

# THE CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

Thursday 17 July, 2008 Hobart

It is with great pleasure that the TMAGgots present to you the Cabinet of Curiosities, a thirty-drawer beast from the National Museum of Australia which has been travelling around metropolitan and regional museums, galleries and libraries, and is presently occupied by objects on loan from TMAGgots and their families, and some members of the Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery staff.

The TMAGgots are a not for profit volunteer operated group dedicated to engaging more people in their 20s and 30s with the Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery. What an honour to have been involved with the Cabinet of Curiosities, a concept which originated in 16th Century Europe and was restricted then to only those wealthy enough to create and maintain such a 'wonder room'!

The idea for this exhibition was to facilitate direct engagement from community members, particularly people who may not visit museums that often, with the TMAG. The Cabinet is a powerful reminder of that

*"My home was once described as an 'exploded museum'."*

wonderful desire in many of us to collect – quite often objects of no tangible value. My mum dug out her "modern" graphics collection, complete with 1988 floppy disk, which to my generation is a certifiable relics. Then there's Christa-Maria Wernick stone hearts – half of which didn't fit in the drawer – contrasting beautifully with her TMAGgot daughter Sophie's impressive 150-strong smurf collection in the drawer below. There is a little bit of the contributor in each drawer and I hope some of their items are successful in stimulating your curious bone!

From stepfather of exemplary TMAGgot Sarah Heald and valuable Cabinet-contributor Jim Marwood:

*"My friends speak of compulsive and eclectic collecting. I think I prefer this to 'acquisitive anal-retentive'. My home was once described as an 'exploded museum'. Schooldays were devoted to postage stamps, butterflies and railway engines, but with the inescapable collection of birthdays, I find objects become valuable for their power to engage with times past, places visited, with experiences unlikely to be repeated – a landing on Lake Pedder beach, a visit to the Island of Yap in Micronesia, or to pick the biggest Mussel shell I have ever seen from the silt, deep in a New Zealand fjord. Easy to recall a flight in an open-cockpit Tiger Moth when handling the navigation gear that went with it! There is also the wish to rescue interesting trivia from a one-way trip to a rubbish dump. How could I ignore a clutch of weirdly shaped tin jelly moulds, found rusting in a damp basement? War souvenirs can be sad or aggressive, but there's a festive feel to the 'A.R.P.' bell and rattle – warning devices that were never needed.*

*Such objects are an exercise for the imagination. How pleasant to have the time and money of an eighteenth century gentleman-philosopher – to indulge*

*in his Cabinet of Curiosities by cultivating travelling friends, to speculate on the strange contributions as they arrive from exotic lands, to imagine mythical origins and to deduce a fantasy of evidence for historic happenings."*

Many thanks to TMAG staff Robbie Poynter and Cobus van Breda for all their hard work.

Kelly Eijdenberg, President

Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery

**TMAGgots**

**CURIUSER AND SPOUSERS**

DR-01  
DR-02  
DR-03  
DR-04  
DR-05  
DR-06  
DR-07  
DR-08  
DR-09

FOOT & PLAYSTED FINE PRINTERS

Tasmania Explore the possibilities

**27** Letters from abroad to my mother

"Living overseas for two years in the early 70s, had the big adventure, 6 weeks by sea, Commonwealth games, working as a Loo lady at London Zoo – camping with Conti! – Octoberfest ..... an awesome time! My mum kept all the letters and I found them in my Primary School suitcase after she died in 1997."

Robbie also owns Every Every Lady's Cookbook in Drawer 19.

**28** Postcards of early Hobart

"My father in law bought them in the bar of the Theatre Royal Hobart Hotel, where he was licensee."

**29** Locks and printing plate

"The upside down lock came from my grandfather Albert Thornton's house – formally the Union Hotel built in the 1830s – off the cellar door. The printing plate is of a billhead inscribed McGregor Bros New Wharfe Hobart Town 1840. The other lock is from an old shed in Richmond."

**32** 19th century 'dead animal carrier'

"I don't know a better name for it! It was used by hunters to carry dead animals. It belonged to Lewis Thurston, my great grandfather's brother in law, who we think was a pall bearer for Weindorfer."

Jess's scientific illustration of the carrier in use

Cover photograph: Sophie Carnell and "mum, practicing new choocy cake recipe learnt in Home Ec at school – heart cake from heart shape tins on heart pattern platter and cuppa from a heart mug (1984)!"

**6** Computer used for navigation training in Tiger Moth aircraft

"It operates digitally (ie with the fingers)."

**10** Jelly moulds made from soldered tin

"I just like collecting small oddities. If more people had a Cabinet of Curiosities Hobart would get by with a much smaller establishment at McRobbie's Gully."

**20** Bell and rattle

"In Britain during 1939-1945 loud electric sirens were mounted on poles to signal air-raid and all-clear, but poison gas attacks would be very local. The plan was for air-raid wardens in gas masks to run around affected suburban streets whirling the rattle to sound a warning, the procedure to be repeated with the bell when the gas was clear. Luckily the plan never needed to be put to the test!"

**'Moonstone'**

"Moonstone is the local name for a round concretion of limestone formed round a fragment of igneous rock in a shallow sea. Found on the plains of central North Queensland. This is a very small one - they can be 2m diameter. There is a label attached - it is the sort of explanation that might have been found among the collection of an eighteenth century gentleman with more imagination than imagination at his disposal."

**23** Shells from the New Zealand fjords: giant mussel, cog-wheel' wolk and paua

**24** Cane toad purse, Yap registration plate and Island stone money

"The registration plate is from Yap in Micronesia where the traditional currency is wheel-sized discs of coralline limestone. There is also six pennyworth of Tasmanian Pedder pennies, one found in shallow water at the eastern end of the beach before the lake was destroyed by the HEC. They were formed by slow concretion of iron salts round the rim of small flat pebbles."

**26** Assorted mammal bones and skeletal material

"Spot the Devil jaws!" ROBBIE POYNTER

[TMAG TEACHING COLLECTION]



SHAUN MCGOWAN

"I am obsessive and compulsive. I am a shopping culture victim."



SAM POYNTER



JULIE HAWKINS

"These are just some of the tools of trade for a newly-qualified graphic designer in the 1970s. The ruler that offers you measurements in points and your choice of leading heights, the proportion calculator that allows you to read off enlargements and reductions at a glance, the opaquing fluid that you use to cover up the many imperfections on your set of film proofs. All boat anchors now – computers do all this work for us, and they do it very well indeed. These objects arouse some nostalgia in me, but I'm no Luddite. I LIKE my computer, and when the next cabinet of curiosities comes around in another 35 years, that's what will go in the drawer."



SARAH BISHOP



KIM O'SULLIVAN



LUCY HAWTHORNE



SHAZ HARRISON WILLIAMS



CHRISTA-MARIA WERNICK

1 Plastic creatures

5 No 5 Albany with space for tie

21 Redheads

29 Disney mugs

2 Sporran

"This was made by a keen old Scot – Jock Cornelius in c 1955 for a member of the St Andrew Society out of a Grannies Fox stole! The stoles were really popular – worn by ladies across the shoulders – with little fox heads smiling out! Gross!! The sporran is worn as part of highland dress and is actually a purse. This was given to me when I went to Edinburgh for the Tattoo playing the bagpipes in 2002. I have a bigger one so the old fox is kept in storage as a collection piece only!"

3 Miscellaneous seed pods on batik print from travels to India, 1975

11 1970s graphics equipment Opaquing fluid, floppy disk, "Modern" Graphics book, reproduction "computer", inch ruler, original keys to studio

4 Glass paperweights

"I started collecting glass paperweights because I have a sweet tooth and they reminded me of candy canes. I collect both antique and contemporary weights and my favourites are the French antiques. I like the little continental mystery weight on display as it was found next to a canal in Nottinghamshire in the early 1900's. I wonder how it got there? The miniature Clichy weight was bought by my father from a shop in Sorell, Tas. I love the fact it has travelled such a long way from what was a suburb of Paris. They all have a story."

7 Butterfly/human hybrids

"The butterfly women celebrate diversity in all things, including physical appearance, something which sadly may be under threat as a Hollywood ideal, based on plastic perfection, begins to take hold."

8 Snowdomes

"I appreciate snowdomes because they are kitsch yet beautiful, affordable and each one in my collection tells a story. Whenever I travel somewhere, I pick up a snowdome and so I have a fairly eclectic collection of plastic and glass domes, including three made by Australian artist Fiona Hall. However I prefer the plastic snowdomes – there is something appealingly basic about them. My favourite is the papal snowdome that I picked up in Rome. It was sitting on its own covered in dust at the back of a small dark shop, and having an interest in religious figures and the often tacky representation of Christian iconography that is particularly prevalent in Italy, I was completely smitten."

9 Hats

"I started making hats when I started knitting as a teenager – I have always done it. Two of the hats in the cabinet are Alice Spring Beanie Festival winners. I have sent a hat every year for eight years and won four times and had two runner ups. It's not about winning though – the prize is a bag of wool – the festival is a not for profit event that raises money to assist promoting Aboriginal women's textile and culture. The rest are from my collection."

12 Stone hearts

"For many years while living in Europe I collected hearts made from interesting materials, but it wasn't until I came to Australia that I found stone hearts shaped by nature."



SOPHIE CARNELL



KEVIN REDD

15 Corals

Deep sea corals from Bering Sea near the Aleutian Islands, between Alaska and Russia

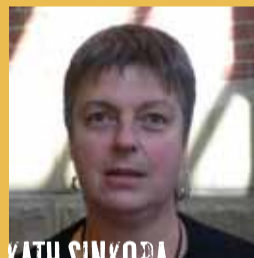
"These deep sea black corals were dragged off the bottom by trawlers when I was working as a fisheries observer. These corals are quite beautiful and it seemed a shame to just toss them back over the side, so here they are."

31 Turtles

"When I was a child I never had the so called 'normal' furry pets because I preferred more interesting creatures like lizards, fish, hermit crabs and best of all - turtles. My first pet turtle was saved from a travelling carnival (where turtles were put into racing contents and bets were made on which one would win) and lived happily in our house in a swimming pool. The collection grew and grew and consists of pottery, glass and a wide range of turtle inspired items."



STUART EDWARDS



KATH SINKORA



PENNY MALONE



HAYLI RYAN



PETA KNOTT

(TMAG TEACHING COLLECTION)

13 Smurfs

"Did you know that smurf figurines have been around since 1959? I've been collecting mine since I was a wee smurfing in the 70's!"

14 A life of fishing

Large longline hooks, corals, fishing charts, fish earbones, lines, photos, fish box labels, net fragments, old glass floats, etc

"These items are the souvenirs of my former life as a fisheries scientist in Alaska. The white otoliths (aka fish earbones) were collected to tell the age of the fish by cross sectioning and counting the rings (like a tree). The hooks are obviously used to catch the fish and the glass floats were found washed up on a very remote set of islands in the Bering Sea known as The Pribilofs."

16 A fabulous failed philatelic effort

"A unique collection of stamps from the late 80's & early 90's. Collected with the expectation they'd be worth something in twenty years .... I was wrong. The colourful stamps from Norfolk Island are my favourites."

17 Felt animals

"I bought these in the 1980's in Launceston. I like them as fun 3D objects for their creative interpretation and I hang them on the ceiling and get great pleasure from their colour and movement."

18 Tin toys

"I have been collecting these for 15 years and started with the two groovy motor bike riders – was a crazy bkie at the time! My favourite is the little green wooden car, found lamenting in an op shop! The collection lives in a bottom drawer and comes out for my nieces and nephews to play with and marvel at."

19 The Multicap Fun Cookbook (with Famous Names recipes)

"It was a birthday present from my aunt when I was younger and I thought it was the lamest gift ever. The only name I recognised was Humphrey B. Bear which seemed like an exceptionally random addition. These days, I appreciate the cookbook for what it is... and its 'quick cupcakes'. They really are quick."

22 Theatre memorabilia

"I love the theatre and have been attending musicals, ballets, orchestral concerts, modern dance acts, piano recitals and plays since I was very young. I always buy the performance program and sometimes, if the show is exceptionally good, I will treat myself to another bit of theatre memorabilia such as this 3D history of Covent Garden or the umbrella from 'Singing in the Rain'. I've also been known to hang around the stage door after a performance! Yes, I'm a theatre groupie, and proud of it!"

25 Shark egg cases

"The shark egg cases are also called Mermaids Purses! They are the empty egg cases of a variety of sharks skates and rays and they wash up on high tides. The little curly tendrils are used as anchor points to the sea floor, rocks, kelp etc and they hatch out from between 6-12 months! Very cool critters! If the purse is not dried out and there is no hole in it, there may still be a baby inside!" LUZ TURNER