



**The Aisling Society
of Sydney**

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2003

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2003

PRESIDENT
VICE PRESIDENTS

MRS MARY LEE
MR JOHN RYAN
MS EVE ROSS

HON. SECRETARY
HON. TREASURER
ARCHIVIST/LIBRARIAN
PUBLICITY OFFICER
COUNCILLORS

DR PETER KUCH
MR PETER GRAY
MISS MAUREEN McLOUGHLIN
MR PETER GRAY
MR DAVID VAUGHAN
DR MARIE LEECH
MRS AILSA HOBAN
MRS KATH STEWART
MR PATRICK TANSEY
MR PHILIP LEE / MRS ANNE STEVENS
MR TOM POWER
MR BRENDAN O'CONNELL

HON. AUDITOR

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

Philip Lee recently resigned as a Councillor, and the Council appointed Anne Stevens to fill the vacancy. The Society owes Philip an enormous debt of gratitude for his mighty contribution as member, Councillor and Past President over the last forty years.

MEMBERSHIP

The Society has 84 financial members and 2 honorary life members. This year there were also 3 honorary members, being winners of the Aisling Society Prize at the University of New South Wales and Macquarie University for 2002/3. In 2003 we welcomed a number of new members namely Muriel Daly, Michael Johnson, Julianne McCue, Peter O'Reilly, Anne Webster (the Irish Consul-General) and Maurice Whelan.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2003 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 26 February.

The Annual Report for 2002, 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. Both these reports were ACCEPTED.

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

ORDINARY MEETINGS

Our monthly meetings were held in the splendid premises of the Consulate-General of Ireland, where we had the privilege of the boundless enthusiasm, support and hospitality of the Consul-General herself, Anne Webster.

FEBRUARY The February Ordinary Meeting followed on the Annual General Meeting and consisted of general business and correspondence, followed by a hugely entertaining Talk by **Brendan Locke** on his uncle, the renowned tenor Joseph Locke.

APRIL Two days before Anzac Day, **Myles Mooney** spoke to us on "*The Irish at Gallipoli*". His moving Talk, punctuated by performances by Myles of some of his own songs, was complemented by a vivid and informative vote of thanks by Jeff Kildea.

MAY **Alison O'Harae**, winner of the Society's prize for Sydney University for 2002, presented a fascinating and scholarly Talk based on her winning essay, entitled "*Patrick and Gildas: Authority and Identity in the British Isles*"

JUNE **Father Edmund Campion's** seductive and graceful Talk about the process of writing his most recent (unanimously acclaimed) book was entitled "*Writing 'Lines of my Life'*".

AUGUST With "*We make out of the quarrel with ourselves poetry*", **Peter Kuch** took us on an enchanting journey, erudite and delicate, among the wellsprings of some of Yeats' most beautiful poems.

SEPTEMBER We were delighted to welcome **Nicky Grene**, Professor of English Literature at Trinity College Dublin, who treated us to a virtuoso presentation, complete with a dazzling array of appropriately accented readings, entitled "*Irish English as a literary language*".

OCTOBER **Andrew Shields** presented a rigorously researched and compelling Talk on "*The Irish land question after the famine*".

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER:

Our St Patrick's Day celebration on Friday 14 March was a delightful evening, held - as always now - in the splendid Strangers' Dining Room at Parliament House, Macquarie Street. 96 members and their guests attended. In the absence of the President, Mary Lee, Dr Peter Kuch welcomed the guests, who included Consul-General Anne Webster, and our host Mr Tony Kelly MLC and his wife Anne. The National Anthems of Ireland and Australia were sung, and an excellent meal was enjoyed by all.

Our speaker for the evening was **Norman Gillespie**, Chief Executive Officer of the Sydney Opera House. He gave a most charming address, self-effacing and humorous. An elegant vote of thanks was proposed by Gerard Windsor.

MID-YEAR LUNCHEON (JULY):

72 members and their guests attended the luncheon, which was again held at the Sydney Rowing Club at Abbotsford with its dramatic views of the Parramatta River.

Maire Sheehan, Mayor of Leichhardt, delivered the ninth annual Joan Ward Memorial Address, on the subject of "*The Irish contribution to Local Government in New South Wales*". The vote of thanks was proposed by David Vaughan.

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. 80 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 2003

- Patrick O'Farrell, a life member of the Aisling Society, died on Christmas Day. Patrick was of course a historian of great distinction, recognised nationally and internationally for his ground-breaking work on Irish-Australian history in particular. He gave numerous memorable Talks to the Society, and was one of our staunchest friends and champions over several decades. Among many other contributions, it was he who inspired us to sponsor prizes at all the metropolitan universities for work on Irish or Irish-Australian history or literature. He is irreplaceable, and we offer our deepest sympathy to Deirdre and to all of Patrick's family.
- Then Tony Cahill, another highly distinguished scholar, a devoted Aisling member and an innate gentleman, died on 9 January 2004. He too had given a very great deal to the Society, in many ways and over many years, and we offer our sincere condolences to Robin.
- Sean Gilroy, long-time former member and affectionately remembered Irish musician in Sydney, also died during the year.

May they rest in peace.

- Peter Kuch has created a splendid website for the Society - <http://irishstudies.arts.unsw.edu.au/Aisling.html>
- Mrs Mary Dynan, our former Secretary, and Professor Muredach Dynan have left Brisbane to return to live in Ireland following Muredach's retirement
- Work has continued 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.

- Maurice Whelan's book, "*Thoughts for the twenty first century: in the company of William Hazlitt*" was launched at Gleebooks in September.
- Peter Gray, our Secretary, was appointed Senior Counsel in October.
- Julie-Ann Robson was awarded her PhD by the Australian National University for her thesis entitled "*Beneath the Socratic cloak': Oscar Wilde and the Art of Criticism*".
- Fr Michael O'Sullivan's book, "*Sydney 1798 Memorial – tomb of a man who fought an Empire*", was launched at the Irish Consulate-General in November.
- Dr Peter Kuch and Dr Julie-Ann Robson are the joint editors of the recently published book, "*Irelands in the Asia-Pacific: being Papers delivered at the second IASIL Asia-Pacific Symposium 2003*".

EVENTS DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATED

- The Society was well represented at a number of events which marked the visit to Australia in February of the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese.
- St Patrick's Day Parade: In 2003, Maureen McLoughlin, Peter Gray and Helen Thwaites, Marie Leech, Peter Kuch and Julie-Ann Robson, and Patrick and Arlene Tansey, together with their children, again 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.
- Brendan O'Connell represented the Society at Macquarie University's Annual Prizegiving Ceremony, and presented our Prize to the winner, Rebecca Lea-Smith.
- Bloomsday. The Society again supported the James Joyce Foundation, which is responsible for the Bloomsday celebrations in June, with a donation of \$200, and many of our members were able to attend some of the numerous events which 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 in June. The speaker was Richard Butler.
- In August a number of members attended the 4th annual gathering at the Irish Famine Memorial, Hyde Park Barracks, arranged by our Councillor Tom Power.
- The Society made a donation of \$200 in support of the St Mary's Cathedral Flower Festival in September. Our donation, as in past years, was directed in particular towards the decoration of the Altar of Irish Saints.
- There were two enthusiastic Aisling tables at the All-Ireland Quiz in September, which raised funds for the St Patrick's Day Parade.

AISLING SOCIETY PRIZES

In 2003, 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 New South Wales

Ms Rebecca Lea Smith
Mr Matthew Wall-Smith and Ms Natacha Shaw

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 and Marie Leech 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 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 2004.

Peter Gray
HON SECRETARY

January 2004