

Te Papa treasures lend inspiration

By ALISA YONG

A 100-year-old soldier doll hidden in Te Papa's archives has inspired a children's story.

The new book, *The Curiozeum*, is an anthology of children's stories by 22 New Zealand writers. The book was launched by Te Papa Press this month.

The writers were given a behind-the-scenes tour of Te Papa and invited to choose an item from the collection as a starting point for a story.

Kelburn-based writer Elizabeth Knox chose a doll that was made by a woman whose fiance died during World War I.

Knox said the premise of *The Curiozeum* was to use an object from the collection for inspiration.

"The idea was to write a book for that junior age group with stories or poems or essays or any other kind of writing response to things held in the collection at Te Papa," she said.

"It didn't have to be direct, so it wasn't like you took the thing and you explained it. You used whatever object you chose as a kind of inspiration point.

"So you could be as faithful or as exploratory as you wanted."

Knox said she particularly enjoyed the tour of the museum's back rooms, but found it difficult to choose an object because there were so many interesting pieces with great stories.

"The museum is full of absolutely astonishing things."

Among the items she considered were a three-piece suit from an abandoned relief depot on a sub-Antarctic island, and Queen Victoria's numbered underwear.

Her final choice was the woollen doll made during World War I.

The doll, dressed like a soldier, was made by Dorothy Broad.

Her fiance, Reefton resident Captain T Wyville Rutherford, fought in Gallipoli and France and was awarded the Military Cross before dying of influenza in Tehran, Iran, where he is buried.

The idea that the doll might be a "love gift" was what drew Knox to the object.

"We don't know if it was a portrait of the soldier, but in my story it is. I imagined a life of this object that's made up."

Knox, who worked at Te Papa's predecessor, the National Museum, for eight years while she was a student, said she had been delighted to rediscover some favourite items.

"I used to just wander around like a ghost and look at things.

"Back then there wasn't enough storage. Things were just tucked in wherever they could.

"I was absolutely delighted that I found one panel that I used to sit down beside when I was feeling upset, just because I liked it.

"I was just thrilled that there it was, sitting in a rack in Te Papa."

The Curiozeum is aimed at 8 to 12-year-old readers.

Other contributors include the late Margaret Mahy, Joy Cowley, Bill Manhire and Tusiata Avia.

Items inspiring them include a samurai suit, a teddy bear and a spirit house. Readers can go to the Te Papa website to find out more about each object.

Edited by Adrienne Jansen and illustrated by Sarah Laing, the book is a collaboration between Te Papa Press and the Whitireia creative writing and publishing programmes.



Hand-made memories: The soldier doll made by Dorothy Broad in about 1914. Photo: TE PAPA



Curiously inspired: Noted author Elizabeth Knox. Photo: GRANT MAIDEN