

Tracking Curtin across the continent

In April the JCPML launched its newest digital resource, *On Track: Curtin's Railways Journeys*. As John Curtin disliked flying and never learned to drive, travelling by rail became a way of life for him in his journeys around the city and between Perth and the rest of the country. This digital project was inspired by the recent refurbishment of the Prince of Wales carriage in which Curtin travelled as prime minister.

Since 1920 when it was first used by the visiting Prince of Wales, the carriage was used by royalty and all prime ministers. When a derailment occurred during the Prince's journey in 1920, Curtin commented on the incident in his *Westralian Worker* editorial of July 9: '[W]e feel it demanded of us to publicly attest our deep satisfaction that the derailment of the Prince's carriage was unattended by physical injury of any kind...'

A few months after John Curtin moved to the west, the Trans Australian Railway was completed making it possible for him to travel across the continent by train instead of steamship. His first trip using the new rail line was in April 1918 when he was sponsored by the WA Government to attend a Press Censorship Conference of newspaper editors in Melbourne.

During the 1930s when Curtin was



Author Philippa Rogers (centre) examines the new digital project with JCPML staff

Leader of the Opposition, he and his press secretary, Don Rodgers, went on the propagandist trail to try to rebuild the Australian Labor Party, rallying the State Executives and local ALP branches. They travelled thousands of miles by train. Don Rodgers recalls: 'We did a lot of travelling in Opposition and they were pretty hard days then, because we didn't have the comforts and emoluments, which I gather the Leader of the Opposition has today. It wasn't until half way through his term that he was even given a sleeping compartment to himself. He had to share one with me up to then, or with whatever member of

staff was there...He liked train travelling, however and was very proud of the Commonwealth railways transcontinental express, that was part, I suppose, of his affection for Western Australia.'

During Curtin's time as Prime Minister of Australia, the *Prince of Wales* carriage became not only a means of travel, but a mobile office and a refuge for him. On his first trip home as prime minister the press release from his office noted: 'Mr Curtin...will be in constant touch by teleprinter with cabled advices from overseas and by telephone with Ministers.' ►

Mr Curtin's Quality

On December 8 1941, just after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, Canberra journalist Ross Gollan wrote about the crisis in the Pacific paying particular attention to 'Mr Curtin's quality':

'Mr Curtin, as Prime Minister, seems to all his closest observers a miraculously changed person from Mr Curtin, as Leader of the Opposition. The theory used to be that Mr Curtin would not be able to stand up to the strain of Prime Ministership for more than a couple of months. Quoted as evidence were the minor illnesses, thought to be of nervous origin, which had a habit of attacking him whenever heavy political weather arrived. Also his knack of indecisiveness in some small

political matters was thought of hopeless augury for his conduct of the nation's major affairs.

The plain fact about Mr Curtin since he took the Prime Ministership is that the bigger the matter that has come to him, the more decisive has been his handling of it – the more the load of work and worry upon him, the better his apparent physical trim. His friends know that hard unemotional thinking has been the basis of his success so far in the Prime Ministership. His political opponents see what they consider an over-faith in the potentialities of the volunteer system in war-time as his only manifest defect. Both his friends and his political enemies unite in appreciation of his sincerity on all war issues, and also of the powers of expression which are making some of

his speeches and statements more eloquent of the basis of Australian resistance to Nazism than has yet been achieved.'

This article is only one of nearly 200 written by Ross Gollan, Canberra correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* between 1941-1945 which are now available through ERA (JCPML00683/1-196) thanks to the kind permission of his daughter, Mrs Horne.

Gollan wrote a weekly column reviewing the government's performance and scrutinising John Curtin's leadership. For anyone interested in this period these articles provide a fascinating contemporary view of the wartime situation and John Curtin's prime ministership.



<http://john.curtin.edu.au>

A way with words

'It is never mine
To be a brilliant star?
Shall I for shame refuse to shine
Or send one beam afar?
The smallest star its perfect work hath done,
If it hath twinkled.

'My sympathy to you and also my encouragement. May you find that there is solace and consolation, and that having one's own life in full abundance is the best we can do for the world we live in and also for ourselves...[G]o on with your way of life as fully as occasions allow. Please try and look hopefully forward to the fine things that are possible and the splendid glories which all of us living may yet attain. I am confident that is what your brother would desire of you.'

John Curtin wrote these words in a letter of sympathy to

Miss Eileen Walsh when her brother died in 1935. The letter is an eloquent example of the way John Curtin cared about people:

'All I know is that the best things that come to us are the enduring fellowships begotten as we live from day to day. These help us out in the hours of difficulty and even make more splendid the few occasions of achievement or happiness. And it is because I would be very proud to count myself in the number who are privileged to be your friend that I ask you to believe that I feel deeply for you in the present days of recent grievous loss. May I also ask that if there is any way in which I could be of any service that you will not hesitate to apprise me. That is what is meant by friendship and fellowship as I understand their spirit.'

The full text of the letter can be read on ERA (JCPML00672/1)



Recently Dr Joanna Sassoon, Research Fellow with Curtin University of Technology's Research Institute for Cultural Heritage, published an article about her research into photographic archives in major institutions around Australia in *Il Mondo degli Archivi*, Newsletter of the Italian Archives Association. Her investigations revealed that many institutions digitising photographs treat them as objects and index the content but do not give any contextual information.

According to Dr Sassoon, 'One of the few photographic archives to document and digitise its photograph collections while retaining their archival integrity is the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library...It leads Australia in the way it tries to reproduce the way we look at an original photograph in a digital context. For example, multiple original photographs from a range of provenances are digitised, as are both the back and the front of the photograph. This website serves as a model for other archival institutions worldwide that are digitising their archival materials.'

The article will also be published in English for *Local-link*, an Australian Library and Information Association publication on local studies.

Planning for *John Curtin's Legacy*

The JCPML is planning a major new exhibition to be opened later this year. Tentatively titled *John Curtin's Legacy: Leading Australia from war to peace*, the exhibition will examine the social, economic and political changes arising from Australia's participation in World War Two. The exhibition is being curated by Lesley Carman-Brown, Public Programs Coordinator at the JCPML with assistance from JCPML Historical Consultant Professor David Black and historian Michal Bosworth.

According to the curator, John Curtin's legacy to contemporary Australian politics arises from his stance as a leader with a firm focus on Australian independence, his ideas for social welfare in the postwar economy and his emphasis on Federal control which formed the basis for future globalisation policies.

Research into the background of the exhibition has now been completed and the thematic development is being progressed. The exhibition will concentrate on the years



Exhibition curator Lesley Carman-Brown (centre) with assistants Heather Campbell (left) and Kat Barton examine items for the exhibition

1942 to 1951 following Australia's progress from the worst year of the war, and arguably of Australian history, until the signing of the ANZUS Treaty.

The exhibition will be a major part of the JCPML's school education program as well as being open to the public.



Travelling into the exhibition

Do you want to know exactly what colour John Curtin's eyes were? Or how tall he really was? These details were officially recorded on John Curtin's first passport, issued in 1924 to enable him to travel from Perth to Geneva to attend the International Labour Organization's conference.

Images of the passport and its contents can now be viewed via ERA (JCPML00684/1) thanks to the generous permission of Curtin's granddaughter, Mrs Beverley Lane. Beverley has loaned the passport to the JCPML for inclusion in our new exhibition which will be opened later this year.

Dinner with the PM

Donations to the JCPML come in many shapes and sizes, some as whole collections in their own right and others as individual items.

The JCPML welcomes all enquires about donations to its collection and if you think you know where old letters, newspapers, scrapbooks or photographs that have a link with John Curtin may be stored we are interested in hearing from you.

Recently, Thelma McCarthy wrote a memoir for the JCPML of her experience with Australia's wartime prime minister. She recalled an event out of the ordinary during her days as a WAAAF stationed at Canberra.

'I was sergeant in charge of the 8am to 5pm shift at the signals station...The telephonists were always being teased by the guards saying things like "The Japs are coming" etc., so when the operator answered a call that said, "This is the Prime Minister calling. I'd like...to invite the CO to lunch."

'...[T]hinking it was a hoax she replied, "I don't know about lunch, but I'll be free for dinner." Then the tone of the voice changed and the

caller said, "I understand you are confused as to my identity, so would you call me back on this number." She checked the number and found it was indeed the number to the PM's Lodge!

'...When she rang back she started to apologise profusely, saying, "Sir, I thought it was the guards calling, they are always trying to trick us, so please accept my apologies." He didn't let her finish her apology, and interrupted by saying, "it was my fault, I was not observing correct protocol, but what about that dinner?"...

'[H]e asked how many girls were on duty that day and she told him there were four of us. Then he said he would send his driver...to pick us up at 6pm after we finished our shift.

'...John Curtin was so informal, ushered us into a small sitting room and offered us all a cool drink. He asked us about our families and the work we were currently doing in the WAAAF. We then went into the dining room and had "Sunday tea" – cold meat and salad followed by stewed fruit and custard. So homely and we all relaxed as we talked and laughed together. He then took us on a tour of the Lodge and the garden...'

Available on ERA at JCPML00682/1.

Contributions and Support since December 2001

Jo Barker
Kim Beazley
Curtin Radio 6NR
David Day
Frederick Duebert
Peter Edwards
John Faulkner
Denis Fitzgerald
Fitzgerald family
Myfanwy Horne
Elsie Macleod
Thelma McCarthy
Bobbie Oliver
Allan Shuttleton
David Waddell

JCPML Challenge Bank Reading Room Visitors

John Faulkner
Charles & Jacqui Goeldner
Linda Luther
Carolyne McCallum
Jim Stokes
Steve Stuckey
Don Q. Washington

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library
Curtin University of Technology,
Kent St, Bentley WA 6102
GPO Box U1987 Perth WA 6845
Tel: 08 9266 4205 Fax: 08 9266 4185
Email: jcpml@boris.curtin.edu.au
Web: <http://john.curtin.edu.au>

Senator John Faulkner (centre) received research help from staff members David Wylie and Lesley Wallace for his recent book on the Federal Parliamentary Labor Caucus, *True Believers*



SPONSORING THE ARTS.
ENDORSED BY THE
MINISTER FOR THE ARTS.