



The Aisling Society
of Sydney

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2009

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2009

PRESIDENT
VICE PRESIDENTS

MR PATRICK TANSEY
MS EVE ROSS
MRS ANNE STEVENS

HON. SECRETARY
HON. TREASURER
ARCHIVIST/LIBRARIAN
PUBLICITY OFFICER
COUNCILLORS

MRS MARY LEE
MR PETER GRAY
MISS MAUREEN McLOUGHLIN
MR PETER GRAY
MR DAVID VAUGHAN
DR MARIE LEECH
MRS AILSA HOBAN
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 74 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, the University of Sydney and Macquarie University for 2008. In 2009 we welcomed two new members, namely Gerard and Patricia Wilson.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2009 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 25 February at the Consulate-General of Ireland. The Annual Report for 2008, 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-Consul, Siobhan Kelly Antonucci.

- FEBRUARY The February Ordinary Meeting followed on the Annual General Meeting, and featured a fascinating exploration of the historical agenda in the songs of the Irish poet Thomas Moore by our Councillor **Tony Earls**, whose Talk was entitled "*Thomas Moore's histories in verse*".
- APRIL **Richard Cowan**, retired professor of Mathematics and prolific historical researcher, brought vividly alive a neglected aspect of the great Western Australian Fenian rescue, in his Talk entitled "*Mary Tondut – the woman in the Catalpa story*".
- MAY 2009 was the fiftieth anniversary of "*The Rose of Tralee*" Festival in Ireland, and **Tom O’Keeffe**, President of the Kerry Association of NSW, gave a wonderful Talk on the origins and history of Festival, and about some of its present features world-wide. As a delightful bonus, Tom was accompanied by the 2008 Sydney Rose, Hannah Bradley.
- JUNE **Chris Geraghty**, former priest and recently retired District Court judge, gave us a most thought-provoking Talk entitled "*Irish monasticism in the dark ages*", which prompted a particularly lively question time.
- AUGUST Beautifully illustrated by some of the iconic Bill Doyle photographs of the Aran Islands, **Claire Dunne’s** Talk, "*JM Synge in the Aran Islands: Generating Irish Indigenous Theatre*", was a detailed and engrossing account of the writer’s time on the Islands a century ago and of the way of life that he found there.
- SEPTEMBER We were delighted to be able to hear again from **Tony Earls**, Aisling member and author. Tony’s most recent book, *Plunkett's Legacy*, is a study of one of the most notable of all Irish-Australian lawyers, John Hubert Plunkett, arguing that the campaign for Catholic emancipation in Ireland is critical to understanding Plunkett’s conduct as Attorney General in NSW from 1836 to 1856. Tony’s fine Talk was entitled "*Searching for Plunkett*".
- OCTOBER **Brendan Walsh** brought the broad experience of over twenty-five years of radio broadcasting to his characteristically lively and audience-involving Talk on "*The Irish contribution to the world of music*".

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER:

Our St Patrick’s Day celebration on Friday 20 March was a vibrant and happy occasion, held this year in the Four Seasons Hotel near Circular Quay. 125 members and their guests attended. Our President, Patrick Tansey, welcomed the guests, who included 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 the distinguished human rights lawyer **Chris Sidoti**. Chris was the independent chair of the UK Government's Northern Ireland Bill of Rights Forum in 2007/08. He spoke with gravitas and deep sincerity about "*Human Rights in Northern Ireland: Recent Experiences and Lessons for Australia*".

MID-YEAR LUNCHEON

83 members and their guests attended the luncheon, which was held on Saturday 25 July, once again at the Sydney Rowing Club on the banks of the Parramatta River at Abbotsford.

Fr Edmund Campion, historian, writer and teacher, gave the fifteenth Annual *Joan Ward Memorial Address*. He held us spellbound as he spoke to us about the life of the great *Ted Kennedy, Priest of Redfern*, the subject of Ed's recently published book of the same name. John Ryan movingly proposed the vote of thanks.

CHRISTMAS PARTY

This year's party was again held at Sancta Sophia College within Sydney University. This delightful venue was made available to us thanks to the kindness and courtesy of the College Principal, our own Marie Leech, to whom we extend our most sincere thanks. The party was as usual a very convivial evening, and was attended by 71 members and friends.

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2009

- Dr **Irene Lucchitti's** book, *The Islandman: the Hidden Life of Tomás O'Crohan*, based on her Ph D thesis on which she had previously given us a delightful Talk, was published
- **Tony Earls'** book, *Plunkett's Legacy*, was published in October, with a launch at Parliament House by Attorney General John Hatzistergos
- **Brendan O'Connell's** daughter Deirdre O'Connell published *The Ballad of Blind Tom*, described as the remarkable life story of a Georgia slave pianist and autistic savant, the Forrest Gump of his time

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.
- In March, Peter Gray represented the Society at a lecture delivered at UNSW by Professor John Kelly of St John's College, Oxford University, entitled *Yeats and Eliot: a "mutual illumination"?*
- Tony Earls was our representative at the UNSW prizegiving in May, when the recipient of our Prize for both History and English was Bob Liang
- Mary Lee represented the Society at a ceremony held by the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry at Sydney University in May, when our Prize was awarded to Michael Coward
- In August, the Department of Celtic Studies at Sydney University presented a symposium on Early Celtic Legal Language. Professor Anders Ahlqvist, Sir Warwick Fairfax Professor of Celtic Studies at the University, was one of the distinguished speakers
- Once again an Aisling team participated with enthusiasm in the annual All-Ireland Quiz / trivia night.

AISLING SOCIETY PRIZES

In 2009, 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 2009 were:

University of New South Wales	Bob Liang (both History and English prizes)
University of Sydney	Michael Coward
Macquarie University	Katherine Dudley

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 Antonucci, 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 2010.

Peter Gray
HON SECRETARY

January 2010