



**The Aisling Society
of Sydney**

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2004

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2004

PRESIDENT
VICE PRESIDENTS

MRS ANNE STEVENS

MS EVE ROSS

DR PETER KUCH

MRS MARY LEE

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MR PETER GRAY

HON. TREASURER

MISS MAUREEN McLOUGHLIN

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DR MARIE LEECH

MRS AILSA HOBAN

MRS KATH STEWART

MR PATRICK TANSEY

MR JOHN RYAN

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 94 financial members and 4 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 for 2003/4. In 2004 we welcomed a splendidly large group of 21 new members namely Monica Adams, Nola Barber, Margaret Beazley, Robin Cahill, Jan Cooney, Philomena Delahunty, Brenda Grosz, Phillipa Johnson, Gareth Johnston, John and Genevieve Kavanagh, Tony Kelly, Jeff Kildea, Carol McMahan, Bernadette Moran, Rita Muffet, Deirdre O'Farrell, Bernard O'Donnell, Deirdre Ronai, Daniel Street and Margaret Washer.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2004 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 25 February.

The Annual Report for 2003, 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 again had the privilege of the wholehearted support and generous hospitality of the Consul-General herself, Anne Webster, ably supported by her Vice-Consul, Michael Keaveney.

FEBRUARY The February Ordinary Meeting followed on the Annual General Meeting and consisted of general business and correspondence, followed by a screening of a beautiful new film from the Irish Tourist Board.

APRIL “*Early Years at the Lodge*” was the intriguing title of **Michael Lyons’** entertaining Talk, full of stories told with great good humour of a childhood in Tipperary with little money but lots of love.

MAY **Dr Leila Kavanagh’s** Talk, entitled “*Archbishop Michael Aiden Courtney*”, was a moving account of the life and tragic death of the impressive missionary priest who had become a close friend of Leila and her family.

JUNE Dr **Jeff Kildea** gave an enthralling Talk (expertly supplemented by PowerPoint illustrations, photographs and maps) entitled “*Australian War Graves and War Memorials in Ireland*”.

AUGUST While The Abbey Theatre 2004 production of “*The Gigli Concert*” was winning fine reviews from the Sydney press, **Peter Kuch’s** timely Talk took as its subject “*The Abbey Down Under: the 1922 Abbey Players Tour of Australia*”.

SEPTEMBER **Damian Gleeson** presented a scholarly and very interesting Talk entitled “*Some Aspects of the Sydney Irish after the Famine*”, sparking a particularly full question time.

OCTOBER Having recently returned from Ireland where he had participated in the 400-year celebrations honouring Donal’s famous retreat, **Fr Michael O’Sullivan** gave us a fascinating Talk on “*The Return of O’Sullivan Beare*”.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER:

Our St Patrick's Day celebration on Friday 12 March was a delightful evening, held - as always now - in the splendid Strangers' Dining Room at Parliament House, Macquarie Street. 71 members and their guests attended. The President, Anne Stevens, welcomed the guests, who included Consul-General Anne Webster and her husband Gerry Clarke, and our host Mr Tony Kelly MLC and his wife Anne. The National Anthems of Ireland and Australia were sung to accompaniment by Stephanie Walker, the message from the President of Ireland was read, and an excellent meal was enjoyed by all.

Our speaker for the evening was **Anne Webster**, Irish Consul-General who gave us a characteristically lively address full of optimism and energy. The vote of thanks was deftly proposed by Patrick Tansey.

MID-YEAR LUNCHEON (JULY):

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

Bishop David Cremin, Aisling life member and soon to retire as Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney, delivered the tenth annual Joan Ward Memorial Address. Happily, he had been persuaded that his audience would be interested to hear something of his own life, especially his rich and varied experience as priest (since 1955) and bishop (since 1974) in Australia. The result was an enchanting afternoon rich in anecdote, gentle reflection and self-deprecating humour. The vote of thanks was proposed by Fr Michael O'Sullivan.

CHRISTMAS PARTY:

This year's party was as usual a 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.

75 members and friends attended and enjoyed another relaxing, informal occasion.

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2004/05

- Sadly, we lost three well-loved members since last year's Report: **Josie Ahern** (widow of fellow long-time member Tom), **David Corcoran** and **Brian O'Neil**.
- Adine Finn, former long-time member and sister of fellow member Josie, and Helen Piert, sister of long-time member Alice Piert, also died during the year, as did Peter Alexander, sterling Scot, former member and former President of the Celtic Council of Australia.
- Sheila Gray, mother of our Secretary Peter Gray and sister of Aisling stalwarts Mary Hegarty and Joan Ward, died in December.

May they rest in peace.

- Patrick O'Farrell was honoured posthumously with an AO in the 2004 Australia Day honours – "for service to education as an academic, researcher and administrator, particularly in Irish history and its contribution to Australian society and culture".
- At the St Patrick's Day Dinner the richly deserved honour of life membership was conferred on both Philip Lee and Fr O'Sullivan, to unanimous acclaim.
- Jared Lesser, Aisling prizewinner at UNSW in 2004, is pursuing Honours in Irish Literature this year under the supervision of Dr Peter Kuch, and has had a paper

accepted for presentation to the International Association for the Study of Irish Literature (IASIL) in Prague in September 2005.

- Gerard Windsor's latest book, a novel entitled "*I Have Kissed Your Lips*", was published, with a delightful launch at Sydney Grammar.
- Work continues on our project to compile a selection of some of the many fine Talks which have been presented to the Society since its inception. It is hoped that the book will be published this year, as part of our 50th anniversary celebrations.

EVENTS DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATED

- St Patrick's Day Parade: In 2004, Maureen McLoughlin, Peter Gray and Helen Thwaites, Marie Leech, Peter Kuch, and Patrick and Arlene Tansey, together with their children, again drove, populated and accompanied the 'Aisling Car' in the Parade.
- The Society again made a donation to the St Patrick's Day Mass Committee, on which Mrs Kath Stewart was the Aisling Society representative.
- The 200th anniversary of the battle of Vinegar Hill was marked by a co-ordinated series of events and re-enactments in March, several of which were attended by large numbers of our members. The Aisling's Sean Flavin and Patrick Tansey served on the organising committee, and the Society donated \$200 to the committee to assist its work.
- With the Irish presidency this year of the European Union coinciding with the accession of ten new member states to the Union, Anne Webster, Consul-General of Ireland, hosted a luncheon in May (jointly with the Lansdowne Club) to celebrate this momentous event; the Premier Bob Carr spoke warmly about the contribution which Europe has made, and is again needed to make, to humanity's attempts to reconcile ethnic and national conflicts and tensions.
- 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 in Sydney which marked the centenary of the great day.
- 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 were among the 250 who attended the 5th annual gathering at the Irish Famine Memorial, Hyde Park Barracks, arranged by our Councillor Tom Power and featuring an occasional address by our member Susan Ryan AO.
- 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.
- Dr Garret Fitzgerald, former Taoiseach, delivered the annual peace lecture to a large and appreciative audience, including several Aisling members, at UNSW in September
- There were two enthusiastic Aisling tables at the All-Ireland Quiz at the INA in September, which raised funds for the St Patrick's Day Parade.
- In September, Dr Peter Kuch was the principal convener of a glittering series of events centred on an international conference on Oscar Wilde (marking 150 years

since the great writer's birth) held in both Sydney and Melbourne, in tandem with the second Irish Film Festival.

AISLING SOCIETY PRIZES

In 2004, 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:

University of New South Wales Mr Jared Lesser, Ms Amy Wootton and Ms
Filomena Molinaro

CONCLUSION

My thanks again to the members of the Aisling Society for the honour they give me by allowing me to serve as Secretary. Thanks also to Anne Stevens 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 2005 when we will celebrate our 50th anniversary.

Peter Gray
HON SECRETARY

February 2005