



**The Aisling Society
of Sydney**

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2007

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2007

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VICE PRESIDENTS

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MS EVE ROSS

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HON. TREASURER
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MRS TRUDI O'NEIL
MR TONY EARLS
MR JOHN RYAN
DR JEFF KILDEA
MR BRENDAN O'CONNELL

HON. AUDITOR

Trudi O'Neil also generously continued to perform the invaluable role of Minutes Secretary, which is very much appreciated.

MEMBERSHIP

The Society has 86 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 2006/7. In 2007 we welcomed thirteen new members, namely Steve & Brenda Carey, Gabriella Glasziou, Padraic Hoban, Diarmuid Kavanagh, Carol Ann Lunn, Larry King, Brian & Beth McAteer, Myles Mooney, Arlene Tansey, Melissa Tully and Joan Watson.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2007 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 28 February at the Consulate-General of Ireland. The Annual Report for 2006, 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 continues to remain healthy. 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. Again we had the enormous advantage of the wholehearted support and genuine interest of the Consul-General, Pat Scullion, ably supported by his Vice-Consul, Louise Kelly.

- FEBRUARY The February Ordinary Meeting followed on the Annual General Meeting and featured a Talk by our member **Brendan Whiting** entitled “*A fresh look at the holy shroud of Turin*”, based on Brendan’s book, *The Shroud Story*, published in 2006. Brendan examined (with the aid of a short film) the latest scientific analyses of the authenticity of the shroud.
- APRIL We welcomed **Tony Dawson**, the biographer of James Meehan, a veteran of the 1798 Irish rebellion who rose to be Deputy Surveyor-General of NSW and who among other things was indirectly responsible for Dee Why’s curious name. Tony’s enjoyable talk was entitled “*James Meehan: a most excellent surveyor*”.
- MAY Professor **Dermot Keogh**, Head of the Department of History at University College Cork and Visiting Professor in the Irish Studies Program at UNSW, presented a fascinating study of “*The Catholic Church, the Holy See and the 1916 Rising*”.
- JUNE **James Franklin**, Professor of Mathematics at UNSW and among other things a prolific writer on philosophy and the history of ideas, conducted a lively Socratic discussion of “*Irish Australia and the Catholic Connection*”.
- AUGUST We were delighted to be able to hear again from Dr **Jeff Kildea**, Aisling member and Councillor. Jeff’s most recent book, *Anzacs and Ireland*, continues his work on Irish Australian themes of the early 20th century, and he drew on that work to give us another enthralling talk, entitled “*Irish Anzacs: Irish men and women in the Australian Imperial Force*”
- SEPTEMBER “*The London Irish: the Linleys, the Sheridans and the Mozarts* ” was the intriguing title of a sparkling talk by **Ken Healey**, the Literary Manager for the National Institute for Dramatic Art (NIDA), who led us on a most effervescent tour of some Irish aspects of Regency London.
- OCTOBER Immediate Past President **Anne Stevens**, whose monumental study of the Hughes family was published to deserved acclaim in this same month, delivered a moving and meticulously researched talk on “*The Hughes family and the Great War*”.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER:

Our St Patrick’s Day celebration on Friday 23 March was a wonderful evening, held this year for the first time in the Dining Room of the American Club, in Macquarie Street, with its spectacular harbour views. 109 members and their guests attended. Our newly-elected President, Patrick Tansey, welcomed the guests, who included Ambassador Máirtín Ó Fainín and his wife Anne, Consul-General Pat Scullion, Mr Tony Kelly MLC (our generous host for many years at Parliament House), Bishop David Cremin and Deirdre O’Farrell. The National Anthems of Ireland and Australia were sung – to accompaniment, this year, by Arlene Tansey, and the message from the President of Ireland was read.

After dinner, our speaker for the evening was **Ambassador Máirtín Ó Fainín**. The Ambassador spoke in his characteristically engaging and entertaining way about some of the many countries and experiences to which his various postings have led him, as well as about emerging currents in the relationship between Ireland and Australia. The vote of thanks was proposed by Marie Leech.

This year's dinner also featured a presentation to Fr O'Sullivan by Bishop Cremin, on behalf of the Society, in recognition of the 55th anniversary of Fr Michael's ordination, and another presentation, to Tony Kelly, by Peter Gray on behalf of the Society, thanking Tony for his years of generosity and graciousness as our Parliamentary host.

MID-YEAR LUNCHEON

107 members and their guests attended the luncheon, which was held on Saturday 21 July, once again at the Sydney Rowing Club on the banks of the Parramatta River at Abbotsford.

Fergus Linehan, the highly successful Artistic Director of the Sydney Festival, gave the thirteenth Annual Joan Ward Address. Fergus spoke to us with humour, insight and emotion about the theatre and arts festivals, about Ireland and Australia, and about emigration and living between different worlds. Eve Ross ably proposed the vote of thanks.

CHRISTMAS PARTY:

This year's party was as usual a very convivial evening, again held at the ideal venue offered by The Australian Graduate School of Management at the University of New South Wales.

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

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2007

- Jeff Kildea's latest book, *Anzacs and Ireland*, was published in Australia by UNSW Press and in Ireland by Cork University Press, and was launched by General Peter Cosgrove AC MC at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park.
- Anne Stevens' book on the Hughes family, *Generations: the Hughes Family of Sydney 1840-2007*, was published in October. It was launched by Gerard Windsor before a very large audience at Kincoppal-Rose Bay school.
- Sandra Coogan, a member of the Society for over 20 years, has been made the first female director of The Illawarra Catholic Club.
- Ed Dunne, who was a member for many years, is now in Cloverlea Nursing Home in Burwood.
- Marie Leech has been appointed Principal of Sancta Sophia College at Sydney University.
- Sadly, we have lost four highly respected members since last year's Report: **May Bodel**, who was a member for nearly forty years and who died at the grand age of 96, **Fr Frank Meecham** (nephew of Fr Hartigan /"John O'Brien", author of *Around the Boree Log*), **John Sheridan** and **Ann Feely**.

John was a long-time member and Councillor who gave us a number of delightful Talks and was always a much-loved contributor in every way. His Requiem Mass, attended by several Aisling members, was a mighty event.

Ann was a member for the 20 years she lived in Australia, and continued to receive her Annual Report following her return home, where she made many members welcome when they visited Ireland. There was a strong Aisling presence at a Memorial Mass for her in Sydney, including Bishop Cremin as the main celebrant assisted by Fr Brendan Shiel and Fr John McSweeney, and Fr Michael O Sullivan looking after the music.

Also during the year Brother Alman Dwyer, brother of our member **Paul** and a truly great Marist educator, died.

May they all rest in peace.

EVENTS DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATED

- St Patrick's Day Parade: In 2007, there was no 'Aisling Car' in the Parade; instead, a large group of members led by our President, Patrick Tansey, marched under the Society's banner
- The Society again made donations to the St Patrick's Day Mass Committee and to the St Patrick's Day Parade Committee.
- Jeff Kildea was our representative at the UNSW prizegiving in April, when the recipients of our Prize were Bartholomew Cummings (English) and Hayley Rudkin (History).
- Also in April, several Aisling members were delighted to attend a reception given by Consul-General Pat Scullion in his home for Joseph Small, remembered by us all with great affection for his time as Irish Ambassador to Australia in the 1980s.
- Patrick Tansey represented the Society at a ceremony held by the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry at Sydney University in May, when the recipient of our Prize was Evan Ellis for an essay on the *Tain Bó Cuailnge*.
- An Aisling team participated with enthusiasm in the annual All-Ireland Quiz / trivia night; naturally their intellectual firepower was insufficiently trivial to triumph this year.

AISLING SOCIETY PRIZES

In 2007, 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 announced in 2007 were:

University of New South Wales	Bartholomew Cummings (English) and Hayley Rudkin (History).
University of Sydney	Evan Ellis

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 Patrick Tansey as President, Maureen McLoughlin and Trudi O'Neil 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 at 1 Market Street. I look forward to another enjoyable and successful year in 2008.

Peter Gray
HON SECRETARY

January 2008