

High Praise for Irish Monument to Great Famine

by

Mary Robinson

Former President of Ireland

during her visit on 10 November 2002



Sydney's Irish Famine Monument is one of the finest memorials to the millions who died, former Irish President Mary Robinson has said. Speaking at the monument during her visit to Sydney on Sunday, 10 November 2002. Mrs Robinson said she found it to be a 'very moving and a very memorable event. It is one of the most simple and eloquent statements about the Irish famine that I have seen. It appealed to me greatly because I do have an international viewpoint on life, and the fact that the artist had come from Iran, that somehow seemed even more special', she said.

The artist 'has known what it was like to be a refugee', she said, adding 'he had an insight into how the orphaned Irish girls must have felt when they first arrived in Australia. Who would ever have thought that there would be a monument to them; young Irish girl orphans, can you get lower in the riches scale than that?'

She said it was very important that the Irish community remembered those who were very marginalised, very poor, very disregarded, and very low in their own self-esteem. Mrs Robinson quoted author Evan Boland when she said:

'I want women who have been outside history to be written back into history, finding a voice where they found a vision. To find the names of otherwise completely forgotten girls in that very eloquent, elegant, simple, poignant monument was very special'.

Famine Memorial Committee president Tom Power said that the memorial has received its 'final seal of approval' with Mrs Robinson's visit. 'Did those twelve year-old orphan girls ever think their names would be on a monument 150 years later?'

The National Monument to the Great Irish Famine was unveiled on 28 August 1999 by Sir William Deane after a marathon fundraising effort that generated over \$350,000. The project was inaugurated by Mrs Robinson's successor Mary McAleese during her State visit on 2 September 1998 and also won the support of the Irish, Australian and NSW governments.

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