

## ON THE HOME FRONT EXHIBITION

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Hon. Stephen Martin, opened the new exhibit at the Museum on Saturday 12 August. The exhibit, which was curated by Joyce McCarthy with much help from Warren Bellamy and from Amelia and Tony Pezzutto, commemorates the life in Wollongong during the second world war. The conversion of the shelter for use as an exhibition space was funded by the 'Australia Remembers' programme established by the Federal Government.

The opening was attended by about 50 Society members and friends including the Society's patron, Cr. Frank Arkell. Also present was Lord Mayor David Campbell and Cr. Pat Franks. Representatives from the war Widows Association, Tongara Museum and the Breakwater Battery Museum were among the crowd.

The exhibit will be permanent and more items will be added as they are acquired. So far, Joyce has scoured the Museum collection and found a variety of relics including ration books, gas mask, air raid-warden's helmet and egg box. From various sources a range of posters were gathered and copied from the exhibit. The Breakwater Battery Museum has loaned a uniform.

One interesting exhibit is a framed letter from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth (now the Queen Mother). The letter thanks Mr and Mrs Straker of Mangerton for providing a home for their niece, Rita Patterson, who was evacuated from England in 1940. Rita spent five years in Wollongong and has returned several times to visit friends she made during her stay.

In 1983, Rita Patterson (by then Rita Jackson) wrote of her voyage to Australia on the 'Batory' and of her life in Wollongong and forwarded the Royal Letter. She poignantly recalled her return to her family:

"On a November day in 1945, once again on a troopship (HMT Andes), and with only 70 evacuees this time, I left Sydney Harbour, band playing, streamers snapping, as the ship left

the quayside, and my feelings were mixed indeed.

My homecoming was unforgettable. I can never forget crossing the Tyne Bridge - coincidentally, a small, exact replica of the Sydney Harbour Bridge - and seeing my dear father and mother waiting for me.

I will never forget the kindness and affection the people of Wollongong showed to a small child far from home at a time of war.

I enclose the letter which was sent by Queen Elizabeth (now the Queen Mother) to my guardians Mr and Mrs Straker. I have kept this letter since 1943 but I feel it belongs to Wollongong. It says clearly how we all feel, and it says it better than I could! Perhaps it could be displayed at the Museum.

Donations of other memorabilia relating to Wollongong during the War would be most welcome.

John Shipp