



**The Aisling Society
of Sydney**

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2005

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2005

PRESIDENT
VICE PRESIDENTS

MRS ANNE STEVENS

MS EVE ROSS

DR PETER KUCH

MRS MARY LEE

HON. SECRETARY

MR PETER GRAY

HON. TREASURER

MISS MAUREEN McLOUGHLIN

ARCHIVIST/LIBRARIAN

MR PETER GRAY

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COUNCILLORS

DR MARIE LEECH

MRS AILSA HOBAN

MRS TRUDI O'NEIL

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 83 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 2004/5. In 2005 we welcomed 9 new members namely John and Irene Sgouromallis, Vince and Carol Neary, Brendan and Mary Dineen, Brendan Whiting, David Murphy and Helen Townsend.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2005 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 23 February at the Consulate-General of Ireland.

The Annual Report for 2004, 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.

OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY

To celebrate the Society's 50th anniversary, two major events were arranged.

PASSING THE TORCH

A selection of some of the hundreds of wonderful Talks given to the Society over the past half-century was published in November. The title of the book is ***PASSING THE TORCH: The Aisling Society of Sydney 1955-2005***. Edited by Peter Gray, the book is a handsome reminder of some of the paths the Society has travelled, as well as a treasure trove of information and reflections on the Irish-Australian experience. Copies are available for purchase at \$30.00.

SEMINAR:

On Saturday 12 November 2005 the Society hosted a sparkling all-day seminar, at the Australian Graduate School of Management at UNSW. 74 people – members and others – attended. After a welcoming morning tea, stimulating and diverse papers were presented by Consul-General Anne Webster, Peter Gray SC, Dr Jeff Kildea, Fr Tom Devereux, Dr Anthony Hughes, Dr Peter Kuch and Fr Ed Champion. A convivial Luncheon was highlighted by the launch of *Passing The Torch*, a task beautifully and memorably performed by Deirdre O'Farrell; by Maureen McLoughlin's gleefully ambushing Peter Gray by presenting to him, on behalf of the Society, a handsome gift in recognition of his work in editing and producing the book; and by Anne Stevens' witty and stylish farewell presentation to departing Consul-General Anne Webster. Throughout the day a continuous display of 50 years of Aisling photographs, brilliantly collated and electronically presented by Patrick Tansey, brought back many memories. Closing drinks were a high-spirited affair, bubbling with enjoyment and camaraderie.

ORDINARY MEETINGS

Our ordinary monthly meetings were held as always 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. Sadly for us, both of these wonderful representatives of Ireland have now returned to Dublin at the conclusion of their respective Australian tours of duty, Michael having departed in August and Anne in December. We thank both of them very sincerely for all the tremendous support and interest they offered to the Society during their time here. Both of them will be much missed by us and by the whole Irish community in Sydney; we wish them every success and happiness in the future. We also of course extend the warmest of welcomes to their successors, Consul-General Pat Scullion and Vice-Consul Louise Kelly.

- FEBRUARY The February Ordinary Meeting followed on the Annual General Meeting and featured a charming Talk by **Fr John McSweeney** entitled “*A Welcome on the Mat: Remembering Father Dunlea*”.
- APRIL **Brendan Whiting**’s engrossing Talk, on the subject of his recently published book, “*Victims of Tyranny: The Story of the Fitzgerald Convict Brothers*”, brought to life a turbulent period of Anglo-Irish-Australian history between 1796 and 1831.
- MAY Our member **Maurice Whelan** swept us along with his contagious enthusiasm and affection for the subject of his own book – a study of William Hazlitt principally from a psychoanalytical point of view – in a delightful Talk entitled “*William Hazlitt: A Man for our Times*”.
- JUNE The enticing title of **Ken Healey**’s Talk, “*The London Irish: the Linleys, the Sheridans and the Mozarts*”, was a springboard for a diverting array of anecdotes and tales drawn from a lifetime’s familiarity with the world of the theatre.
- AUGUST **Julia Miller** was the winner of the 2004/05 Aisling Society Prize for Macquarie University, for her work on Irish historiography and Irish revisionist historians, reflected in the title of her thought-provoking Talk on “*The Colours of Irish History*”.
- SEPTEMBER We were delighted to welcome back Professor **Portia Robinson AM**, long-time member and friend and distinguished authority on early colonial Australia, whose typically intriguing Talk was entitled “*Crime and Punishment: Ireland’s Criminal Women in Early NSW*”.
- OCTOBER Dr **Clare Pollard**, Curator of Japanese Art at the Art Gallery of NSW and formerly Curator of the East Asian Collections at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, gave us a fascinating Talk, illuminated by a remarkable selection of slides, on “*Chester Beatty and his Library*”.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER:

Our St Patrick's Day celebration on Friday 18 March was a delightful evening, held – as always now – in the ideal surroundings of the Strangers’ Dining Room in Parliament House, Macquarie Street. Fittingly for our 50th anniversary year, there was a splendidly large attendance of 121 members and their guests. Michéal Martin TD, visiting Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Development, was able to join us for a time and made a gracious speech. 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 **Gerard Windsor**, who sparked many a discussion with a typically thoughtful, angular and insistently unsentimental address entitled “*Farewell to Old Ireland*”. The vote of thanks was deftly proposed by Eve Ross.

MID-YEAR LUNCHEON

65 members and their guests attended the luncheon, which was held on Saturday 23 July, once again at the Sydney Rowing Club at Abbotsford with its fine views of the Parramatta River.

Helen Townsend gave the eleventh Annual Joan Ward Address. Helen's great-grandfather William Irwin left his farming family in County Tyrone to come to Australia in 1849, and the family's letters to William, from 1850 to 1893, enabled Helen to give us some vivid and poignant insights into life in both colonial Australia and Victorian Ireland, and into the experiences of leaving, and of loss. Nihill Somers warmly proposed the vote of thanks.

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.

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

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2005

- 2005 marked the Society's 50th anniversary, as noted above, and this achievement was celebrated throughout the year, most notably at the St Patrick's Day Dinner and by the holding of the seminar in November at which *Passing the Torch* was launched.
- Our Life Member Bishop David Cremin stepped down as Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney in the same year that he celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his ordination. Many Aisling members were present at a luncheon in June to thank and farewell Bishop David.
- Gerard Windsor was awarded the 2005 Pascall Prize for Critic of the Year.
- Sister Dymphna O'Brien RSJ celebrated her Golden Jubilee.
- An Aisling team participated with enthusiasm in the annual All-Ireland Quiz.
- Sean Flavin celebrated his engagement to Dolores.
- Sadly, we have lost two well-loved members since last year's Report: **Joan Gortley** and **Robin Cahill**. Terry Keaney, 46-year-old son of **Margot and Frank Keaney**, also died, tragically young, in July. May they rest in peace.

EVENTS DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATED

- St Patrick's Day Parade: In 2005, 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.
- Eve Ross represented the Society at the Macquarie University prizegiving when she presented our Prize to Julia Miller.
- Similarly Peter Kuch was our representative at the UNSW prizegiving when the recipients of our Prize were Fernanda Valdes (English) and Anne Middleton (History).
- Bishop David Cremin was the main celebrant of an unforgettable Requiem Mass in Redfern Park for the inspirational Fr Ted Kennedy in May.
- In August a number of members were among the large crowd who attended the 6th annual gathering at the Irish Famine Memorial, Hyde Park Barracks, arranged by our Councillor Tom Power and featuring an oration by Thomas Keneally

- September saw a highly successful (sold out, in fact) third Irish Film Festival, of which our Dr Peter Kuch was again the Director
- In November many Aisling members were delighted to attend a reception given by Consul-General Anne Webster in her home for Michéal Martin TD (making his second visit down under for the year).

AISLING SOCIETY PRIZES

In 2005, 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	Ms Fernanda Valdes and Ms Anne Middleton
University of Sydney	Ms Melissa Markauskas
Macquarie University	Ms Julia Miller

CONCLUSION

My thanks again to the members of the Aisling Society for the honour they give me by entrusting me with the Secretary's role. 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 elegant premises at 400 George Street. I look forward to another enjoyable and successful year in 2006, as we embark upon our second half-century.

Peter Gray
HON SECRETARY

February 2006