



The Aisling Society
of Sydney

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2011

THE COUNCIL OF THE AISLING SOCIETY 2011

PRESIDENT
VICE PRESIDENTS

DR JEFF KILDEA
MR PATRICK TANSEY
MRS ANNE STEVENS
MRS MARY LEE
MR PETER GRAY
MISS MAUREEN McLOUGHLIN
MR PETER GRAY
MR DAVID VAUGHAN
DR MARIE LEECH
MR PADRAIG HOBAN
MRS TRUDI O'NEIL
MR TONY EARLS
MR JOHN RYAN
PROF ANDERS AHLQVIST
MR BRENDAN O'CONNELL

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

HON. AUDITOR

In addition, Trudi O'Neil generously continued to perform the invaluable role of Minutes Secretary, and Patrick Tansey kindly took on a good deal of the work in relation to organising our three main annual functions, to assist Maureen. These contributions from Trudi and Patrick are very much appreciated.

MEMBERSHIP

The Society has 71 financial members and 4 honorary life members. This year there was also one honorary member, being the winner of the Aisling Society Prize at the University of Sydney for 2011, and we welcomed 4 new members, namely Michael and Helen Smullins, Denis O'Flynn and Ronan McDonald.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2011 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 23 February at the Consulate-General of Ireland. The Annual Report for 2010, 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 advantage of the genuine interest and full support of the Consul-General, Caitriona Ingoldsby, and of the Vice-Consul, Siobhan Kelly Antonucci.

- FEBRUARY** The February Ordinary Meeting followed on the Annual General Meeting, and featured a charming Talk by **Kate Guilfoyle** about Irish mythology.
- APRIL** **Peter Moore**, archivist, legal consultant, multicultural publisher and editor, teacher and tour guide, navigated the strange cross-currents that have carried with them the statue of Queen Victoria which now stands outside the Queen Victoria Building near the Sydney Town Hall. His meticulously researched and illustrated Talk was entitled "*Queen Victoria's Irish statue in Sydney: Ireland's other gift to Australia*".
- MAY** We welcomed Reverend **Edward Vaughan**, Rector of St John's Anglican Church, Darlinghurst, who had recently returned from six years as the Church of Ireland Rector of Crinken, near Bray, south of Dublin. Ed spoke to us on "*Faith and Society in Modern Ireland: some personal reflections*".
- JUNE** **Siobhan McHugh**, generous giver of many wonderful Talks over the years, gave us an enthralling evening with "*Marrying Out: mixed marriage, family conflict and religious bigotry between Catholics and Protestants in Australia 1920s-70s*". *Marrying Out*, broadcast on ABC Radio National, NZ public radio and RTE, had won a gold medal at the 2010 New York Radio Festival, and it formed part of Siobhan's thesis for which she was awarded her PhD this year.
- AUGUST** Aisling member, psychoanalyst and writer, **Maurice Whelan**, read to us from two of his recently published volumes of poetry, *The Lilac Bow* (2009) and *Excalibur's Return* (2011), and reflected on the writing process. Tony Earls introduced Maurice's Talk, and gave a friendly critique of his poetry.
- SEPTEMBER** Irish-born **Ber Carroll** writes Irish-Australian novels about modern-day women, their relationships, family dynamics and ambitions. Her delightful Talk was entitled "*Writing Irish fiction in Australia*".
- OCTOBER** **John McLaughlin**, recently retired Master and Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of NSW from 1989 to 2010, gave us an absorbing and deeply-researched Talk on "*Irish lawyers in colonial Australia*", focusing in particular not only on their outstanding achievements but on their different personal reasons for deciding to come here.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

BREAKFAST WITH ANDREW O'HAGAN

The acclaimed novelist and essayist, Andrew O'Hagan (a Scot with a strong Irish heritage), was in Sydney in March to promote his latest book *The Life and Opinions of Maf the Dog, and of his friend Marilyn Monroe*. By happy serendipity, we were able to host a breakfast on 11 March at which Andrew spoke. Sancta Sophia College at Sydney University was the perfect venue, thanks to the good offices of Marie Leech, College Principal and Aisling

Councillor. Those present were treated to a reflective, moving and elegant address by a fine writer and thinker. Gerard Windsor moved the vote of thanks in customarily thoughtful style.

ST PATRICK'S DAY DINNER:

For our St Patrick's Day celebration on Friday 18 March, we again enjoyed the splendid Strangers Dining Room in Parliament House in Macquarie Street, thanks to the courtesy and hospitality of our host and fellow member Tony Kelly MLC. 93 members and their guests attended. Our President, Dr Jeff Kildea, welcomed the guests, and introduced our speaker. 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 Dr **Richard Reid**, Senior Curator at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. Richard was the curator of the major Irish-Australian exhibition opening on St Patrick's Day itself, 17 March 2011, and he spoke with passionate enthusiasm about the exhibition, its genesis, the provenance of its kaleidoscopic array of exhibits, and some of his personal favourites. The vote of thanks was proposed by John Ryan.

MID-YEAR LUNCHEON

74 members and their guests attended the luncheon, which was held on Saturday 23 July, once again at the Sydney Rowing Club on the banks of the Parramatta River at Abbotsford. Professor **Justin O'Brien**, Director of the Centre for Law, Markets and Regulation at UNSW, spoke most engagingly about the economic, social and ethical issues confronting Ireland (and other EC countries) in the throes of the current financial crisis. Peter Gray moved the vote of thanks.

CHRISTMAS PARTY

This year's party was held on Tuesday 22 November at Sancta Sophia College at Sydney University. The party was as usual a very convivial evening, and was attended by 50 members and friends.

AISLING SOCIETY MILESTONES IN 2011

- Gerard Windsor's latest book, *All Day Long the Noise of Battle*, a study of an Australian attack in Vietnam, was published in April.
- Maurice Whelan published a volume of poetry, *Excalibur's Return*, in August.
- Work has begun on the project to set up an Aisling website, and it is hoped that this will be accomplished during 2012
- This year the Society lost two wonderful members of very long standing: **Peter Hoban** and **Brendan Dineen**. May they rest in peace.

EVENTS DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY PARTICIPATED

- St Patrick's Day Parade: for the first time in many years the event had to be cancelled, because of heavy and continuous rain
- The Society again made donations to the St Patrick's Day Mass Committee and to the St Patrick's Day Parade Committee.
- *Not Just Ned: A True History of the Irish in Australia* – a major exhibition at the National Museum of Australia from March to July, was a great success, and many Aisling members were among those who made the trip to Canberra to enjoy it
- Life member Brendan O'Connell 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 James Montgomery

- The Society donated \$2,000 to the Celtic Studies Foundation at Sydney University to support the teaching of Modern Irish at the University
- Professor David Fitzpatrick of Trinity College Dublin delivered the inaugural Patrick O'Farrell Memorial Lecture at the John Hume Institute for Global Irish Studies at UNSW on 9 November. Fittingly, given Patrick's long and close association with our Society, numerous Aisling members were present

AISLING SOCIETY PRIZES

In 2011, 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 2011 were:

University of Sydney

James Montgomery

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 Jeff Kildea as President, Maureen McLoughlin, Trudi O'Neil and Patrick Tansey 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 Caitriona Ingoldsby 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 2012.

Peter Gray
HON SECRETARY

December 2011