

Friday February 12, 2016

Miss Porter's House gives a rare glimpse of the past

By Damon Cronshaw

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Heritage House:

Kathryn Pitkin in Miss Porter's House. Picture: Marina Neil.

Topics went back in time on Thursday. We paid a visit to Newcastle's only National Trust house.

Dubbed Miss Porter's House, this time capsule prompts plenty of thoughts.

Like thank god toilets are now built inside the house.

Yep, the place has an outdoor dunny and, would you believe, an outdoor kitchen. That is, the kitchen is separated from the main house. This was partly to do with fire risk, which doesn't surprise us given its combustion oven.

The house will be open to the public from 1pm to 4pm on Sunday.

We were given a preview tour by the lovely Kathryn Pitkin, chairwoman of the house's management committee.

Kathryn said the inhabitants set a perfect example of how to make a "house museum".

"They threw nothing away," she said.

Miss Porter's House, a two-storey Edwardian terrace in King Street, was built in 1909. Its owner Herbert Porter died age 41 in the influenza epidemic of 1919.

This so-called Spanish flu killed 6000 people in NSW and millions across the world.

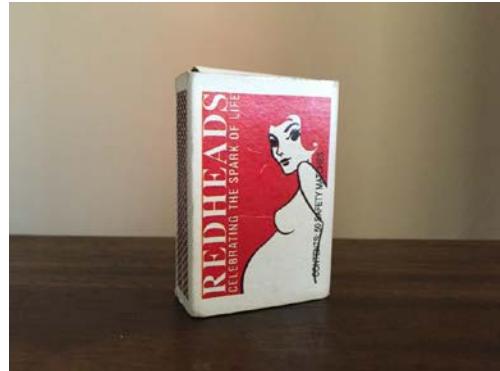
Herbert's wife Florence Porter outlived her husband by 50 years. Their two daughters, Ella and Hazel, lived in the house their entire lives. Hazel died in 1997 and left the house to the National Trust.

The house belonged to a time when a lounge room was called the front parlour. The room probably wasn't used much, except when posh people visited, Kathryn said.

As we strolled through the house, we noticed Box Brownies, pre-electric flat irons, old radios that bring to mind the 1950s and ghastly old brown suitcases.

The old TV existed in a time when “the kids were the remote control”, Kathyrn noted with a smile.

There was a pack of Redheads matches with a pregnant woman on the box. Different era, that. It was a time of “making do”, when clothes and other items were repaired, not mindlessly discarded.



A pregnant woman on a Redheads matchbox.

We spotted wooden clothes pegs. Petrochemical companies hadn't yet cashed in on the plastic revolution.

So how do we feel after seeing the house? In awe of the past, with slight disdain towards its stuffy conventions. More grateful for the present.

Now, where's our iPad.