

## When is a doll's house not a doll's house?

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**ABSTRACT:** Claimed as the smallest house in Australia, the Doll's House was a tiny two-roomed dwelling from the 1870s that became the poorest house in the then poorest suburb of Melbourne (Collingwood). It has since earned heritage status being cited by the National Trust in 1985 and later registered as a historic building. The miniature proportions of this tiny worker's cottage are the reason behind its nickname.

This fascination with the miniature produced houses at much smaller scales as the residences of dolls rather than people. This paper examines the difference between the dolls' houses of the "old country" of the period and those that resulted from the need to make do with the resources at hand in the new colonies. Between the 1870s and the end of the nineteenth century the former were moving from bespoke houses for the very wealthy to mass-produced toys for the middle classes. German firms like Gottschalk were exporting their dolls' houses and mass-produced furniture for these to the UK and elsewhere in imitation of the exteriors and interiors of the period. In Australia dolls' houses of this period were made from waste materials such as packing cases. Furnishings could also be handmade, perhaps to the suggestions of Mrs Beeton, who encouraged children to make their own dolls' house furniture. The paper speculates as to whether this might also have been the situation in New Zealand. Unfortunately, no homemade dolls' house dating back to 1870 has yet been located here.

### Introduction

The Melbourne Doll's House implies it was a house for "one doll" whereas in fact, as discussed below, it was a very small Collingwood house for a family. When writing about a small-scale house as a toy most authors call it a dolls' house, implying it is a residence of a number of dolls, although in America often the apostrophe is missing with reference being made to a doll house. The original UK term was a baby house but by the 1870s it was a dolls' house. This is the convention used in this paper, except where the original differs.

Whatever it was called, what was once a toy

to be handed on, dispatched to the attic, or disposed of, has now become a subject of serious study when it comes to domestic life and interior design.<sup>1</sup> From study of the interior we are supposed to learn how the servants' quarters differed from those of house owners, and how both classes were engaged, whether running the house or in suitable leisure pursuits. The problem with this is that, like full-sized houses, the life within them changes with time, as do the finishes and fittings. Rarely can you visit an historic house where the inhabitants still live in an historic manner, the nearest perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobs *A History of Dolls' Houses* pp 19-20; King *The Collector's History of Dolls' Houses* p 2.

being 18 Folgate Street, London. This house dating from c1724 was restored to reflect life in Spitalfields in the eighteenth century and was lived in for 20 years by its owner Dennis Severs until his death in 1999. It is now open to the public.<sup>2</sup> Visiting it as a house no longer inhabited, however, makes it along with most National Trust properties more like visiting a dolls' house at 1:1 scale, albeit without the rogue, out of scale and wrong period objects that are found in most dolls' houses from all periods. However, this is already straying from the 1870s.

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<sup>2</sup> Dennis Severs House Co. "Welcome to Dennis Severs' House" np.

The late nineteenth century was the time when the dolls' house descended from the nurseries of the privileged as a toy mass produced for the new middle classes.<sup>3</sup> This meant not only the dwellings but also the furniture and fittings had to be cheap and hence mass produced. The centre of this industry was the areas of Thuringia, the Erzgebirge, and Nuremberg in Germany. Based on a mixture of training, shared equipment (lathes could be rented out for turning the basic shapes which would then be finished and painted at home), and home-based work, small wooden artefacts were turned out by the millions.<sup>4</sup> This paper explores these developments looking particularly at the exteriors of dolls' houses to view the extent to which they reflected their times and the aspirations of those times.

### **The Doll's House, Melbourne**

It may seem odd for a paper on dolls' houses to start with a full-sized building but the Melbourne Doll's House (the Australians clearly see it as having only one occupant, or else they just don't know how to use the

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<sup>3</sup> Hamlin "Flexible specialization and the German toy industry 1870-1914" pp 35-36.

<sup>4</sup> Fritsch and Bachmann *An Illustrated History of Toys* pp 72-74.

apostrophe) is important for two reasons. The first is because it was claimed that the main part of it started life as a prefabricated dwelling in the 1870s shipped out to the colony and set up in Collingwood, then one of the poorest parts of Melbourne. This made it part of the move to mass production in the middle to the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> However, the heritage listing for the Doll's House makes no mention of prefabrication.<sup>6</sup> The second reason is the fact its small dimensions have been romanticised in its modern name, in turn glorifying the tiny and making it out to be something special. However, single and two room houses were also a feature of New Zealand at this time and Schrader suggests these were cottages, to distinguish them from the larger houses and villas.

Cottages were graded according to size. The smallest houses were called "cottages," the next step up were "superior cottages" and the bigger still were "houses," often further distinguished as "substantial" or "of more pretensions."<sup>7</sup>

Schrader further states early cottages had a rectangular or square floor plan with central

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<sup>5</sup> Brown "Australia's smallest house?" np.

<sup>6</sup> Heritage Council Victoria "Dolls House" np.

<sup>7</sup> Schrader "Housing" np.

door and were of one or two rooms. This suggests that such small houses were not unusual at this time in both Australia and New Zealand.

The other claim made for the Melbourne Doll's House is that it is the smallest house in Australia.<sup>8</sup> The 2.5m wide dwelling has two rooms, and a lean-to kitchen and bathroom on the back. This gives it a floor area of just under 19m<sup>2</sup>, including the small lean-to kitchen area at the rear of the house. It is thus similar in size to the plan of a New Zealand four-room worker's cottage with its street frontage of approximately 3.3m and overall floor area of approximately 17.5m<sup>2</sup> for the house and 2.2m<sup>2</sup> for the separate wash house, plus a separate WC.<sup>9</sup> However, both new world examples should be compared to the smallest house in the UK, in Conwy, Wales with a floor area of 3.05 x 1.8 m on two levels (total 11m<sup>2</sup>) and a low ceiling height.<sup>10</sup> The UK dolls' house equivalent of this is the much later two-room "Pixie," made by Tri-ang in the 1930s to make a dolls' house affordable for

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<sup>8</sup> Brown "Australia's smallest house?" np.

<sup>9</sup> Schrader "Housing: Housing floor plans" np.

<sup>10</sup> The Smallest House "Welcome to the Smallest House in Great Britain" np.

those with very moderate means.<sup>11</sup>

The 1870s "full-size" Australian Doll's House, which started life as 130 Islington Street, was occupied until 1978, although it was never as overcrowded as the three-room house of roughly the same dimensions, also in Collingwood, illustrated in the Investigation and Slum Abolition Board's, 1936-37 *First (Progress) Report*, which accommodated two adults and ten children.<sup>12</sup> The maximum number of people living in the Doll's House was three and for the last 30 years it was occupied by a mother and son.<sup>13</sup> The Doll's House is of historical significance as an extraordinary example of a house built in the inner suburbs of Melbourne before the implementation of strict planning and building controls.<sup>14</sup> It is illustrated in the 1937 report into slum conditions in Victoria with those investigating being "amazed to discover one house built on an allotment of land with a frontage of 8 feet 5 inches."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Lines *From G&J to Tri-ang* p 145.

<sup>12</sup> Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board, 1936-37 *First (Progress) Report* p 29.

<sup>13</sup> Collingwood Historical Society Inc. "The Doll's House" np.

<sup>14</sup> Heritage Council Victoria "Dolls House" np.

<sup>15</sup> Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board, 1936-37 *First (Progress) Report* p 15.

What is of significance is that this tiny house has been "whimsified" by its new name of the Doll's House, identifying what was once probably a rat-infested slum with no proper sanitation with what Beatrix Potter saw as a charming habitation for dolls and naughty mice, in this instance a house for one china doll owner (hence perhaps Potter's use of "doll's-house") and one wooden servant doll.<sup>16</sup> The tiny Collingwood house was given this name when first rescued by business man Bob Neylon who ran a building equipment hire business and put the cottage up in the corner of his yard, where he opened it to the public.<sup>17</sup> After his death it was dismantled and later moved to Collingwood College after a group of students from the college involved in a local history project obtained a grant from Yarra Council to set it up as a museum.<sup>18</sup> It seems to have been moved again as its current position is in the college grounds at the end of Islington Street,<sup>19</sup> thus bringing it back almost to where it started.

<sup>16</sup> Potter *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*.

<sup>17</sup> Anon. "Eazy-way Hire Service, Collingwood, Victoria" pp 1-3.

<sup>18</sup> Arundell "Collingwood Doll's House restored" np.

<sup>19</sup> Cummings "The Dolls House" np.

### **The dolls' house of the 1870s**

It seems that a house that appears to be as small as a child's toy can rise above a somewhat unsavoury history just because it is a house in miniature, and thus forms part of humankind's fascination with the creation of a miniature version of the everyday world. As an adult, Beatrix Potter, who revealed in water colours a miniature world populated by animals, bought a dolls' house that dates from the 1860s-70s.<sup>20</sup> This two-down one-up flat roofed house with a crenellated cornice was purchased by the author to hold objects that feature in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, such as the cradle and birdcage.<sup>21</sup> The house is now part of the National Trust at Beatrix Potter's home in the Lake District, Hilltop. What is useful about this house for those with an interest in the history of architecture is not so much its cluttered interior, which is Victorian in feel, but its exterior architectural aspirations. Victorian Gothic had produced crenellated mansions such as the 1816 Abbey Manor in Worcestershire. Did the maker of the Hilltop dolls' house wish to suggest that, despite its modest proportions, the (assumed)

<sup>20</sup> King *The Collector's History of Dolls' Houses, Doll's House Dolls and Miniatures* pp 332-333.

<sup>21</sup> National Trust "Objects from our Beatrix Potter Collection" np.

child owner would be endowed with a new respect for Gothic Revival architecture? In 1870 Norman Shaw was using crenellations with gables and towers for the home of new hugely wealthy steel magnate Lord Armstrong at Cragside. Shaw, however, in common with many dolls' house creators, was "an almost bewildering eclectic of the first order."<sup>22</sup> After all, the maker of Beatrix Potter's dolls' house had somewhat "hedged his bets" regarding whether Gothic or Classical was the true style, by including a pediment over a front door flanked by columns. This uncertainty is reflected in the domestic architecture of the time, not just in the UK but also in New Zealand. The 1870s saw Scottish Baronial with crenellations embedded in Lanarch Castle,<sup>23</sup> Italian Classical in Melrose House, Nelson,<sup>24</sup> and in Wellington Goldies Brae (1876) which is a one-off in defiance of all styling definitions, and which has been described as "a new style of building altogether."<sup>25</sup>

What we do know is that there are dolls'

<sup>22</sup> Furneaux Jordan *Victorian Architecture* p 226.

<sup>23</sup> McGill and Sheean *Landmarks* p 16.

<sup>24</sup> Melrose House "Melrose House, Gardens and Café" np.

<sup>25</sup> Cochran "Wellington Houses" p 231.

houses from the 1870s that are still extant and that offer a different view of exterior architecture even if their interiors are still delightfully cluttered. The battle of the styles is alive and well in the collection of such miniature houses now held by the National Trust at Wallington Hall in Northumberland. The basis of the Wallington collection is the 12 houses that formed the collection of Mrs Graham Angus of Corbridge, near Hexham, with most dating from around the 1870s.<sup>26</sup> When she died in 1973 her collection was donated to the National Trust.

In the Wallington collection The Long House with its classical Georgian façade (Figure 1) dates from 1870 and has been described as "one of those basic, pleasantly proportioned, late-Victorian homes seen in every suburb and known as 'The Hollies' or 'Wisteria Lodge'."<sup>27</sup> Built in the 1870s there is a real Wisteria Lodge in Battersea, London. With its four bedrooms it was supposedly constructed for his mistress by a member of the Banham locksmith family.<sup>28</sup> The Wallington Long

<sup>26</sup> King *The Collector's History of Dolls' Houses, Doll's House Dolls and Miniatures* pp 314-327.

<sup>27</sup> King *The Collector's History of Dolls' Houses, Doll's House Dolls and Miniatures* p 315.

<sup>28</sup> Archant Community Media "London's most romantic

House has but two bedrooms one above a parlour and the other above the kitchen. A staircase, landing and two narrow rooms occupy the centre bay, the stairs probably being a later addition. When it comes to the Gothic, the earlier picturesque Joiner's House from the 1830s (Figure 2), with its central stairs and four narrow rooms either side on two storeys, is reminiscent of a Gothic lodge cottage such as Audsley's design in his 1870 book *Cottage, Lodge and Villa Architecture*.<sup>29</sup> The Gothic that found its way to New Zealand is perhaps less picturesque and more found in extenuated proportions and details, such as the high gables and decorative bargeboards and finials of houses like the 1879 Oneida Homestead near Whanganui,<sup>30</sup> and in Wellington Spinks Cottage (1854-63).<sup>31</sup>

The final house from the Wallington collection relevant to this discussion is the three storey 1867 house known as The Claremont (Figure 1). With its brick walls and slate roof (in this case both painted on) and bay window this is

house for sale" np.

<sup>29</sup> Audsley & Audsley *Cottage, Lodge and Villa Architecture* plate following p 58.

<sup>30</sup> Bowman and Burr "Built Heritage Inventory: Oneida Homestead" 5pp.

<sup>31</sup> Hall "Wellington Housing 1840-1870" pp 67-68.

typical of urban terraced houses of the time, such as those of St Domingo Vale in Liverpool (late 1860s-early 1870s). In 1870 these three storey brick houses with low brick walls around each front garden were occupied by "a mixture of lesser merchants and professional people, prosperous tradespeople and the higher echelons of the salaried white-collar sector."<sup>32</sup>

Muthesius suggests that from the 1870s onwards terraced houses in the UK lost the verticality of The Claremont doll's house and were lower in their proportions.<sup>33</sup> Terraced houses have yet to become common in urban New Zealand and, apart perhaps from Dunedin, those dating from the 1870s are rare. A terrace of two storey workers cottages with front verandahs was built in 1877 at 107-111 York Place in Dunedin,<sup>34</sup> but these are very different from the three storey brickwork that forms the dolls' house called The Claremont in the Wallington collection. In Dunedin, the two storey brick terraced houses at 62-86 Dundas Street, dating from the 1870s, are more English in character but two storey rather than



**Figure 1:** Wallington dolls' houses: The Long House is centre back and The Claremont in the right foreground

three.<sup>35</sup> The exception is the c1879 three storey Manor Terrace in Manor Place, reputedly by architect Francis Petre.<sup>36</sup> However, the exuberance of the three storey cascade of bay windows and Moorish gothic arches is a long way from the plain Georgian style brick façade of The Claremont. This is an example, perhaps, of dolls' house architecture looking

backward rather than forward. This has always been a dichotomy for the designers of dolls' houses. Should they reflect the house where the child might live or should they be a window into the child's adult future by reflecting the forward-looking architecture of the time? When dolls' houses were built by the estate carpenter for the children of the aristocratic owner they were often miniature examples of the big house, such as the 1735

<sup>32</sup> Menuge *Ordinary landscapes, special places* np.

<sup>33</sup> Muthesius *The English Terraced House* p 184.

<sup>34</sup> Murray "Built In Dunedin" np.

<sup>35</sup> Heritage New Zealand "Dundas Street Terraced Houses" np.

<sup>36</sup> Anon. "Shells" np.

Nostell Priory Baby House<sup>37</sup> and the much later 1933 dolls' house for Peggy Lines of the Tri-ang dynasty founded by the three Lines brothers, based on the family home at Leigh Place, Surrey.<sup>38</sup> Examples of forward looking dolls' houses are the 1830s Joiner's House at Wallington which coincided with the 1833 first edition of Loudon's *An Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture*<sup>39</sup> and the much later 1935 attempt of Tri-ang to introduce modernism into British doll's houses, which was a failure.<sup>40</sup>

A similar dichotomy between dolls' houses as a reflection of the surrounding built environment as opposed to those that are at the forefront of architectural thinking is found in Germany and the dolls' houses of Moritz Gottschalk. Starting as a bookbinder in Marienberg in the Erzgebirge in 1873 the firm entered the dolls' house market and continued to make dolls' houses until 1972 when it was absorbed into VERO (derived from Vereinigte Olbernhauer Spielwarenbetriebe) the national

<sup>37</sup> Eaton *The Ultimate Dolls' House Book* facing p 12.

<sup>38</sup> Lines *From G&J to Tri-ang* p 144.

<sup>39</sup> Loudon *An Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture*.

<sup>40</sup> Vale "Dollshouses and Modern Architecture: a Cautionary Tale" pp 22-31.



Figure 2: Wallington dolls' houses: The Joiner's House, c1830

toy maker of the DDR.<sup>41</sup> From the beginning Gottschalk dolls' houses were exported "to England, France, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and America."<sup>42</sup> King suggests that this success was in part owing to being in the right place at the right time:

Steam-power, the abolition of tariffs and the decline of small rulers after the Unification of Germany in 1871, resulted in a rapid development of manufacturing

<sup>41</sup> die Puppenstubensammlerin "Moritz Gottschalk: a brief history" np.

<sup>42</sup> die Puppenstubensammlerin "Moritz Gottschalk: a brief history" np.

industries not only in the traditional fields of wooden toys but also in metal and papier mâché ... the toy industry grew rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century, and by 1910 the quality and quantity of German toys were the envy of Europe.<sup>43</sup>

Early Gottschalk dolls' houses have been described as resembling "villas and romantic castles."<sup>44</sup> However, these did no more than reflect in miniature the gamut of styles and rich decoration embraced by the designers of

<sup>43</sup> King *The Collector's History of Dolls' Houses, Doll's House Dolls and Miniatures* p 380.

<sup>44</sup> Pasierbska *Dolls' Houses* p 30.

late nineteenth-century villas in cities like Dresden.<sup>45</sup> This richness of detail in the Gottschalk dolls' houses was made possible by the 1830 German invention of colour lithography. Printed paper was used on both dolls' houses and furniture to supply the detail, this making the end product much cheaper.<sup>46</sup> Much later Gottschalk dolls' houses espoused modernism and the Gottschalk flat roofed dolls' house from the 1930s has been described as "another indication of the company's willingness to seek innovative solutions to the ever changing influences in the modern world."<sup>47</sup> However, in the late nineteenth century other German manufacturers deliberately made their houses resemble those of the country to which they exported. One such was the unknown German maker of houses for the London wholesaler Silber and Fleming. Typically, these Silber and Fleming dolls' houses were miniature town houses not unlike The Claremont discussed earlier.<sup>48</sup> One such house made its way to Australia c1885.<sup>49</sup> At this time

<sup>45</sup> Potapova "Fencing as a Part of the Urban Context of the District Blasewitz in Dresden" p 105.

<sup>46</sup> Bristol and Geddes-Brown *Doll's Houses* p 100.

<sup>47</sup> Ackerman *The Genius of Mortiz Gottschalk* p 124.

<sup>48</sup> Bristol and Geddes-Brown *Doll's Houses* p 104.

<sup>49</sup> Carlin "The Rouse Family Doll's House: Kathleen

Germany was also the provider of much of the furniture and accoutrements for fitting out the house, wherever it was originally made.<sup>50</sup> Here there is no doubt that what could be bought was a miniature version of what would be found in the interiors of houses in the 1870s in many parts of the world. The 1879 carpenter-made house given to the eight year old American girl Bessie Mitchell for Christmas that year has furniture from Germany and also from the American firm of Bliss.<sup>51</sup> Like Gottschalk, Bliss also used printed coloured paper to produce fanciful houses but they did not start production of these until 1895, describing their houses in catalogues "as "true to nature in all respects" and ... that they were "designed and modelled by a practical architect."<sup>52</sup>

### **Furniture and fittings**

Mention has already been made of the importance of the German toy industry in the latter decades of the nineteenth century when it comes to furnishing a dolls' house.

An article, published in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1875, exclaims:

Rouse" pp 30-31.

<sup>50</sup> Flick *The Dolls' House Book* p 27.

<sup>51</sup> Bristol and Geddes-Brown *Doll's Houses* p 94.

<sup>52</sup> King *The Collector's History of Dolls' Houses, Doll's House Dolls and Miniatures* pp 468-469.

"The Germans excel in the construction of Lilliputian crockery, kitchen utensils and imitation fruits and viands. A wagon-load of such articles could be obtained from Houndsditch in half an hour and a doll's house as big as a cabinet piano could be swiftly furnished."<sup>53</sup>

However, children were not always expected to be passive consumers. Mrs Beeton published her book on household management in 1861 and that on needlework in 1875. Bristol and Geddes-Brown state that the former gave useful advice on how to make dolls' furniture from cardboard and a dolls' house from a packing case with "white foolscap paper pasted to the wood for ceilings and scraps of old wallpaper for the walls."<sup>54</sup> Referring to Mrs Beeton's book on needlework Chen states:

Children should be taught that everything about the dolls' house must be neat and precise. Moreover, the author believed that being precise and having good taste in early years would bear fruit in one's later life.<sup>55</sup>

In 1860 the Landells published *The Girl's Own Toymaker and Book of Recreation*, which contained instructions on making dolls' house furniture. Flick's comments on this book are pertinent: "many little girls must have wept

<sup>53</sup> Bristol and Geddes-Brown *Doll's Houses* p 100.

<sup>54</sup> Bristol and Geddes-Brown *Doll's Houses* p 102.

<sup>55</sup> Chen "The Art of Housekeeping" np.

bitterly as their flimsy paper houses collapsed in sticky heaps. A child was expected to be able to produce a "rustic Swiss Cottage" covered with little twigs carefully split in two, a three-wheeled paper perambulator, a half-tester bed, a couch and a washstand, all from the scantiest of diagrams."<sup>56</sup> However, for those living far away from the European centres of commerce the home-made toy was often all that was possible.

### **The dolls' house and the antipodes in the late nineteenth century**

In the nineteenth century the conditions when emigrating to Australia and New Zealand by ship meant there was little room for dolls' houses:

In the early 1870s a Wellington immigration officer informed the agent general in London that "letters written home by immigrants who have been made miserable throughout the passage ... do more to retard emigration than all the costly advertisements, peripatetic lecturers, and highly paid agents do to advance it."<sup>57</sup>

Dolls' houses, like full-sized houses, would have to be built, although Robert Holden states "J.F. Read of the Hyde Park Toy and Fancy Bazaar in Elizabeth Street, Sydney was

a regular advertiser. One of his most alluring texts, just in time for Christmas 1842, offered "dolls' houses."<sup>58</sup> However, evidence for the home-made nature of antipodean dolls' houses comes from an 1879 article in the "Children's Corner" in the *Australian Town and Country Journal*.

So she said, "Should you like to have a dolls' house Blanche?"

"A real dolls' house, Auntie? where they can have parties and sit on real little sofas?"

"Yes, my dear."

"O Auntie, it would be splendid. But where could we get the house?"

"My dear, you and I will make one."

"Oh!—could we, Auntie?"

"You shall see, my dear," and away she flew to find a packing case, and to coax Papa, who was a capital carpenter, to divide the case into four compartments by two shelves placed crossways inside, and to put a door in front."<sup>59</sup>

The same information was published simultaneously in *The Australasian* but this time in the form of an instructive column. However, it seems that dolls' house furniture could be bought in Melbourne toy shops.

Of course, it may be said that toy furniture is to be

bought so cheaply that it is hardly worth the trouble of manufacturing at home; but my object in this paper is rather to find occupation for restless little fingers than to give instruction on how to make articles which shall eclipse the gorgeous doll's furniture of a West-end toyshop.<sup>60</sup>

A true Australian dolls' house made from a packing case and dated to the 1870s was shown in 1999-2000 in an exhibition in Sydney. This three-storey structure, with cornice top and balconies, opens centrally. Standing over a metre tall it has carrying handles on the sides and stencils that were part of its first life are still visible under the brown stain.<sup>61</sup> Also exhibited was the nineteenth-century conversion of a travelling trunk to a two-room house, with painted stonework joints and three storeys of windows to the front with a central blue front door, though there were only two rooms inside when the door (lid) was opened. In 1929, this dolls' house was converted back into a storage box as the inside is crudely lined with pages from the *Illustrated Tasmanian Mail* for June 24 1929.<sup>62</sup>

Although no New Zealand dolls' houses from

<sup>56</sup> Flick *The Dolls' House Book* p 35.

<sup>57</sup> Wilson "Journeys to New Zealand" np.

<sup>58</sup> Holden "Some Thoughts on Doll's Houses for Australian Children" p 12.

<sup>59</sup> Anon. "The Doll's House" p 28.

<sup>60</sup> Anon. "Cheap Toys and How to Make Them" p 7.

<sup>61</sup> Benson "Upstairs, Downstairs" pp 24-26.

<sup>62</sup> Quinn "The Travelling Trunk" pp 22-23.



the 1870s have been found they must have been around. Tantalisingly, in *Toys of Early New Zealand* the statement is made that "[t]he museums seem to be the best source [of dolls' houses] but none has any dating from before 1870," while the earliest dolls' house mentioned in the book is the 1880 Watson House, which was brought out from England.<sup>63</sup> A strange 1870 article in *The Timaru Herald* on the difference between boys and girls makes reference to a dolls' house when describing the characteristics of a girl. "She takes naturally to her dolls, and never wearies of dressing them and arranging the baby-house" (baby house was the original English term for a dolls' house).<sup>64</sup> In 1872 there was an advertisement in *The Daily Southern Cross* for "Furniture and Doll's House Fittings" at "Harris', Cavendish House, Queen Street and Shortland Crescent."<sup>65</sup> However, perhaps this line was not a success as the many later advertisements for the same firm only refer to "Large Wax, China, Gutta Percha, Dressed and Undressed Dolls"<sup>66</sup> with no mention of dolls' houses. However, one did appear at the

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<sup>63</sup> Armstrong and Jackson *Toys of Early New Zealand* p 35.

<sup>64</sup> Anon. "Boys and Girls" p 4.

<sup>65</sup> Anon. "Toys! Toys! Toys" p 4.

<sup>66</sup> Anon. "Harris's Selection of Christmas Presents and New years' Gifts" p 4.

1876 bazaar to raise funds for the Knox Church, where one of the stalls contained "a doll's house, furnished complete, and all sorts of worked articles" suggesting it may have been homemade and fitted out by the Dunedin ladies in charge of the stall.<sup>67</sup>

### Conclusion

Historic dolls' houses have often been claimed as reflecting the interior design and way of life of particular periods in history, but their relationship to the exterior architecture of the day is also important. Two things perhaps emerge from this discussion of doll's houses in the 1870s. The first is that just as the early settlers had to build their own houses, which by the 1870s were replaced by houses made by builders, so something as frivolous as a dolls' house was also likely to be homemade at that time, although by the end of the nineteenth century commercially-made dolls' houses were finding their way to the antipodes. The second thread is to do with the romance of miniaturisation, which implies that what is small is also twee, or as we might say now, cute. Many early dolls' houses, like that in Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, show the servants working presumably

long hours in kitchens and serving the owner dolls in other ways. This way of life, however, appears much more romantic in the world of toys, just as calling the smallest house in Australia, which was no more than a slum, "The Doll's House" takes away from the appalling difficulty of life in such a building in the 1870s in Collingwood.

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<sup>67</sup> Anon. "Knox Church Bazaar" p 2.

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