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100 Amazing Tales from Aotearoa with Riria Hotere and Simon Morton

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Have you ever wondered what treasures are held in the storerooms of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa? Usually people only catch a glimpse of the 'backstage' items when exhibitions are on display at Te Papa for the public to visit.

The TV series, *Tales from Te Papa*, allowed viewers behind the closed doors to see some of the hidden treasures. The series led to the publication of this superb book, a finalist in the 2013 New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards.

Each object is given a detailed description about its history, materials and construction. Although the information about the items is fascinating, it's the accompanying stories that capture the imagination. Readers discover who created the items and their original use.

Many of the objects have tales of interest for young people. For instance; there are intricate Maori kites, a collection of Samoan Kilikiti bats and rubber balls, finely crafted soldier dolls, and Kiwi-style puppets. Humpty, Big Ted, Manu and Jemima from the children's television series *Play School* are shown - although it's rumoured that Little Ted was 'blown-up' on the last day of filming the show.

Head lice are usually associated with nits, those nasty little beasties that cause much head scratching. Te Papa curator, Ricardo Palma, has studied lice for forty years! His focus is on the thousands of parasites that live on seabirds. However, he has even found seven head lice on a 1500-year-old Egyptian comb.

Did you know there's about a thousand species of seaweed in New Zealand? You may also be surprised to discover that your shampoo, moisturiser and toothpaste could all be thickened with seaweed gum. Te Papa has an extensive library of seaweed specimens.

A 'flimsy' conjures up images of fine underwear. It's nothing of the sort. A flimsy is a pigeongram - a message carried by a pigeon to outlying New Zealand islands. Pigeon Post had special stamps and stationery for its unique airmail service which began in 1897.

The museum also has creatures that are very much alive - the bone cleaners. A colony of dermestid beetles are kept at work cleaning the skeletons of birds and animals. Dead birds are often brought in to Te Papa for their research collections.

500 illustrations add to the appeal of this beautifully designed book. Each item is given a double-spread with multiple illustrations showing the objects in close-up detail along with historical photos. The curators who care for the taonga are also photographed which personalises the on-going stories of the objects.

The book includes DVDs of the complete television series, plus a bonus 20 episodes. So many stories - so much treasure.

Reviewed by children's book author Jean Bennett

**Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa website:
www.tepapa.govt.nz**

