



**The Aisling Society
of Sydney**

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2006

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2006

PRESIDENT
VICE PRESIDENTS

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MS EVE ROSS

DR PETER KUCH

MRS MARY LEE

HON. SECRETARY

MR PETER GRAY

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MISS MAUREEN McLOUGHLIN

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MRS TRUDI O'NEIL

MR PATRICK TANSEY

MR JOHN RYAN

DR JEFF KILDEA

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 81 financial members and 4 honorary life members. This year there were also three honorary members, being winners of the Aisling Society Prize at the University of New South Wales and the University of Sydney for 2005/6. In 2006 we welcomed five new members, namely Irene Lucchitti, Dolours Fogarty, Maureen Breslin, Elizabeth Hurst and the Australian Irish Heritage Association of WA.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2006 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 22 February at the Consulate-General of Ireland.

The Annual Report for 2005, 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 – notwithstanding the deprecations wrought by the financing of our self-published book. Both these reports were ACCEPTED.

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

ORDINARY MEETINGS

Our ordinary monthly meetings were held as always in the rooms of the Consulate-General of Ireland, for whose support and generosity we are again most grateful. In October the Consulate moved, from the familiar premises at 30/400 George Street to equally welcoming accommodation at Level 26, 1 Market Street. Again we had the privilege of the wholehearted support and genuine interest of the new Consul-General himself, Pat Scullion, ably supported by his Vice-Consul, Louise Kelly.

FEBRUARY The February Ordinary Meeting followed on the Annual General Meeting and featured a marvellous *ex tempore* Talk by **Jeff Kildea** (admirably filling the breach caused by a technical glitch which had resulted in our being unable to show two new short films on Ireland which had been made available by Tourism Ireland), and the opportunity to meet our new Consul-General, Mr **Pat Scullion**.

APRIL In 2005 Dr **Frank Molloy**, of Charles Sturt University, had published a biography of the once-prominent Irish-Australian poet Victor Daley, "*Victor Daley and Sydney*". Frank's lively Talk surveyed Daley's years in the city, and especially his career as a poet and journalist with '*The Bulletin*', '*Freeman's Journal*' and other papers - as well as his Bohemian lifestyle, including his leadership of the "Dawn and Dusk Club".

MAY Lawyer and historian **Tony Earls**, one of our members, marked the 100th anniversary of the death of Michael Davitt with his keenly researched Talk entitled "*Michael Davitt: an Australian Perspective*", focusing in particular on Davitt's visit to Australia in 1895.

JUNE Our Life Member and Past President, Fr **Michael O'Sullivan**, gave yet another of his many original and engaging Talks, this one entitled "*Stone Circles of Ireland and Australia*" – ranging from the massive 5,500-year-old burial mound at Knowth, County Meath to the large stone circle erected in 2005 in Glen Innes, NSW.

AUGUST **Melissa Markauskas** was the winner of the 2005 Aisling Society Prize for Sydney University, for her work in Medieval Studies, reflected in the title of her scholarly Talk on "*St Columbanus and John Scottus Eriugena: early medieval Irishmen on the continent*".

SEPTEMBER We welcomed Dr **Irene Lucchitti**, a new Aisling member whose recently completed Ph D explores the iconic Irish-language literature of the Blasket Islands off the coast of Kerry, and who spoke to us most evocatively about "*The Islandman: Tomas O'Crohan*".

OCTOBER "*Francis de Groot: Irish Fascist Australian Legend*" was the intriguing title of a most fascinating Talk by Dr **Andrew Moore**, associate professor of history at the University of Western Sydney. His book on the remarkable Captain De Groot was shortlisted for the 2006 NSW Premier's History Awards (State Records Prize).

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER:

Our St Patrick's Day celebration on Friday 24 March was a wonderful evening, held again in the Strangers' Dining Room in Parliament House, Macquarie Street. 117 members and their guests attended. A feature of the evening this year was an exhibition, in the pre-dinner room, of 15 photographs by Richard O'Farrell, entitled *Vanished Kingdoms – a tribute to Professor Patrick O'Farrell*. All photographs were for sale, with 50% of all funds received to be generously donated by Richard to the Society. The President, Anne Stevens, welcomed the guests, who included Deputy Consul-General Louise Kelly, our host Mr Tony Kelly MLC and his wife Anne, Bishop David Cremin and Deirdre O'Farrell. The National Anthems of Ireland and Australia were sung – to accompaniment, once again, by Stephanie Walker, and the message from the President of Ireland was read.

After dinner, our speaker for the evening was acclaimed actor and director **John Bell**. John spoke beguilingly about his Irish forebears (the title of his address being, indeed, "*Irish as Paddy's Pigs*") and about some of the Irish dimensions to his career in the theatre, and then held the hushed room spellbound as he read – in his beautiful voice – a haunting piece by the Irish playwright Sebastian Barry, from his play "*The Steward of Christendom*". The vote of thanks was proposed by Peter Kuch.

MID-YEAR LUNCHEON

78 members and their guests attended the luncheon, which was held on Saturday 29 July, once again at the Sydney Rowing Club at Abbotsford with its fine views of the Parramatta River.

Siobhan McHugh, distinguished author and broadcaster and longstanding friend of the Society, gave the twelfth Annual Joan Ward Address. Siobhan's books include *The Snowy: the People Behind the Power* (winner of the NSW Premier's Award for Non-Fiction), and she spoke to us with tremendous verve about the Snowy River scheme, including both the substantial Irish contribution to its workforce and the recent enormous upswelling of popular resistance to government proposals to sell it to the highest bidder – resistance which had resoundingly prevailed. Patrick Tansey 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.

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

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2006

- *Passing the Torch*, our book of selected Talks published to mark the Society's 50th anniversary in 2005, was the subject of favourable reviews in journals as diverse as *The Irish Echo*, *The Catholic Weekly*, the *NSW Bar Review*, *Madonna Magazine*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Táin*.
- Brendan Whiting published his latest book, "*The Shroud Story*" (about which he will be speaking to us in 2007).
- Peter Kuch was appointed to a professorship, as the Eamon Cleary Chair of Irish Studies at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand. The Council of the Society entertained Peter and Liz to dinner, to bid them farewell and to thank Peter for his tremendous contribution to the Society over the years he has been with us
- We were happy to receive a donation from the Australian Celtic Tiger (an on-line resource directory for the Australian Celtic community), the result of our being nominated by Tourism Ireland as the beneficiary of its sponsorship of the directory – our thanks to both those organisations.
- Sadly, we have lost two well-loved members since last year's Report: **John Reavey** (member since 1958) and **Brenda Grosz**. Mary Coogan, mother of **Sandra Coogan**, also died this year, as did Kathleen Ryan, mother of **John Ryan**. Then, only days before Christmas, came the tragic news of the sudden death of David Lyons, 29 year-old son of **Michael Lyons** and his wife Celine. May they rest in peace.

EVENTS DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATED

- St Patrick's Day Parade: In 2006, Maureen McLoughlin, Marie Leech, Peter Kuch, and Patrick, Arlene and Marie Tansey, together with their various associated children, again drove, populated and accompanied the 'Aisling Car' in the Parade.
- The Society again made donations to the St Patrick's Day Mass Committee and to the St Patrick's Day Parade Committee.
- Mary Lee was our representative at the UNSW prizegiving, when the recipients of our Prize were Lisa Due Hin (English) and Kim Thi Hue Ho (History).
- In September a number of members were among the large crowd who attended the 7th annual gathering at the Irish Famine Memorial, Hyde Park Barracks, arranged by our former member and Councillor Tom Power (who retired from the Society during the year, and for whose contribution over the years we express our thanks).
- September also saw a successful fourth Irish Film Festival, of which our Dr Peter Kuch was again the Director.
- An Aisling team participated with enthusiasm in the annual All-Ireland Quiz.
- In September several Aisling members were delighted to attend a reception given by Consul-General Pat Scullion in his home for Michael Ahern TD, Irish Minister for Trade and Commerce.
- Aisling members were also among the supporters of the Chair of Modern Irish Studies / UNSW / John Hubert Plunkett Society Annual Dinner in October, which featured an address by Thomas Keneally.
- In October Máirtín Ó Fainín arrived in Canberra to take up his appointment as Ireland's Ambassador to Australia. The Secretary, Peter Gray, represented the Society at a reception held by Pat Scullion, Consul-General, at the new Consulate premises in Market Street, to welcome Mr Ó Fainín.

AISLING SOCIETY PRIZES

In 2006, 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	Lisa Due Hin (English) and Kim Thi Hue Ho (History).
University of Sydney	Daniel Hill

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 Pat Scullion and Louise Kelly, for their interest in and support of our activities and for continuing to allow us to hold our meetings in their elegant premises – first at 400 George Street and then by the end of the year at 1 Market Street. I look forward to another enjoyable and successful year in 2007.

Peter Gray
HON SECRETARY

January 2007