

A Goldfields Nugget with Papal Connections



The large Quartz nugget on a superb Italian rosso antico base is a rare relic of the Australian Gold Rush of the 1850's and 1860's. It comes from the collection of Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli (Plate 1) (April 2, 1806 November 6, 1876) the "Italian Richelieu", the Cardinal Deacon, Secretary of State to the Vatican from 1848 until his death. He played a key role in Italian politics, resisting the unification of Italy and thereby affecting Roman Catholic interests in European affairs.

On the death of the Cardinal the correspondent for Times, writing from Rome on December 7 1876 noted:

His collection of precious stones, it was supposed, was such as would not discredit an Arabian Night's description, and his rare marbles also included-works of art of immense price. It has been described as a mine of riches hidden within his apartment in the Vatican...When the fancy first took the Cardinal I cannot tell, but with those opportunities at his command, which few but a Cardinal Secretary of State would be likely to possess, Antonelli was able to enrich his collection from every part of the world. To whatever distant lands the Roman' Church extended her dioceses and missions, there was somebody acquainted with the fact that mineralogical and geological specimens, costing nothing but the breaking off, would be gratefully received by the Cardinal Secretary, and little by little his collection increased, until the specimens sent him were but additional examples of what he had received before. I remember having occasion to ask : " Can I bring your Eminence, any examples of the Irish marble's" "Thanks," he replied, "I believe I have a specimen of every stone found in the island, even to a piece of the Giant's Causeway".



1. Portrait of Cardinal Antonelli.

This quote sums up the Cardinal's interest in precious stones and marbles. His cabinet to house his collection of pearls and diamonds was exhibited at the 1862 London Exhibition, the French papers valued the collection:

..... at from 15 to 20 millions, without speaking of his collection of ancient and valuable objects; which represent at least a million -and a-half. The Cardinal possesses one of the finest assortments of precious stones which exist in Europe; diamonds of all forms and all of the purest water, incomparable emeralds, pearls, and turquoises' of unknown size — a veritable Oriental treasure. Fortunately, the Cardinal has nephew....

It is from the family descendants of the Cardinal's nephew that the silver mounted nugget has been purchased. The mounts represent good triumphing over the snake of evil.

I suggest that the nugget was sent to the Cardinal after the receipt, in 1868, of a painting in the High Country at Mansfield Victoria: (Plate 2)

An oil-painting representing the Madonna and Child, valued at 600 guineas, has been presented to the St. Francis Xavier Church, Mansfield, by his Eminence Cardinal Antonelli, of Rome. The artist is Signor Sassa Faratti. The gift is an acknowledgment of the esteem in which the Rev. Mr. M'Gillicuddy was held by those in high authority in the Church at Rome, where the rev. gentleman studied for some years.

2. The Argus report of donation of Madonna and Child in 1868.

This is in fact a spelling mistake the artist was Sassoferrato famous for his renditions of the Madonna and child. (Plate 3)

Giovanni Battisti Salvi, II (1609-1685) The artist, whose name refers to the place of his birth, was initially apprenticed to his father. He was influenced above all, by Raphael (1483-1520). The bulk of his work seems to have involved painting numerous copies of various devotional works for private patrons, in a direct response to the demands of the Counter Reformation.

Dr Gerard Vaughan the current Director of the National Gallery in Canberra wrote an essay on Sassoferrato to accompany the purchase of the artist's painting Madonna in prayer by the National Gallery of Victoria during his time in Melbourne as Director:

The mid-nineteenth-century enthusiasm for Sassoferrato was also reflected in the early exhibitions history of the National Gallery of Victoria. In the first years of collecting, with Sir Charles Eastlake, Director of the National Gallery, London, acting as adviser, the NGV elected to concentrate on contemporary British art. Eastlake made no attempt to induce Melbourne's



3. A modern print of the famous original Madonna and Child by Sassoferatto.

seriously under-resourced museum of art to imitate his collecting interests in the field of the masters. Precisely because of this, the trustees of the NGV organised, from time to time, loan exhibitions when the Melbourne community offered from their private collections works which covered a much broader range of artistic practice. There was a notable concentration on copies of old masters, particularly the Italian Baroque.... Thus, in the huge loan exhibition of 1869 three copies of works by Sassoferatto.

A series of photographs of the 1869 installation survive showing at least three copies of works by Sassoferatto then on view at the National Gallery of Victoria. (Plate 4)

The painting hanging in the 1869 Exhibition at the bottom right of a contemporary photograph is the Madonna and Child from the Church in Mansfield the location of which is currently unknown. (Plate 5)



4. Illustration Catalogue of the Works of Art Exhibited March, April, May and June 1869, Melbourne.

Perhaps this story if published in Melbourne will lead to the reuniting of the painting and the nugget?

Mansfield Catholic Church was a stronghold of the faith and famous for its association with the Kelly family:

The shooting by Ned Kelly of Sgt Kennedy became in the press the 'Mansfield Outrage' Sgt. Michael Kennedy having been shot dead by Ned Kelly, along with three other constables, at Stringybark Creek. Kennedy's body was brought into Mansfield and the Anglican Bishop Moorhouse was called upon to preach. Consoling his grieving widow the bishop strongly advised her against viewing 'the poor disfigured corpse' of her husband. Half his face had been shot off and a wild animal had chewed off his left ear sometime over the three days his body lay in the bush before discovery.

Catholic Priest, Father Scanlan rode by night, 'along the wild road from Benalla, with the reins in one hand, and a revolver in the other,' to conduct the funeral service, from St. Francis Xavier's Catholic Church. [It was an ecumenical occasion with Bishop Moorehouse walking at the head of the procession alongside, and at the invitation of, the Catholic priest Father Scanlan. Samuel Sandiford, the Anglican rector of Mansfield, and the local Presbyterian minister, the Rev. Reid also joined the procession. For an age marked by fierce sectarianism this degree of co-operation is quite notable.

While standing in solidarity with the victims of the crime and insisting that the perpetrators should be tracked down and arrested, at the same time Moorehouse showed remarkable sympathy for the Kelly Gang in a letter to Canon Harvey. 'Poor wretches! One cannot help pitying them, crouching among the trees like wild beasts – afraid to sleep, afraid to speak, and only awaiting their execution. But bushranging is

203	GOULD, The Right Rev. the Roman Catholic Bishop of Melbourne, D.D.—The Anunciation	Artist unknown
204	do The Transfiguration	Artist unknown
205	do Christ Bearing the Cross	Artist unknown
206	do St. Agnes	Artist unknown
207	do Adoration of the Magi	Artist unknown
208	do Departure into Egypt	Artist unknown
209	do Madonna and Christ	Artist unknown
210	do Vision of St. Jerome	Artist unknown
211	do Ecce Homo	Guido
212	do Street Scene in Rome	Artist unknown
213	do St. Sebastian	Artist unknown
214	do St. Cecilia	Artist unknown
215	do The Crucifixion	Artist unknown
216	do Philosopher with a Skull	Artist unknown
217	do St. Sylvester	Artist unknown
218	do Virgin and Child	Andrea del Sarto
219	do St. Laurence bestowing Alms	Artist unknown
220	do St. Michael	Artist unknown
221	do Fruit Piece	Artist unknown
222	do Portrait of St. Hyris	Artist unknown
223	do Head of the Virgin, on copper	Carlo Dolci
224	do Virgin and Child	after Raphael
224A	do Reading Magdalen	

5. Item 209 Madonna and Christ, Artist unknown. The attribution has been dropped, as the artist, as recorded in the Argus, did not exist. Sassoferatto was his place of birth.

so horrible, so ruthless, so utterly abominable a thing, that it must be stamped out at any cost.

Two days after the funeral while preaching in the church at Mansfield he repeated these remarks, prayed for the murderers and told the people they should 'pity the poor wretches who caused us to mourn over these disasters. Not long after the funeral, Moorhouse and his wife stopped at an inn in Benalla for a meal and a change of horses. They were surprised to notice Chief Commissioner Standish, who was overseeing a year-long search for the Kelly Gang, leave the inn without speaking with them. As the Moorhouse's moved on, they noticed a mounted policeman up ahead of them and others stationed here and there along their route as if keeping watch over them. Upon returning to Melbourne he was informed that the Kellys were angry at the Bishop's influencing of public opinion against them and had planned to kidnap him, spirit him away to the mountains and hold him for ransom. While enjoying a smoke in the garden of the inn he had been in range of their rifles. However, some of the Kelly supporters thought such an action would damage their cause and so warned the police; hence the armed escort.

Mansfield is famous as part of the Ned Kelly Trail. Significant memorials include the Memorial to the Police erected in the centre of the town's roundabout.

Mansfield Cemetery is the burial ground for police officers slain by Ned Kelly and his gang at Stringybark Creek.

A possible donor of the nugget is the Stonyhurst, Jesuit educated, local Catholic identity, Dr. John Pearson Rowe (1810-1878) a physician and squatter who owned the 'Loyola Run' (also known as Mount Battery) near Mansfield. Rowe. Rowe was a member of the Melbourne University Council serving on the committee that established the Medical School in 1862. He is reputed to have fired a shot at a 14-year old Ned Kelly accompanied by bushranger Harry Power in 1869, stood for the Upper House seat of the Murray District in 1859 and was defeated. In October 1878 Rowe supplied information to police Sergeant Kennedy on the whereabouts of Ned Kelly. Acting on Rowe's verified advice, Kennedy and his police party rode into the Wombat Ranges, where three of them were killed; and the Kelly Gang legend was born.

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Cardinal Antonelli's Jewel - Casket for keeping his collection of precious stones safe. The whole is elaborately carved, gilt, and picked out with colour. The entire length at base is 2 feet & 10 inches. Exhibited, London 1862