

Jeweller treasures old tin gems

MOST of us live in houses of streamlined functionality, but if your home is older than you are, it may feature the work of some of Queensland's early tinsmiths.

That craft has inspired Brisbane-based jeweller Barbara Heath in her latest touring exhibition.

Her work is both beautiful and functional and serves as a sort of ode to a lost craft, bringing together historical tinwares from private collections and also showcasing her own pieces.

Barbara is a renowned jeweller with many exhibitions to her name.

She did hours of research into the history of Queensland tinsmithing, and turned it into a fascinating read – look out for the catalogue at the exhibition.

Barbara says people have enjoyed seeing familiar forms they recognise from their own homes.

"Often they have little idea of how simply these things have been made," she says.

Tin was once as common as plastic. And it was this familiarity she enjoyed exploring and exploiting.

Some of her beautiful, jewel-like adornments include a tin chain downpipe (similar to those used in Japan to direct rainfall), crowns and candlesticks.

"Early plastic items do have a 'collectable' status already," Barbara says. "Everyday items from past times always hold a special interest – sometimes they can appear quite strange to us now."

The exhibition is an intersection of

trade, craft and design. All three are concerned with bringing "things" into being, therefore to varying degrees all three are concerned with materials, skills and appearance, Barbara says.

"Trade is bound to use innovations in materials and techniques as it is bound to time/cost efficiency.

"Most trades must move forward quickly in their problem-solving and must apply cost-effective ways to produce their outcomes.

"Craft is concerned equally with process, materials and skills. Craft is absorbed in the act of making and the integrities of materials and skills.

"Often the appearance of a craft product will reveal the way it was made. Often, but not always, craft is slow. Design is concerned with appearance, functionality and also with ideas and innovation.

"Design applies those concerns to trade or craft. Like a rope, these three strands are best when all twined together to create the most efficient, functional and beautiful object. The history of things shows many instances of this kind of integrity."

To view Barbara's work, visit Bribie Island Seaside Museum, 1 South Esplanade, Bongaree, Bribie Island, until June 3.

Other regional galleries are expected to follow.

To find out more, visit Barbara Heath's website at viewersite.wordpress.com and search tinsmith.

