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A History of Ireland in 100 Objects

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Objects don't just have stories, they tell stories. There is a certain paradox that surrounds them. They seem precise and fixed, literally tangible, yet they can put us in touch with the past in a direct and immediate way. What they said to their contemporaries may be different from what they say to us. Whether it's a silver tea urn from Georgian Dublin or an illuminated page from the Book of Kells, historical objects help us gain a more complex understanding of our past. When so much about the past - especially the Irish past - is contested, physical things can provide secure anchors in history. They ought to make things simpler, and yet, when an object is actually examined, this apparent simplicity quickly falls away. Such interesting objects tend to provoke more questions than they can answer. Over the past two years, Fintan O'Toole, the literary editor of the Irish Times, has selected 100 objects - the majority of which can be found in the National Museum of Ireland - to narrate a history of Ireland. These objects have been chosen simply for their ability to illuminate moments of change, development, or crisis. Articles on these historical objects appeared weekly in the Irish Times and are now being collected in book form by the Royal Irish Academy. The book will act as a reminder that people have inhabited Ireland for quite some time and have survived innumerable ordeals and challenges. *** "The objects....span the centuries from 5000 B.C. to 2005....a wooden fish trap from the Mesolithic era, found preserved in a bog in Co. Meath....St. Patrick's Confessio (460-90), the oldest surviving example of prose writing in Ireland....an emigrant's suitcase from the 1950s tells the story of Ireland's diasporic expansion. The final object was selected by readers from a shortlist of ten. A decomissioned AK47 assault rifle, it speaks to Ireland's recent history of strife and commitment to peace; its links with the larger world, and its own unique story." - Sheila Langan, Irish America Magazine, June-July 2013. *** "Thoughtfully written and thoroughly accessible to readers of all backgrounds, A History of Ireland in 100 Objects is both a fascinating browse and a repository of historical highlights made tangible, highly recommended." - The Midwest Book Review, Wisconsin Bookwatch, The World History Shelf, May 2013Ëœ

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