From the Director’s Desk ...

We’ve had a very busy time since our last issue of the JCPML Information Update. Of particular note was the visit of eminent historian Dr Geoffrey Serle, AO, to the JCPML as our first Visiting Scholar. Dr Serle spent the week in Perth researching material for his biography on John Curtin and we were honoured to have him give the inaugural JCPML Public Lecture.

Dr Serle delighted the audience with his insights into Curtin and we had a wonderful response from the public including personal letters of heartfelt support from those unable to attend. Thank you for the encouragement.

Another distinguished visitor we had pleasure in welcoming was former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. Mr Whitlam paid a private visit to the JCPML accompanied by his wife Margaret and expressed his approval of the building and the work we have been doing on the collection. He also took the opportunity to view our developing electronic archive. As we fast approach the end of the year, preparations for the opening of the JCPML to the public are well underway. The last significant event for this year is the Foundation Stone Ceremony on November 27. The guests of honour will be Mr Richard Court, the Premier of Western Australia, and Mr John Curtin, grandson of Prime Minister Curtin, who will jointly unveil the foundation stone.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish all those who have generously offered us their goodwill, support and donations, a Merry Christmas and we look forward to sharing with you an exciting new year in which we open our doors for the very first time.

Curtin Moves into New Home

John Curtin’s bust has recently been relocated to the public foyer of the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. The bust, sculpted by artist Peter Gelencser, will form part of a prominent display in the JCPML main entrance.

The bust was originally presented to Curtin University of Technology by the University of WA, and for many years it lived in the university’s administrative area.

The John Curtin bust flanked (left to right) by Curtin’s grandson, John Curtin, and Associate Professor David Black.
In August, the JCPML received a private visit from former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and his wife Margaret.

Mr Whitlam has been a strong supporter of John Curtin for many years and has spoken on several occasions for the John Curtin Memorial Lecture series in Perth. The JCPML is now the official repository of these lectures and Mr Whitlam has very kindly donated his copyright to the JCPML.

Mr and Mrs Whitlam were given a tour of the new facilities and took the opportunity to view the developing electronic archive.

- Staff welcome Gough and Margaret Whitlam to the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library

Project has Successful Launch via Internet

The July launch of the JCPML's first digital project—John Curtin: A Prime Minister and his People—via the Internet was met with enthusiastic response. Statistics for the month show the site, which was promoted via several radio interviews, received a number of hits. Amongst comments received was the email response from Liz McGinnis, year 12 history teacher:

“This is manna from heaven! I have been increasingly despairing of ever finding worthwhile Australian history sites ... Yours is truly wonderful and I can only urge you to hasten to the next project.”

This web site was developed in collaboration with the Australian Archives who made available a selection of letters written to John Curtin by ordinary Australians. The site contains nearly 500 documents comprising approximately 600 electronic facsimile images.

The digital project can be accessed via the JCPML homepage, <http://john.curtin.edu.au>

New Staff

The newest member to be welcomed to the JCPML staff is David Wyle. As the Archives Technician, David works closely with Archivist Kandy-Jane Henderson—assisting with collection maintenance, facility management and reference and access services. One of David's current priorities is ensuring the collection database is up and running by the time the JCPML opens to the public in February next year.

Prior to joining the JCPML, David worked in the Public Records Office of Western Australia as Archives Officer. Public Records Access and Team Co-Ordinator, Repository Services Team. He has also spent time on secondment as Information Officer to the Commission on Government.

In particular, David's professional focus is in the areas of storage, preservation and disaster recovery.

Electronic Archive

Thanks to support from Digital Equipment Corporation, the JCPML has taken possession of an alpha 4100 Unix server which will provide for the future electronic archive needs of the JCPML.

Please note the new web address for the JCPML is:

http://john.curtin.edu.au

Watch out for new developments on the web in conjunction with the Foundation Stone Ceremony
"G for George"

"The time we went to Perth in the Lancaster bomber—that was a thing I shall never forget." remembers Gladys Joyce, private secretary to Prime Minister John Curtin during the dark days of World War II. Miss Joyce's story is one of several oral history interviews undertaken recently by Isla Macphail for the JCPML on a recent trip to Canberra. As a result of that visit, a number of valuable oral histories and donations are currently being processed for accession into the JCPML collection.

The flight on the Lancaster bomber nicknamed "G for George" was one of the very few times Prime Minister Curtin ever flew and was undertaken as part of the 1943 election campaign and for the good cause of encouraging recruits to join the air force—and is just one of the stories recounted by Miss Joyce about her time with the Prime Minister.

While Curtin sat up front at the navigator's table, Miss Joyce and fellow "passenger" Hazel Craig had seats over the bomb bays—an area at the back of the plane approximately 8 or 9 inches wide and with no pressurisation and no seatbelts—as the crew put on a display of aerial acrobatics for the country towns they passed through. "I was very ill. They had the ambulance waiting for me at Kalgoorlie ... they took me straight away to the St John of God Hospital," explains Miss Joyce. "Fortunately I was wise enough to take some big brown office envelopes!" She survived the trip and was able to participate in the dinner Curtin threw for the crew at the end of the week, noting that the Prime Minister admitted to not enjoying the flight himself.

We welcome Miss Joyce's oral history as a valuable contribution to the JCPML collection. ♦

Right on Our Doorstep

For several years now, Associate Professor Dennis Moore, Director of Curtin University Planning, has been a sleuth on our behalf in his search for material to add to the JCPML Collection. Professor Moore is an inveterate browser of bookstores and book sales and by keeping his eyes open has come across some classic volumes to add to the JCPML collection.

Recently, Professor Moore donated two interesting items. One is an Austerity Loan leaflet, dated 1942 and signed by John Curtin. The leaflet asks for all Australians to pledge themselves to an austerity campaign and join the army of "working forces" to support Australians fighting overseas during World War II—"We will forget privileges, comforts and rest. Nothing shall block the way to the attainment of victory."

The second item was found here on our doorstep during a Curtin University charity book sale. The Prime Ministers of Australia is beautifully illustrated with the official parliamentary portraits of Australia's prime ministers and contains highlights of their terms of government.

Thank you Dennis for your supportive efforts!

New Purchases for Collection

The JCPML has added several new purchases of microfilm copies of various Australian newspapers to the collection which will provide valuable resources to researchers.

Inaugural JCPML Public Lecture

On 14 August Dr Geoffrey Serle, AO, our Visiting Scholar for 1997, delivered the inaugural JCPML Public Lecture in the new theatre of The John Curtin Centre. Dr Serle is a distinguished historian and John Curtin biographer and his contribution to the Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB) on Curtin is highly regarded. As an author, Dr Serle's books have won several prestigious awards including the Ernest Scott prize, the National Book Council Banjo award and the Age Book of the Year.

The event proved very popular with approximately 100 people attending the lecture. There were also a number of messages of support for the day from those who were unable to attend.

The lecture was entitled Glimpses of John Curtin and Dr Serle provided an interesting, entertaining, and highly informative narrative on Curtin's life. One of the points Dr Serle stressed about Curtin was his ability to inspire fellow Australians.

According to Dr Serle, "in his late years Curtin grew in wisdom and character ... Curtin did rally the nation to the war effort to a considerable extent, probably more so than anyone else could have done (though this should not be exaggerated, for there were pockets whom no one could have rallied). But to the extent that he did, it was because he inspired cynical Australians with respect for his unassuming dignity, simplicity, straightforwardness and patriotism."

The JCPML Public Lecture will be an annual event to be held in July on the anniversary of Curtin's death each year.

Contributions and Support since July, 1997:

- Horace Cleaver
- Eunice Coffey
- Hazel Craig
- Peter Curtin
- Marjorie Finch
- Adele Hodges
- Gladys Joyce
- Dr Carmen Lawrence
- Judy McKay
- Dennis Moore
- Barbara Ross
- Alan and Mavis Salisbury
- Dr Geoffrey Serle
- Anne Spence
- Anne Taylor
- E Gough Whitlam

Distinguished Visitors to the JCPML:

- Dr Geoffrey Serle, AO as Visiting JCPML Scholar
- Gough and Margaret Whitlam
- Cheryl Davenport, Member of Parliament
- Max Evans, Member of Parliament