

JOHN CURTIN PRIME MINISTERIAL LIBRARY  
CURTIN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

# INFORMATION UPDATE

JULY 2014

## 2014 JCPML Anniversary Lecture

Dr Geoff Gallop will present the 2014 John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library Anniversary Lecture on Tuesday 26th August 2014. The lecture is entitled *Is constitutional freedom enough? The battle for the heart & soul of a nation*.

Professor Geoff Gallop is the Director, Graduate School of Government at the University of Sydney. He was a member of the Western Australia Legislative Assembly from 1986 to 2006, and the Premier of Western Australia from 2001 to 2006.

Dr Gallop lodged his personal papers with Curtin Library in 2006, following his resignation as Premier of Western Australia. Dr Gallop felt a strong identification with Curtin - the University formed part of his Victoria Park electorate; he served over three years as a Councillor in Fremantle (John Curtin's electorate); and he and other members of his government often made use of the Curtin Library and particularly the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library.

The Geoff Gallop Collection, focuses on Dr Gallop's years in the WA Parliament and includes electoral office papers, speeches and speech notes, memorabilia, correspondence, electorate scrapbooks, political cartoons, government

Above: John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. Image: James Rogers.  
Below: Dr Geoff Gallop.

achievement reports, direct mail, and papers on a wide variety of themes including WA electoral reform, the Australian republic, the Australian Labor Party and WA history, and the Burke, Dowding and Lawrence Governments.

### Event details:

**Date** Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2014  
**Time** 4.15pm for a 4.30pm start  
**Venue** Sir Laurence Brodie Hall Atrium  
John Curtin Gallery, Building 200A  
Curtin University, Kent Street, Bentley  
The lecture will be followed by light refreshments.

RSVP by 18<sup>th</sup> August 2014  
**Telephone** +618 9266 4912 or  
**Email** [library-events@curtin.edu.au](mailto:library-events@curtin.edu.au)

*Parking is available in Car Park D3. Enter via the main entrance on Kent Street and follow the signs.*



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# 2013-2014 VISITING SCHOLAR LECTURE BY DR TOBY DAVIDSON



Left to right: Emeritus Professor David Black, Dr Toby Davidson, Professor Sara de Freitas and Imogen Garner. Dr Toby Davidson delivering his lecture. Tennyson's *Poetical Works* inscribed by John Curtin.

*That reddish veil which o'er the face  
Of night-hag East is drawn...  
Flames new disaster for the race?  
Or can it be the dawn?*

On 27 December 1941 this short extract from *Dawnward*, a poem written early in the twentieth century by Bernard O'Dowd, an Australian born poet of Irish descent, was used by then Prime Minister John Curtin to open what was arguably his greatest rhetorical piece and most significant published article *The Task Ahead* often also referred to as the 'turn to America statement'. In similar vein less than three weeks earlier Curtin had concluded his historic broadcast in the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and Australia's declaration of war on Japan with the words of Swinburne

*Come forth, be born and live  
Thou hast help to give...  
Hasten thine hour  
And halt not til thy work be done.*

These extracts formed a centrepiece in the 2014 JCPML Visiting Scholar lecture on 30 April under the title *Good for the Soul: John Curtin's Life with Poetry* presented by Dr Toby Davison, an award winning Australian poet and lecturer at MacQuarie University in Sydney and a great-grandson of John Curtin.

Over the years since the 1990s the JCPML Visiting Scholar programme has resulted in the production of a number of notable and valuable publications including David Day's *John Curtin: A Life* published in 1999. In that year JCPML Historical Consultant David Black was Visiting Scholar and

wrote *Friendship is a Sheltering Tree: John Curtin's Letters 1907 to 1945*, in the course of which references to Curtin's love of poetry were made from time to time. Subsequently, in 2004 Dr James Curran presented a lecture on *A Crisis of national meaning: Prime ministers and the dilemma of Australian nationalism* arising from his earlier studies on prime ministerial rhetoric and Australian nationalism. This year's lecture, however, focussed directly on Curtin and his 'life with poetry' and Toby Davidson provided abundant evidence to justify his assertion that Curtin was a 'passionate and voracious reader who held poetry in particular esteem'.

This is the less surprising when taking into account the fact that although Curtin's formal education ended in his early teens he became by profession a journalist who over the years edited and wrote numerous articles for trade union newspapers as well as the *West Australian* during the years in the early 1930s when he was out of Parliament. Curtin did not himself write poetry (as had his father-in-law, daughter and in recent years Toby himself) but it played a crucial role in his life, fascinating him as a small child and subsequently playing a central role in having 'allowed him to socialise... and to reinforce ties, friendships, aims, credos and loves'.

By the age of nineteen when he had 'effectively switched religions from Catholicism to socialism' poetry came to play a large part in his life and it was in this period for example that he was drawn to the works of an array of Australian and international poets. These included O'Dowd himself of whom he spoke in terms of veneration but Toby comments that 'initially, Curtin's engagement with non-Australian poets proved the stronger'. All this must be seen in the wide array of activities and interests for Curtin during his Victorian

Socialist parties including drama, novels, choirs, orchestras, socialist scouts and football (including the Ruskin Football Club for which Curtin 'often laced up his boots'.

One fascinating aspect of Curtin the socialist's involvement with the poetic world, was his preoccupation with Dante's *Inferno* which led Curtin to ruminate—'a faith is first feared and then embraced. Today the world is afraid of socialism, Tomorrow it will desire it'—and to underline an excerpt with associated commentary indicating 'Remorse seems to me the heaviest punishment. We cry out[sic] Ah if I but had that chance again how different would I act'.

Linking these kinds of comments Toby is able to draw various conclusions as to where Curtin stood in his desires for and fears concerning the political world and perhaps crucially his belief that logic rather than bluster was the key to oratory. The active involvement of the Needham family in the world of poetry was crucial to the nature and success of Curtin's marriage with literary references abounding in his correspondence with both Abraham Needham and Elsie. These led to Toby's conclusion that the 'network of socialist bibliophiles' was 'deeply immersed in poetry' and when Curtin became editor of the *Westralian Worker* far from diluting 'his ties with poetry' it had 'at least for the 1920s... the opposite effect. This also left open the question as to whether Vigilant the pseudonymous book reviewer for the *Worker* and Curtin himself were in fact one and the same person.

Finally, when moving to Curtin's political career Toby considers poetry—one hour's poetry every Sunday became the ritual—and contends that poetry served the twin purposes for Curtin—to rouse and to console. In wartime

this was especially apposite and in this regard Curtin was acutely aware that the minds, as well as the bodies, of the next generation were being sacrificed. That this should be so reflected the fact that poetry was 'a lifelong companion for John Curtin' whether as a young socialist; the activist 'scouring Dante's *Inferno* for pragmatic moral teachings'; the unionist in love with a poet's daughter who shared his affinity with words; the newspaper editor who ran (and more than likely wrote) some of the most sophisticated poetry interpretation then available in Australia...[and] the politician and statesman...depicted throughout Australia by the newspapers as a symbol of the Australian citizen, whose only idiosyncrasy [sic] was that he quoted poetry. The handwritten annotations in the various books of poetry and other literary works in Curtin's collection contained frequent (marginally) misquoted excerpts which only served to confirm that they were written from memory thus reflecting an aspect of Curtin's life that went far beyond occasional perusal of numerous works with which he became familiar outside and beyond whatever formal education he had received.

To Curtin poetry was a window to what life was all about and in the darkest hours of his life and political career it provided a message of hope. Toby has made an important, indeed major contribution to our understanding of Curtin the man.

**Professor David Black**  
JCPML Historical Consultant

# 2014 VISITING SCHOLAR

The 2014 JCPML Visiting Scholar is Dr Deborah Gare, Associate Professor in the School of Arts and Sciences, and leads the History program at the University of Notre Dame. Deborah is the author or editor of several leading works, including *Making Australian History: The politics of the past since 1788* (Cengage, 2008). Her research interests are, broadly, Australian, Western Australian and Empire history. In particular, Deborah is currently writing a history of women in Fremantle and a biography of Mary Ann Friend (1800-39). She was previously a Research Associate at Curtin University, a Visiting Fellow of the University of British Columbia and a Visiting Scholar at the University of Manchester. Deborah has a strong interest in teaching and learning within the Humanities and represented the Deans Council (DASSH) in the Australian Learning and Teaching Council project which developed graduate standards for the discipline of History.

Dr Gare will conduct her research at the JCPML in August and will explore a broad range of social issues and conditions within Fremantle during the inter-war years. Her research will include human experience stories and how Curtin responded to them. Deborah's research will be presented at a lecture late in 2014.



Dr Deborah Gare

## Public tours program

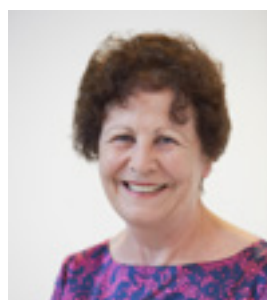
Tours of the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library are now available for booking by interested groups. The tours, which take about one hour, are available to members of the public, community groups and post-secondary students. Participants will be taken through the reading room and stacks area of the library, and see some of the unique and original items from the collections.

Tours are available on weekdays only, and groups to a maximum of 15 people are preferred. For more information contact the Library Archivist, Sally Laming on 9266 4205 or email [jcpml@curtin.edu.au](mailto:jcpml@curtin.edu.au)



Items from the collection. Image: James Rogers.

## Imogen Garner retires



The University Librarian and JCPML Director, Ms Imogen Garner is retiring on the 4th July after 11 years at Curtin University. Imogen formally took on the position of Director of the JCPML in March 2004, following her appointment to Curtin University as University Librarian in July 2003.

As Director of the JCPML, Imogen advocated for the JCPML within the University, working with staff to further the JCPML's programs and officiated at JCPML public events. The JCPML thanks Imogen for her support and contribution as Director, and wishes her all the best for her retirement.

## Curtin biography wins national literary award

Bob Wurth's historic biography *The Battle for Australia* has won first prize for non-fiction in the national literary awards sponsored by the Fellowship of Australian Writers. The JCPML hosted the national launch of the book in November 2013 for Bob Wurth, a former JCPML Visiting Scholar.

The Library congratulates Bob on his award.

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library  
Curtin University, Kent St, Bentley WA 6102  
GPO Box U1987 Perth WA 6845  
Tel: +61 8 9266 4205 Fax: +61 8 9266 4185  
Email: [jcpml@curtin.edu.au](mailto:jcpml@curtin.edu.au) Web: [john.curtin.edu.au](http://john.curtin.edu.au)