

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

## OBJECT BIOGRAPHY

### Les Darcy: in loving memory

On 24 May 1917, in a room in a hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, Australian boxing champion, Les Darcy, aged 21, died from pneumonia contracted after about of septicaemia. At Darcy's bedside that day was his sweetheart, Winnie O'Sullivan, who cut off a small piece of Darcy's hair that she kept, along with her favourite photo of him, in a small golden locket. When O'Sullivan died in 1974, the locket was discovered among her possessions; her family had been unaware of its existence.



Locket belonging to Winnie O'Sullivan, 1917 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 locket is part of the National Museum of Australia's collection.

It later came to light that O'Sullivan's brother, Maurice, a great mate of Les Darcy, carried the locket at the end of his watch chain for many years and would show it to anyone who asked.

Of Irish Catholic descent, and a faithful Catholic himself, Les Darcy rose to boxing fame in the early years of the First World War. This success allowed him to build a house for his mother and to assist his poor family. In the heated atmosphere of Australia's conscription debates in 1916, Darcy slipped secretly away to America where he intended to make enough money from his boxing career to ensure his parents could live comfortably, and then to enlist for war service. Many in Australia, some in high places, accused him of cowardice, and in America he was unable to obtain fights that paid him well.

When Darcy's body was returned to Australia he was given a hero's funeral. He was adopted by the Catholic community who saw him as unjustly persecuted, as he had only wished to help his family, and then do his duty for his country.

*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](http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/irish_in_australia)

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