

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 *Nashwauk* anchor

‘Continues fearful rough – ship tossing from one side to another’ – that was how George Doolette described 29 April 1855 in his diary. George, a carpenter from Dublin, his wife and six children, were aboard the immigrant ship *Nashwauk*, 76 days out of Liverpool, England, as the ship beat along the southern Australian coast. By 13 May, the ship was about forty kilometres south of its destination – Port Adelaide in the colony of South Australia – when it ran aground in the dark off Moana.

As day broke, Captain Archibald McIntyre saw that his ship was finished. The hull was shattered and water pouring in. The weather was worsening, and advice came from the shore to abandon ship. Passenger struggled to find a place on the five lifeboats and some of the women and children were carried through the waves to the shore on the backs of sailors. One of the children, Edward Stibbles, later recalled - ‘Some of the passengers were frightened and cried to the Virgin Mary to save them’.

Amazingly, nobody lost their lives, although the more than 300 passengers now possessed only the clothes they stood up in. It was a bleak welcome to their new home; very few of their possessions were salvaged from the ship. A steamer, the *Thomas Melbourne*, was sent from Port Adelaide to pick up survivors and even this short sea passage nearly ended tragically for 20 year old domestic servant, Bridget Riordan, from County Cork, Ireland. Leaning against a hinged doorway on the side of the ship, it yielded to her weight and she fell overboard while the ship was going at full speed. After five terrifying minutes in the water, she was rescued by the ship’s boat.

Many survivors refused to go to sea again, and walked to



The *Nashwauk* anchor, on loan from the State Records of South Australia, is on display at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra in the exhibition *Not Just Ned: A true history of the Irish in Australia*.

Adelaide. Here they were accommodated in the so-called 'German Hospital' at government expense, and over the next weeks efforts were made to find them employment. It was perhaps all too much for Catherine Stanley, a 23 year old domestic servant from Kilkenny, Ireland. She was admitted to the Adelaide Hospital on 17 May, dying there of fever five days later.

The *Nashwauk* passengers were mainly Irish, among them approximately 175 young single women who almost invariably gave their occupations as domestic servant or farm servant. Their home counties were a map of Ireland – Kilkenny, Westmeath, Dublin, Cork, Derry, Antrim, Galway – but 76 of them (43 per cent) were from two counties which supplied colonial Australia with nearly a third of all its Irish immigrants – Clare and Tipperary. All the *Nashwauk* Irish were also 'assisted immigrants', receiving a virtually free passage from the government of South Australia, and it was similar government assistance from all the Australia colonies which allowed the Irish to come to 19th century Australia in large numbers.

For decades holiday campers who visited Moana Beach Tourist Park were aware of the *Nashwauk*. The ship's large two ton anchor stood just inside the gate, and many a family snapshot featured this relic of Australia's 19th century 'assisted immigration' history. The anchor has been brought to the National Museum of Australia to help tell the story of the large Irish element in that immigration. Then it will return to the Moana Park to remind visitors of that terrifying night in 1855 when hundreds of Irish immigrants could have perished within sight of shore, but were mercifully saved.

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

Curator's notes prepared by Richard Reid, Senior Curator, National Museum of Australia