

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 *Rajah* quilt

One small group of female convicts, including Irish women, who arrived in Hobart on the *Rajah* in 1841, have left an extraordinary testimony to their skill and perseverance — the *Rajah* quilt, the only known surviving convict shipboard quilt. The *Rajah* quilt is one of those extraordinary pieces that speak to the experiences women during their onboard journey to Australia.

Provided with needles, thread and patchwork pieces by the British Ladies' Society for the Reformation of Female Prisoners, several different women onboard the convict ship quilted together the 2,815 fabric pieces in the medallion style, popular in the late 18th century in England and Ireland. Of the 180 women onboard the *Rajah*, 37 of those women were from Ireland such as Ann Chapman, a needlewoman by trade who was sentenced to seven years transportation for stealing. Could Ann have been one of those women who stitched the quilt? On arrival in Hobart, the quilt was then presented to the Lieutenant Governor's wife Lady Jane Franklin.



The *Rajah* quilt, 1841 is on display at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra in the exhibition *Not Just Ned: A true history of the Irish in Australia*. The convict women were provided with needles, thread and patchwork pieces by the British Ladies' Society for the Reformation of Female Prisoners.

The *Rajah* quilt is on loan from the National Gallery of Australia

Of the objects relating to Australia's convict history, there is very little relating to convict women. The National Gallery of Australia in Canberra acquired the quilt in 1989 and it has become the most requested object for viewing at the Gallery. Due to its fragility, the quilt is only on display once a year and the National Museum of Australia is very excited to be able to display the quilt in its upcoming exhibition *Not Just Ned: A true history of the Irish in Australia*.

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 Rebecca Nason, Curator, National Museum of Australia