-de-camp to the President of Singapore.

- Peter Gray, our Secretary, married Helen Thwaites, and the wedding was revelled in by a number of Aisling members.
- Both Tom Brady, Irish Consul-General, and Ruadhrai Dowling, Tom's Vice-Consul, completed their stints in Sydney during the year and returned to Ireland, to be replaced respectively by Anne Webster and Michael Keaveney. We wish Tom and Ruadhrai all the best for their next postings (Greece, in Ruadhrai's case!) and thank them for all their friendship and help to us while they were here, and we welcome Anne and Michael and very much look forward to working with them in the future.

## **EVENTS DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATED**

- The Society was well represented at the Regent Hotel on 19 February for the Lansdowne Club's farewell to Richard O'Brien, who departed Australia after seven highly successful years as Ireland's Ambassador.
- St Patrick's Day Parade: In 2002, Maureen McLoughlin, Peter Gray and Helen Thwaites, Marie Leech, Peter Kuch and Julie Robson, and Patrick and Arlene Tansey, together with their children, drove, populated and accompanied 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.
- St Patrick's Day Mass: Maureen McLoughlin and Peter Gray were readers during the Mass at St Mary's Cathedral.
- 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.
- Many Aisling members were present, as usual, for the annual dinner of the John Hubert Plunkett Society, formed to support the establishment of the Chair of Modern Irish Studies at UNSW, which was held at Parliament House on 21 June. The speaker was Professor Jarlath Ronayne, Vice-Chancellor of Victoria University, Melbourne.
- The opening of the new INA Library, on the first floor of the refurbished Gaelic Club, was celebrated in July.
- A number of members attended the Black Velvet Parade Fundraising Dinner held at Parliament House on 6 September for the City of Sydney St Patrick's Day Parade.
- The inaugural Irish Film Festival was held in October-November under the auspices of the Modern Irish Studies Program at UNSW. Peter Kuch, our immediate past President, was one of the driving forces behind the festival, which proved an outstanding success, featuring appearances by the acclaimed Irish director Jim Sheridan and screenings of such films as *The General*, *In the Name of the Father*, *The Commitments*, *Michael Collins* and *Bloody Sunday*. This year the annual dinner of the UNSW Chair of Modern Irish Studies Endowment Committee was an integral part of the Festival, and was addressed by Jim Sheridan. Aisling members were prominent in their support of the Festival and the dinner.
- The Irish Welfare Board's fundraising "Night at the Trots" in December was again well supported by Aisling members.
- Patrick Tansey is the Society's representative on the "Friends of Vinegar Hill", a group of which Sean Flavin is the Chair and which will be advising Blacktown Council on

appropriate ways to commemorate the bicentenary, in March 2004, of the Battle of Vinegar Hill.

### **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 Georgina Brunyee  
Ms Alison O'Harae

### **CONCLUSION**

My thanks again to the members of the Aisling Society for the honour they have given me by allowing me to serve as Secretary. Thanks also to 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, followed by Anne Webster and Michael Keaveney, for their interest in and support of our activities and for continuing to allow us to hold our meetings in their stylish premises at 400 George Street. I look forward to another enjoyable and successful year in 2003.

**Peter Gray**  
**HON SECRETARY**