

Not Just Ned: A true history of the Irish in Australia
An exhibition developed and presented by the
National Museum of Australia

OBJECT BIOGRAPHY

The Archbishop of Brisbane

This jewel encrusted monstrance was presented in 1928 to the Archbishop of Brisbane, Sir James Duhig (1875-1965) who was born in County Limerick. The precious stones that adorn it were donated by Brisbane Catholics who supported Duhig's plan for the Holy Name Cathedral. I like to imagine that some of the jewels were originally part of a great-great grandmother's engagement ring, maybe part of an heirloom brought from Ireland to Australia, selflessly donated with devotion to the Church and Duhig's leadership. The richness of this holy object illuminates the strength of the local support for Duhig's plan. The Cathedral was to adorn the centre of Brisbane's Fortitude Valley as Duhig considered the Valley the true and proper heart of the city. Many agreed with Duhig, in fact over 35,000 people attended the stone laying ceremony on 16 September 1928.



The Monstrance, 1928 is on display at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra in the exhibition *Not Just Ned: A true history of the Irish in Australia*. It is on loan from St Stephen's Cathedral, Brisbane

Part of the plan for the Cathedral was to inter some Irish soil under the foundations, a 'molehill' of which has been loaned from the Catholic Archdiocese Archives in Brisbane for display in the exhibition *Not Just Ned: A true history of the Irish in Australia*. It is believed the soil was ordered out from Ireland by Duhig who wanted to connect the Brisbane Catholic Church to the Irish one. Although unusual, there are other examples of people with Irish links importing soil for similar purposes but for its snake repelling qualities. Legend has it that when St Patrick banished the snakes from Ireland he blessed the soil with this quality. One Australian with Irish links who may have believed in the miraculous qualities of Irish soil was early New South Wales politician William Charles Wentworth. The child of an Irish surgeon, Wentworth's house at Vacluse is purported to have had its foundation laid on top of Irish soil. While we have not been able to prove this point, Wentworth's story, including his convict birth, is featured in *Not Just Ned: A true history of the Irish in Australia*.

Although Duhig was not able to build the Holy Name Cathedral, he is remembered as a great builder of churches and other public buildings, including hospitals, in Brisbane. Many of those

400 buildings he erected continue to dot the Brisbane skyline, a lasting reminder of Duhig's commitment to the Catholic Church.

I believe the photograph of Duhig at All Hallows school, near Brisbane's CBD, that features in *Not Just Ned: A true history of the Irish in Australia* captures another aspect of one of his passions, education for children. He was a strong advocate of secondary education for children, urging parents to send them to one of many schools he built in Brisbane. Duhig's story is a great example of a man devoted to both Ireland and Australia, the Church and its flock.

Not Just Ned: A true history of the Irish in Australia is on show at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra from 17 March-31 July 2011. Admission charges apply.

For more information about the exhibition visit www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/irish_in_australia

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