

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

OBJECT BIOGRAPHY

Cross of Cong

One of the great moments of any ceremony in a Catholic cathedral comes when a cardinal, fully clothed in his red robes, processes to the altar with his attendant priests, amid swirls of incense.

Australia's first cardinal was Irishman Patrick Francis Moran, appointed in 1885. Moran was determined to show Australian Catholics of Irish descent their cultural inheritance, the rich iconography of the early Christian church in Ireland. One of the objects he brought out from Ireland was a full-sized replica of the Cross of Cong, which was carried before him as he strode to the altar.

The original Cross of Cong, a twelfth-century Irish Christian processional cross, beautifully worked with Celtic designs in gold and silver, was made to house a relic of the cross of Christ. It was hidden away in the mid-seventeenth century, rediscovered in the nineteenth century and ended up in the National Museum of Ireland, where it is regarded as one of the museum's greatest treasures. A replica was made by Dublin jeweller Edmund Johnson for the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, and copies were made by Tiffany's of New York. Moran brought one of these fine replicas to Sydney, where it testified to the antiquity and splendour of Australia's Irish dominated Catholic Church.

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



A replica of the Cross of Cong 1893 by Edmund Johnson on display in the exhibition *Not Just Ned: a true history of the Irish in Australia* at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. The replica is on loan from St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney