



**Aficionado:** Gwen Jones is a mover and shaker when it comes to collecting.

Photo: MARK TAYLOR

# Keeping count of the condiments

Salt and pepper shakers come in a wide range of colours and forms. And there are Waikato people who have hundreds. **Jess Thorne-George** meets some collectors.



The pair of monkeys are small, yellow and spotted. They take their place among a Noah's Ark of multi-coloured animals with everything from frogs to hippos, cows to mice.

Despite the monkeys' unusual colouring, they are the favoured ones. Among the enormous selection nothing in their appearance makes them jump out, but they carry an association unmatched by the rest.

They are part of Gwen Jones' collection of salt and pepper shakers, and they were handmade by her daughter, Jennifer, in a ceramics class.

Gwen has shakers in every form imaginable. Not only animals, but enough fruit and vegetables to fuel an entire five plus a day campaign: everything from mushrooms and tomatoes to watermelons and pineapples. And then there are those with a kiwiana touch, such as New Zealand sheep, paua shells and even tiki.

Two, by two, they pack an entire room in Gwen's cosy Waharoa home where five cabinets are required to house them in all their astonishing variety.

They also spill out into the dining room, where a smaller cabinet displays around 100 sets.

And not one set is a repeat, unless it's in a different colour. After all, "that would be hoarding," Gwen says.

Hoarding or not, her collection adds up to up an impressive 1802 sets of shakers, making it currently the largest in the Waikato and Districts Salt & Pepper Club.

That even puts her ahead of club secretary Cedric Duncan, who has been with the club since it began in the 1980s and has about 1100 sets.

Today Cedric, Gwen and other members of this dedicated group are gathered at the Matamata home of Faye Troughton. Twenty people sit on an assortment of chairs in the garage, sipping tea and coffee, nibbling on club sandwiches and sausage rolls and chatting animatedly. The club, which has members from as far as Wellsford and Wanganui, meets once every two months, moving around the members' homes and today it is Faye's turn to host.

Inside, there is a room with a small display of shakers set up on a bed. This is dubbed the Competition Room. Members bring along items from their collections according to a theme, with a vote deciding the winner. Another room holds the sales table, where an assortment of items is displayed for club members to buy. The items vary from home-made jams and

fudge to used books and, of course, sets of salt and pepper shakers.

During lunch \$2 raffle tickets are sold, with winners collecting prizes ranging from beauty hampers to vegetable baskets.

The formal part of the meeting, run by club president Doreen White with the help of Cedric, takes place when everyone is fed, comfortable and ready to talk business.

On today's agenda is an upcoming convention for the New Zealand Salt and Pepper Club, a nationwide club of which many in the Waikato club are also members.

The New Zealand club holds conventions roughly every two years and today's business includes discussing fundraising for the event which will be held in Cambridge next year. All proceeds raised will be put towards expenses such as buses and meals.

The Waikato club has around 25 members. Some of them are serious collectors, others are friends and family who simply find the collecting fetish interesting.

Club secretary Cedric is also a life member of the New Zealand club. He says his secretarial duties make him the "general dogsbody", responsible for the likes of newsletters, programmes and banking. He is also a repository of knowledge, including an account of the national club's origins.

The national club was established in 1974 by Kay Missen, from Melville, Hamilton, and Cedric believes she advertised the club by placing an advertisement in the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*.

The Waikato club began about 10 years later when New Zealand members

began organising smaller groups throughout their districts.

There are about 40 members in the New Zealand club, a decrease from 80 or so in recent years. Sadly, due to the dwindling numbers, the national club's future is unsure and Cedric believes that the next convention may be the last.

Members of the Waikato club are currently running the New Zealand club and they will be in charge of hosting the convention.

Gwen was recently appointed president of the New Zealand club, a position for which she is well qualified after half a century of collecting.

Gwen, 80, discovered her love of the specialised collectables about 52 years ago when she worked at a gift shop and a representative bought in a set of small white rabbit salt and pepper shakers.

She instantly fell in love with them and was later gifted the set. Her collection quickly grew to about 50 and, after later hearing about the club through a friend, she became a member.

Her comfortable home bears testament to her abiding passion. It not only houses her enormous salt and pepper shaker collection, but has an entire room dedicated to daughter Kim's soft toy collection, which includes more than 800 items.

Plenty of wall space is also allocated to Gwen's second collection - about 500 collector teaspoons. Meanwhile, porcelain dolls fill another cabinet and an assortment of ornaments are spread throughout the house.

Gwen has gathered her shaker collection over the years from sources such as markets, antique stores and op shops, and many of them were gifts from friends and family.

She points out an antique china swan set that was a gift from a former neighbour.

Others have come from older members of the club when they down-sized their collections.

The sets have cost her from roughly 50c to \$15.

Her collection is a feature on the agenda of next year's convention, and members of the New Zealand club will visit her home to view the enormous array of salt and pepper shakers she has gathered over the past five decades.

Gwen admits it's getting harder to find new and different sets of shakers to add to the cabinets.

But despite the number, she has no trouble remembering what she already has in her collection.

"I instinctively know whether I have it or not." Nevertheless, she adds new items when she can.

Gwen is adamant she won't sell her shakers and would like them to remain in the family.

"My daughters will have a smashing good time with them."

■ Jess Thorne-George is a Wintec journalism student.



**Tiny gems:** Shakers can take any number of forms. Photo: SHAY MORRIS

## GREAT SHAKES

Some of the more commonly seen forms of salt and pepper shakers are:

**Bench sitters or sitter sets:** These usually consist of two animal or people shakers designed to sit on a bench, sold with the set.

**Condiment sets:** A complete condiment set includes two shakers, a third container or pot with a lid and spoon for mustard or sugar, and a tray base - six items in all.

**Huggers:** A hugger is where both shaker pieces touch the shelf, and one shaker partially wraps around the other, or two pieces actually hug or wrap around one another.

**Longboys or tallboys:** These are at least 10cm tall or long, and are usually animals with narrow, elongated bodies. Other forms include Squeakers, Snow Domes, Rockers, Noddors, and Nesters or Stackers. Source: www.saltandpepperclub.com

Waikato Salt and Pepper Club members pay a yearly fee of \$5 to belong to the club. Members come from all over the Waikato and other districts. For more information on the club, phone secretary Cedric Duncan on (07) 827-4316.

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