

# Kapiti Coast MUSEUM

## March 2021 Newsletter Lifelike Dolls



Members who have visited the Museum recently will have noticed the addition of two finely crafted and lifelike dolls now on display in the reception area. These dolls were placed in the Museum's care last year by Pamela Mason, a lifelong artist and craftsperson resident in Paraparaumu.

Pamela is a self-taught artist who commenced drawing and painting as a teenager in the 1940s. The family henhouse was converted into a studio to allow the young but talented painter to develop her art. Besides painting she has practised many art forms over the course of her life including ceramic decoration and glazing, embroidery and crocheting, all necessary skills involved in crafting the prize winning, lifelike dolls that she eventually turned her hand to.

Pamela took up a career as a school dental nurse but in the 1980s decided to make more time for her artistic endeavours by opening a gift shop featuring her own creations. Prior to this she had started making the lifelike dolls and these proved to be sought after and much commented upon items in the new shop. Pamela stopped making the unique dolls in 1992 by which time she had made 54 dolls, most of which have found new homes with customers, her daughters and latterly her granddaughters as well. Details of all the dolls made were documented in a little green notebook where Pamela has meticulously recorded essential details for each doll including origin, when made, the doll's name and even the price it was sold for.

So how are the dolls created?

A basic kit is imported usually from Germany. The kit contains a small number of porcelain china parts such as solid feet and ankles, hands and arms up to and including articulated elbows and

most importantly the head and neck – minus the top of the head! Facial features such as eyes and lips are painted and clearly are vital to achieve the lifelike effect that give the doll its unique character. Then the rest of the fabric body is stuffed with suitable material and the decorated china parts attached. A styled wig is made from special thread and attached to the doll's head before the doll is dressed with the ensemble of handmade clothing and accessories to complete the overall lifelike effect.

The Museum is very grateful to receive these two examples of the doll maker's craft from Pamela Mason which are now on display. Next time we view these lifelike dolls we can reflect on the amount of time, effort and artistry that went into their creation.

*The Kapiti Coast Museum acknowledges the generous support from Pamela and her daughter Penny in making the doll display possible.*

**Article provided by Neville Queree, visitor host and committee member**

**My favourite museum object by Mark Holland, visitor host and committee chairman.**



How to choose between the toaster and the Dead Man's Penny ? When I show visitors through the museum, I always make a point of showing them both these objects.



The toaster because it creates a sense of nostalgia for our "older" visitors who might remember one in their own home or perhaps when visiting their grandparents or the family bach. And because it is

a great way to engage with younger visitors by asking them what is it, how do you open it and why it was it such a pain to use ? Answers should include that you had to keep opening it to see if it was toasted to your exact requirement, you had to turn the toast over to do the other side and, most importantly, if you didn't hold just the handles you would burn your fingers !

The Dead Man's Penny, on the other hand, should evoke a sense of sadness and be something that visitors will be glad they haven't seen one before. The Memorial Plaque was issued after the First World War to the next-of-kin of all British Empire service personnel who were killed as a result of the war. They were similar in appearance to but much larger than the penny coin, hence they became to be known as the "Dead Man's Penny". 1,355,000 plaques were issued into the 1930s. They were issued in a pack with a commemorative scroll from King George V.

The Penny on display in the museum is mounted in a frame which would have been done by the family of Albert Brown who was killed in 1917. The Brown family ran a large farm in Waikanae. A penny coin is also on display to highlight the similar design.

### **Heritage Weekend visitors**

The Museum was one of the Kapiti Coast museums and galleries participating in the Kapiti Heritage Group's promotion over Wellington Anniversary Weekend. We had 43 visitors – 37 adults and 6 children. Visitors could enter a prize draw for a range of prizes which was drawn the following week. One of our visitors won a flight over Kapiti Island so, always remember, if you don't enter you can't win.

### **Tour Groups**

We always welcome tours by groups and are happy to open for them outside our normal hours. Recently, we hosted 10 people from the Kapiti Friendship Group together with 20 members from other branches throughout New Zealand. Visitors commented how much they enjoyed seeing things they remembered from days gone by. The Dead Man's Penny and Robert Muldoon's shoes he wore when he called the snap-election were also popular.

### **Visitor Hosts and other volunteers**

Now that Carolyn Krebs has completed her contract to catalogue some of our collections, our museum is again totally dependent on volunteers. Carolyn will, however, remain as a volunteer and as a committee member.

We always welcome volunteers who can help as visitor hosts or volunteer their expertise helping with our various collections including camera, musical, radio and telecommunication objects. If you would like to help or know of someone who might, please contact Mark Holland at [mandmholland@yahoo.co.nz](mailto:mandmholland@yahoo.co.nz)



Finally, what is this ? No chocolate fish as a prize but the answer will be in our June Newsletter.