



The Aisling Society
of Sydney

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2008

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2008

PRESIDENT	MR PATRICK TANSEY
VICE PRESIDENTS	MS EVE ROSS MRS ANNE STEVENS MRS MARY LEE
HON. SECRETARY	MR PETER GRAY
HON. TREASURER	MISS MAUREEN McLOUGHLIN
ARCHIVIST/LIBRARIAN	MR PETER GRAY
PUBLICITY OFFICER	MR DAVID VAUGHAN
COUNCILLORS	DR MARIE LEECH MRS AILSA HOBAN MRS TRUDI O'NEIL MR TONY EARLS MR JOHN RYAN DR JEFF KILDEA
HON. AUDITOR	MR BRENDAN O'CONNELL

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

MEMBERSHIP

The Society has 93 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 2007/8. In 2008 we welcomed 8 new members, namely Michael O'Flynn, Anne-Marie King, Michael and Celine Lyons, Monsignor Tony Doherty, Anders and Judith Ahlqvist and Geraldine Lavin.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2008 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 20 February at the Consulate-General of Ireland. The Annual Report for 2007, which had been prepared by Peter Gray and circulated to members beforehand, was presented, as was the Treasurer's report which had been prepared by Maureen McLoughlin and likewise circulated. 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 genuine interest of the Consul-General, Pat Scullion, and of his Vice-Consuls, Louise Kelly until August and then her successor Siobhan Kelly (to whom we renew the warmest of welcomes).

- FEBRUARY The February Ordinary Meeting followed on the Annual General Meeting and featured a fascinating and scholarly Talk by **Dr Pamela O'Neill**, Honorary Fellow at the University of Melbourne and President of the Australian Early Medieval Association, entitled "*Between a rock and a wet place: women and the law in early Ireland*".
- APRIL We welcomed our Consul-General himself, **Pat Scullion**, who brought us up to date with the still-encouraging situation in Northern Ireland, in his Talk entitled "*Current Developments in Northern Ireland: How did we get here from there?*"
- MAY Life Member and Past President **Fr Michael O'Sullivan** delivered a vintage example of his inimitable presentation style, an intriguing and mischievous study (enlivened by Fr Michael's photos taken in 2007 on a circuit around Ireland) of "*The pursuit of Diarmaid and Grainne, and the 'beds' he erected each night for her*".
- JUNE **Helen Townsend**, Aisling member, gave us a charming Talk entitled "*An Irish farm boy: Irish Protestant identity in 19th century Australia*". Helen told the story of her great-grandfather William Irwin, who left his farming family in County Tyrone to come to Australia in 1849, and whose loyalty to his Catholic brother on the one hand and his ties to the Protestant establishment on the other created poignant tensions in him which were reflected in the wider society.
- AUGUST We were delighted to be able to hear again from **Maurice Whelan**, Aisling member and author. Maurice's most recent book, *Boat People*, is a novel, prompted by the Tampa incident in 2001, which starts in the Great Famine and moves into present day Australia. Maurice drew on that work to give us a though-provoking Talk about this nation of refugees, also entitled "*Boat People*".
- SEPTEMBER In *God, Actually* **Roy Williams**, former high-flying lawyer turned writer and reviewer, harnesses his legal and literary skills to analyse the arguments for and against the existence of God. Roy's Talk to us, with the same title as his book, was a gentle, self-effacing account of how the book came to be written.
- OCTOBER **Margaret Winnett's** lively Talk on "*Irish Dancing in Australia*" included both a fascinating glimpse into one aspect of the social world of 1950s/1960s Sydney, and a fine demonstration by the speaker herself, a treat for the audience from someone who has been performing and teaching Irish dancing in Sydney for over 50 years,

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER:

Our St Patrick's Day celebration on Wednesday 12 March was a vibrant and happy occasion, held again in the Dining Room of the American Club, in Macquarie Street, with its spectacular harbour views. 118 members and their guests attended. Our President, Patrick Tansey, welcomed the guests, who included Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of New South Wales, and her husband Sir Nicholas Shehadie, and Consul-General Pat Scullion. The National Anthems of Ireland and Australia were sung to accompaniment by Arlene Tansey, and the message from the President of Ireland was read.

After dinner, our speaker for the evening was **Governor Marie Bashir**. The Governor spoke in her characteristically modest and engaged way about Australia's "wonderful Irish legacy", including the unforgettable contribution of the legendary parish priest of the Governor's home town, Narrandera – Fr Hartigan, or John O'Brien, of "*Around the Boree Log*". The vote of thanks was proposed by Peter Gray.

MID-YEAR LUNCHEON

76 members and their guests attended the luncheon, which was held on Saturday 26 July, once again at the Sydney Rowing Club on the banks of the Parramatta River at Abbotsford.

Anders Ahlqvist, the inaugural Sir Warwick Fairfax Professor of Celtic Studies at Sydney University, gave the fourteenth Annual *Joan Ward Memorial Address*. Anders spoke to us with enthusiasm and good humour about his varied and distinguished university career and about the future of Celtic Studies in Australia. Fr O'Sullivan ably proposed the vote of thanks.

CHRISTMAS PARTY

This year's party was held, for the first time, at Sancta Sophia College within Sydney University. This delightful venue was made available to us thanks to the kindness of the College Principal, our own Marie Leech. The party was as usual a very convivial evening, and was attended by 85 members and friends.

A special feature of the evening was the Australian launch of a new book celebrating one of our distinguished former members, Oliver MacDonagh. *Looking Back: Living and Writing History – Oliver MacDonagh 1924–2002* is edited by Oliver's former student Tom Dunne.

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2008

- Fr John McSweeney's book on our Life Member, Bishop David Cremin, "*Call me David*": *Bishop David Cremin – a Memoir*, was published in October. It was launched by Bishop Terence Brady, at a reception at the residence of the Consul-General, Pat Scullion
- **Frank Keaney**, who was a wonderful member for many years, sadly died in September. Judge **Brian Donovan**, a former member, also died during the year. May they rest in peace.

EVENTS DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATED

- St Patrick's Day Parade: a large group of members led by our President, Patrick Tansey, marched under the Society's banner accompanying 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, as well as to Sydney Irish Radio.
- Tony Earls was our representative at the UNSW prizegiving in May, when the recipient of our Prize in History was Samantha Watson
- Various Aisling members were delighted to attend a number of receptions given during the year by Consul-General Pat Scullion in his residence

- David Vaughan represented the Society at a ceremony held by the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry at Sydney University in May, when our Prize was shared by Anne Healey and Christopher Mason
- In October Anders Ahlqvist, whom we were delighted to welcome as a member this year, delivered his Inaugural Lecture as Sir Warwick Fairfax Professor of Celtic Studies at Sydney University
- Once again an Aisling team (Maureen McLoughlin, Marie Leech, David Vaughan and Roleen Vaughan) participated with enthusiasm in the annual All-Ireland Quiz / trivia night; this year they stormed to second place.
- Several Aisling members enjoyed the 19th annual Celtic Studies Foundation Christmas Concert, held at St Andrew's College, Sydney University, in December.

AISLING SOCIETY PRIZES

In 2008, 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 2008 were:

University of New South Wales
University of Sydney

Samantha Watson (History)
Anne Hanley and Christopher Mason

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 Siobhan Kelly, for their interest in and support of our activities and for continuing to welcome us to their elegant premises at 1 Market Street. I look forward to another enjoyable and successful year in 2009.

Peter Gray
HON SECRETARY

January 2009