



Queensland Irish Association

Newsletter

July 2026

Big crowd for Bloomsday in Brisbane 2026

The QIA celebrated Bloomsday (16 June) in the Queen Street Mall again this year with around a 100 participants (including passers-by).

Special thanks to the performers reading sections of James Joyce's *Ulysses* – Matt Foley, Mary Crawford, Dan O'Neill and Monica Norris. Music was provided by Brendan Williams and pipes and drums of the QIA Pipe Band led by Bruce Grice.

The whole event was organised by the Association's Historical and Cultural Committee.

The event was sponsored by the Irish Government through a grant to the QIA for which we are very grateful.

Photos and more information on pages 6 & 7.

Vale Michele Bourke

Former QIA Director, Michele Bourke, passed away on 7 July following a lengthy illness. Michele was appointed as a director on 27 November 2022 and only relinquished her position due to illness last year. Her involvement in the QIA was far longer and more extensive, particularly in the Historical and Cultural Committee. Many of her friends were able to exchange greetings with her at this year's Bloomsday celebration.

Michele's funeral will be held at Christ the King Catholic Church in Churchill St in Graceville at 10.30am on Monday, 20 July.

We will have a full tribute to Michele in our August newsletter.



QIA celebrated Bloomsday in Brisbane 2026 on June 16 in Queen Street Mall. More pictures on pages 6 & 7. Photo: Mary Allen

Roasting Jeff Spender

There are still a few tickets available for the Farewell Roast for former President, Hon. Jeff Spender KC, on 24 July.

Jeff retired from the position of President in April this year after nearly nine years in the role. His willingness to take on the role of President was crucial to the Association being returned to the control of its members in 2017 after a period of administration.

The lunch is being held in the Ithaca Room of Brisbane City Hall starting at 12 noon. Tickets are available through functions@queenslandirish.com.au.

There is a stellar line-up of speakers for the event including Australian Catholic University Chancellor,

Martin Daubney, former High Court judge, Pat Keane, former Commonwealth Attorney-General, George Brandis, and the Deputy Head of Mission at the Irish Embassy, Sam Roberts, with a last word to Jeff Spender himself.

Congratulations Mary Allen

Mary Allen is a QIA Director and produces (and writes much of) this newsletter each month.

She has just been advised that one of her other publications, *Irish Queenslander*, has been selected by the State Library of Queensland for preservation in the PANDORA Archive, Australia's national web archive.

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 Queensland Irish Association
The Roast of Jeff Spender



Join us to farewell former QIA President
Jeff Spender on his retirement

on Friday 24 July 2026
at 12pm for 12.30pm start

Ithaca Room, Brisbane City Hall

Two-course meal and cash bar
Entertainment by Tom Kimmett

Tickets: \$69pp

RSVP before 10 July.

Booking form and tickets by email to functions@queenslandirish.com.au

Big crowd for Bloomsday in Brisbane 2026

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More than a decade of stories about Queensland's Irish community will be preserved as part of the archive and available to future generations of researchers, historians and anyone interested in the role and stories of the Irish in Queensland.

This recognition of Mary's work is tremendous news, a tribute to her on-going recording of Queensland Irish history.

Irish Queenslander can be found at <https://irishqueenslander.com>.

Congratulations, Mary.

Celtic Winter Concert

The winter concert of the Queensland Irish Choir will be held on Saturday, 25 July from 2pm to 4pm at the Hills Church, Everton Hills. Tickets are \$27 for adults and children are free. Tickets can be booked at www.qldirishchoir.org.

Membership renewal

It's the season to renew membership of the Queensland Irish Association for the 2026-2027 year. Renewal notices will be forwarded in the near future.

While you are renewing your membership, think of any friends or family members who you might encourage to join. Members are the life blood of any association like the QIA, especially as it continues to re-build.

Change to AGM

A reminder that the date of the 2026 QIA AGM has been brought forward to 14 November this year. The venue is still Wests Rugby Union Club at Toowong.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible this year.

Graham Moloney, QIA President.

Calendar

17 July 2026

The Ireland Funds Australia
Brisbane Luncheon, Hillstone, St Lucia, 12.30pm. <https://irelandfunds.org/chapters/worldwide/australia/>

20 July 2026

Family and friends are warmly invited to celebrate Michele Bourke's life at a Requiem Mass 10:30am at Christ the King Catholic Church, Churchill St, Graceville QLD, followed by her burial Centenary Memorial Gardens, 353 Wacol Station Rd, Sumner. For livestreaming see kmsmith.com.au

24 July 2026

Queensland Irish Association presents The Roast of Jeff Spender at, Ithaca Room, Brisbane City Hall, King George Square. 12pm for 12.30pm start. Tickets: \$69pp by email to functions@queenslandirish.com.au

25 July 2026

Queensland Irish Choir Celtic Winter Concert, Hills Church, Everton Hills, 2pm. Tickets: www.qldirishchoir.org

11 October 2026

Brisbane Celtic Festival, Moorlands Park, Auchenflower. www.ccaq.org.au

16 - 18 October 2026

Irish Film Festival Australia at Palace Barracks, Petrie Terrace. <https://irishfilmfestival.com.au/>

14 November 2026

Queensland Irish Association Annual General Meeting, Wests Rugby Union Club, Sylvan Road, Toowong.

17 - 18 April 2027

Queensland Manx Viking Festival, Allpass Parade, Shorncliffe. www.manxvikingfestival.com

First Friday of the month

Queensland Irish Association Pipe Band play at Friday Irish Sessions in Gilhooley's, Brisbane. See www.facebook.com/QIAPB.

Second Wednesday of the month

Tara Hall Dining Club, The Ship Inn, Sidon Street, South Brisbane. Contact Secretary Roger Thornton rjthornton8@bigpond.com or 0408 878 938

Last Saturday of the month

Tigh Gaelach luncheon at Easts Leagues Club, Coorparoo between February and November at 11am. Contact President Michelle FitzPatrick on mitchfitzpatrick@hotmail.com or 0403 384 223

*Ar dheis Dé
go raibh a hanam*



Michele Therese Bourke

Vale Michele Therese Bourke,
former Director of Queensland Irish Association,
who passed away on Tuesday, 7th July.

A Requiem Mass for Michele will be held on
Monday, 20th July at 10.30am
at Christ The King Catholic Church,
Churchill Street, Graceville, QLD, 4075.

May she rest in peace



Irish Queenslander selected to join national archive

Irish Queenslander website has received a significant honour after being selected by the State Library of Queensland for preservation in Australia's national web archive.

The State Library has invited Irish Queenslander to become part of the PANDORA Archive, Australia's long-running digital preservation program managed in partnership with the National Library of Australia. The archive safeguards websites and online publications considered to have lasting cultural, historical and research value.

The recognition means Irish Queenslander has been acknowledged as an important part of Queensland's documentary heritage, with its website preserved within the Australian Web Archive for future generations.

Founded as a print magazine before evolving into a digital news platform, Irish Queenslander has spent more than a decade documenting the achievements, history, events and stories of Queensland's Irish community.

First published as a free community magazine, Irish Queenslander built a loyal readership through its coverage of Irish life across Queensland before transitioning to an online publication, www.irish-queenslander.com, allowing its stories to reach a wider audience and creating a lasting digital archive.

Since its launch in 2013, the publication has covered everything from St Patrick's Day celebrations, Irish festivals and community events to the stories of pioneering Irish Queenslanders, musicians, dancers, sporting clubs, charities, historians and family history researchers. To-



Editor Mary Allen launching Irish Queenslander magazine at an Irish women in business fair at the Irish Club in 2013.

gether, those articles have created an extensive record of Irish life across the Sunshine State.

Editor and publisher Mary Allen said the invitation was both unexpected and deeply meaningful.

"I was delighted when the State Library of Queensland got in touch to ask if Irish Queenslander could be archived nationally. Every article represents someone who has contributed to Queensland's Irish story, and knowing those stories will remain accessible for researchers, historians, genealogists and future generations makes all the years of work worthwhile.

"The media landscape has changed enormously. As newspapers have declined, long-form storytelling has become less common, and much of the conversation has moved to social media, where stories can disappear almost as quickly as they appear. While social media has created new ways to connect, it has also made it harder for communities to find trusted,

independent sources of local news and in-depth stories. The people, events and achievements that shape a community deserve more than a fleeting post — they deserve to be documented and preserved."

Established in 1996 by the National Library of Australia, the PANDORA Archive was created to ensure significant Australian online publications are not lost as websites change or disappear. The State Library of Queensland works with the National Library to identify Queensland websites that form part of the state's documentary heritage.

In its invitation, the State Library explained that its aim is "to build a comprehensive collection of Queensland publications to ensure the availability of our documentary heritage both now and in the future."

The Library will periodically capture snapshots of the Irish Queenslander website, preserving

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Irish Queenslander selected to join national archive



Mary Allen with volunteers taking part in the 2014 Saint Patrick's Day Parade advertising Irish Queenslander on a Belfast-built Delorean DMC 'Back to the Future' car. Pictures: Irish Queenslander

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its content and making it permanently accessible through the Australian Web Archive.

The achievement reflects the important role community publications play in recording local history. While major news organisations document national events, community media often preserves the everyday stories that define a community — the volunteers who organise festivals, the pipe bands and Irish dancers keeping traditions alive, the sporting clubs, charities, musicians, genealogists

and local historians whose contributions shape Queensland's Irish identity.

Allen, a Cork-born journalist, has spent more than two decades working in media in Ireland and Australia. She worked as a sub-editor with the Irish Examiner newspaper group in Cork before later joining the Irish Echo in Sydney and moving to Queensland in 2012.

Her contribution to Queensland's Irish community was recognised in 2014 when she received a joint community award from the Queensland Irish Association, the

Irish Australian Support Association of Queensland and the Queensland Gaelic Football and Hurling Association, presented "in appreciation of [her] outstanding support and generosity to the Irish community during [her] time in Brisbane."

She currently serves as a Director and Public Relations Officer of the Queensland Irish Association, publishes the Association's newsletter, and manages its digital communications and social media, as well as organising events. She also publishes Anglo&Celtic at www.angloandceltic.com, an independent cultural website celebrating the British, Irish and wider Celtic communities across Australia.

Unlike many community publications, Irish Queenslander has remained editorially independent throughout its history. Produced without government grants, it has relied on advertising support, volunteer effort and, at times, Allen's own financial commitment to continue documenting the community's history.

For Allen, whose career has centred on telling other people's stories, the archive is a fitting acknowledgement of the value of independent community journalism.

"Every community has a story worth preserving. I'm incredibly proud that the stories shared through Irish Queenslander will continue to be available long into the future."

For a publication dedicated to preserving the past while reporting the present, becoming part of Australia's permanent digital archive is a fitting milestone — ensuring the story of Queensland's Irish community remains available for historians, researchers, genealogists and future generations.



Editions of Irish Queenslander print magazine from 2013 and 2014.

Celebrating Bloomsday Queensland-style

*By Graham Moloney,
President, QIA*

Over 100 people (including some curious passers-by) attended the celebration of Bloomsday in the Queen Street Mall on 16 June. It was my first time at Bloomsday and I can heartily recommend it to you for the future.

The stars of the show were the four readers, each reading a passage for James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The four were:

- Matt Foley, former Attorney-General of Queensland
- Mary Crawford, former Member for Forde in the House of Representatives
- Dan O'Neill, former Lecturer in English at University of Queensland
- Monica Norris, Actress.

By coincidence, Monica Norris won the Jan Dooley Award for best participant in this year's St. Patrick's Day parade dressed as Molly Malone. For Bloomsday, Monica played another Molly and read Molly Bloom's soliloquy.

Having tried several times to read *Ulysses* (another attempt beckons), I must say it was easier to have excerpts read to me by the performers – especially with the context they provided.

As part of the celebration, many members of the audience dressed in period costume, including poet, Ross Clark, who dressed as Leopold Bloom.

Music

Participants were welcomed and farewelled by a group of pipers and drummers from the Queensland Irish Association Pipe



Band led by Bruce Grice.

A musical interlude was provided by Brendan Williams who many might know from the band Blarneystone. Amongst his selection was a jig known as The Irish Washerwoman which had two Brisbane connections. It was the music for the club song of Brisbane Brothers Rugby League Club, and the Beginner's Jig for a generation of children learning Irish dancing at the old Irish Club.

After the event, the performers and the audience repaired to Gilhooley's Irish Pub and Restaurant for a drink, a meal and a lot of talk!

The Origins of Bloomsday

Bloomsday celebrates the life and work of the Irish author, James Joyce, and particularly his novel, *Ulysses*.

The novel is an important piece of modernist literature and was written with a stream of consciousness technique that focussed on recording the thoughts and feelings as the characters as they went about their daily business.

Ulysses follows the life of one Dubliner and the people with whom he interacts on just one day.

The Dubliner is Leopold Bloom, the day is 16 June, 1904. Hence, Bloomsday.

Celebrating Bloomsday Queensland-style



QIA President Graham Moloney giving a welcome at our Bloomsday in Brisbane 2026 celebration on June 16, with, from left, musician Brendan Williams and speakers Matt Foley, Dan O'Neill, Mary Crawford and Monica Norris. Photos: Mary Allen



How a remote lighthouse helped shape history

From guiding ships to playing a role in World War II, the Blacksod Lighthouse is one of Ireland's most fascinating maritime landmarks. As it prepares to mark its 160th anniversary, there's never been a better time to visit.

Sitting at the tip of the wave-lashed Mullet Peninsula in County Mayo is a remarkable piece of history. For 160 years, the Blacksod Lighthouse has guarded Blacksod Bay, a ruggedly beautiful stretch of Atlantic coastline known for its Blue Flag beaches, rich birdlife and mercurial weather.

Built in 1866 to guide vessels entering the bay, the granite lighthouse – with its striking square shape – was at the centre of a transitional period for the west of Ireland. The growth of the maritime industry necessitated new safety measures, as both local and foreign merchants used the bay to transport goods such as fish and textiles. “If we go back 160 years, you might have seen 200 to 300 ships in the bay each day,” says Fergus Mac Suibhne, Tourism Officer for Solas Visitor Centre and Blacksod Lighthouse Tours, whose family were



longtime keepers there.

But Blacksod's importance would stretch far beyond maritime safety. During World War II, the remote lighthouse found itself connected to one of the most pivotal military operations in history. Although Ireland remained neutral during World War II, weather reports were passed on to Britain. As lighthouse keepers in Blacksod, Mac Suibhne's grandparents,

Maureen and Ted Sweeney, were responsible for sending out their observations.

On 3 June 1944, Maureen – who turned 21 that day – made a recording of the atmospheric conditions in Blacksod and sent it onwards via the local post office. The report revealed that an incoming storm could affect the planned

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How a remote lighthouse helped shape history



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Allied invasion of Normandy on 5 June.

“They put D-Day on hold,” says Mac Suibhne. “On 4 June, Maureen made another set of observations, which enabled the Allies to realise that Blacksod had now been through the storm.” D-Day was re-scheduled for 6 June and ultimately led to the Allied victory.

“I don’t think it was until the 75th anniversary of D-Day that the rest of the world became aware of what this lady did,” says Mac Suibhne.

Maureen Sweeney died at the age of 100 in 2023, and she, her husband Ted and Blacksod will forever be associated with an event that helped end World War II.

Blacksod prepares to mark 160 years with a very special celebration

With such a prestigious history, it’s no surprise that there are big plans ahead to mark Blacksod’s 160th anniversary. On 30 June, the festivities will begin with a free open day at the lighthouse. There’ll be a chance to meet Irish Coast Guard

crew, and a screening at Solas Visitor Centre of Mac Suibhne’s short film, *Keepers of the Light*, about his family connection to the lighthouse.

At 10pm, LED candles will be given to those attending. By candlelight, Mac Suibhne will then recount the story of the night of 30 June 1866 and the excitement in the village when the lighthouse opened.

“It will be an opportunity for people to come together as a community and acknowledge our maritime history,” he says of the event. “We are the next incarnation of the keepers. The ceremony will be called *Carrying the Light* – we’re carrying that light from 160 years ago and acknowledging it in 2026.”

Exploring the wild beauty of a remote peninsula

Off the beaten track and rich in natural beauty, the Mullet Peninsula is perfect for exploring in a day, as it’s only around 33km long and 12km wide. As well as

Blacksod Lighthouse – which can be visited by tour – the peninsula boasts historic sights, including a holy well and old church associated with St Deirbhile, along with the Napoleonic-era Glosh Tower.

For those seeking invigorating outdoor adventure, it’s also the perfect go-to.

“It really is one of the last untouched places in Ireland,” says Mac Suibhne, noting that its exposure to the Atlantic means it is largely treeless, with a landscape that is instead defined by dunes, rocky outcroppings and fields that stretch to the horizon. You can walk wild Atlantic beaches such as Elly Bay or Mullaghroe Beach (both of which are also good for swimming), golf at Carne Golf Links, or gaze at the stars in Mayo Dark Sky Park (about an hour’s drive away).

It’s also the perfect place to get out and experience things on the water. Next to Blacksod Lighthouse, Blacksod Sea Safari offers a

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How a remote lighthouse helped shape history

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range of boat tours that take in the area's raw beauty and get up close to its local wildlife while Belmullet Boat Charter and Wild West Boat Tours also offer guided excursions. For something more active, there's kayaking with Wave Sweeper Adventures or a swim in the Belmullet Tidal Pool. At Glosh Beach, Tonn Nua Surf School offers surf lessons.

Just remember that there's a reason it's called the "Wild" Atlantic Way. "Pack for the wind and the rain, but pack the shorts and the t-shirt too," says Mac Suibhne with a smile. "The day can start off blowing a gale and lashing rain, and by the evening it's like you're in Tenerife."

But that's part of the joy of a visit here – you're always close to nature and its wild ways.

Plan a visit

Blacksod Lighthouse can be enjoyed by guided tour, which includes a visit to the lightroom where you can see the original Fresnel lens. Booking is advisable and is available online. Solas Visitor Centre is open seven days a week from 10am to 5pm daily and has an on-site cafe.

Lighthouses of Erris

The Mullet Peninsula is home to four lighthouses. As well as Blacksod, there is Broadhaven and offshore lighthouses of Blackrock and Eagle Island (which can be enjoyed from viewing points on the peninsula).

Where to stay

At Blacksod there's Léim Siar B&B, while hotel options in Belmullet include the Broadhaven Bay Hotel, Talbot Hotel and



Interior lantern at Blacksod Lighthouse, above, and, below, Deirbhile's Twist stone circle, Mullet Peninsula.

Western Strands. Slightly further away is the Erris Coast Hotel in Geesala.

There's also Belmullet Glamping, which offers cosy pods that allow

easy access to the Inishkea Islands, Dun na mBó and Blacksod Bay.

Words and pictures:
www.ireland.com



Music legends unite for Shane MacGowan tribute

A stellar line-up of international artists has been confirmed for 20th Century Paddy – The Songs of Shane MacGowan, a new tribute album celebrating the extraordinary songwriting legacy of the late Shane MacGowan.

Shane's wife Victoria Mary Clarke and Rubyworks have announced the upcoming release of the tribute album honouring the everlasting legacy of Shane MacGowan. The name of the album was inspired by Shane as '20th Century Paddy' is an album Shane had always wanted to make himself.

Coinciding with this announcement, the album's first single, a reimagined version of the classic hit "A Rainy Night in Soho" performed by Bruce Springsteen, is available now on all streaming platforms worldwide.

"Shane was all naked bottomless humanity. Threatening to force us to ask ourselves if we were living deeply, authentically. He was raw, hilarious, no apologies and profound. His soul was filled with the transgressive and ecstatic properties of the saints," said Bruce Springsteen.

The album features U2, Bob Geldof, Primal Scream, Bruce Springsteen, Tom Waits and more. It will be released on 13 November.

'20th Century Paddy - The Songs of Shane MacGowan' is a sonic love letter to a catalogue that shaped generations. The album features a wide ranging mix of icons and contemporary disruptors, each bringing a unique perspective to the tracks that defined Shane Mac-



Gowan's career.

"Shane's spirit and songwriting are eternally exalted through this glorious collection, each song is uniquely and graciously interpreted by these beyond beautiful artists and his family are humbled by and thankful to each and every one of the musicians involved, to the delightful team at Rubyworks, and to John Kennedy without whom this would not have happened," said Victoria Mary Clarke.

Honouring Shane MacGowan's legacy, 50% of artist royalties will be donated to Dublin Simon Community to provide lifesaving housing and healthcare for those experiencing homelessness.

"Shane MacGowan was a

long-time supporter of our work and it is because of this enduring connection that proceeds from the new tribute album will go to helping Dublin Simon Community support people who are homeless today. Shane's empathy for people sleeping rough in Dublin was well known; he never hesitated to stop, acknowledge, and share a moment with someone on the street.

In 2021, Shane performed at the annual Christmas Eve Busk on Grafton Street in Dublin, which turned out to be his last live performance before he passed away. Since then, one of his songs has been played at the Busk each year.

Queensland Irish Choir ready for winter concert

By Terence O'Connor,
Queensland Irish Choir

It is said that July is the coldest month in Brisbane. On 25 July, the Queensland Irish Choir will perform its Celtic Winter Concert at Everton Hills, and it will warm the cockles of your heart!

It is our tradition that the Winter Concert takes the audience on a musical excursion throughout the Celtic world and this year is no exception. Indeed, the songs that will accompany that journey are exceptional!

The stirring ballads Highland Cathedral and Cornwall My Home will have your hearts racing and the "coming home" songs Song for the Mira and Valley of Strathmore will tug at your heartstrings.

The love songs Fields of Gold (made famous by Eva Cassidy) and Raglan Road will capture your hearts entirely.

The Boys from Wexford, Catalpa and Last House on our Street con-

stitute a grim reminder of dark days in the history of Ireland.

The Concert will feature solos by our own Choristers which will offer variety and musical depth to the concert experience. It is a Concert not to be missed.

Tickets are now on sale at <https://www.qldirishchoir.org/events>.
Online \$27; Door sales \$30; Children (Under 15) free.



Having a Function

We can add a whole lot more to your evening

Photo's (taken & printed) the same night and returned before the function finishes.
We will do PR photos of the event at no extra cost.
(subject to numbers)
Studio lights if requested will be set up before guests arrive.
There is no additional cost beyond the price of the photo's.
This is a great way to have a memory of the evening.

Good Times Network Photography
Phone 0401450977
www.goodtimesbristbane.com

Contact us

We welcome content from Members and friends in this newsletter.

If you have news or an article you would like to see included, email the editor, our public relations officer Mary Allen, at mary@queenslandirish.com.au

You can also reach us through our website, www.queenslandirish.com.au, and on our social media pages.

Another great way to interact with QIA is by joining our Facebook [group](#), Queensland Irish Association Friends and Supporters.

Editor and designer: Mary Allen.

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QIC
QUEENSLAND IRISH CHOIR

Celtic Winter Concert

An afternoon of Celtic music and song

Saturday 25 July 2026
2.00pm
Hills Church Auditorium
79 Queens Road, Everton Hills
Doors Open 1.30 pm

Tickets: <https://www.qldirishchoir.org/events>
Adults: Online - \$27 Door Sales - \$30
Children: Free (Under 15 years)

Enquiries
0493 455 487

Government of Ireland
Emigrant Support Programme