

Personal Portrait of a Prime Minister

The personal letters of Australia's wartime prime minister, John Curtin, have been published by the JCPML, producing an intimate portrait of one of Australia's greatest leaders. The letters have been compiled and interpreted by Professor David Black under the title 'Friendship is a Sheltering Tree': John Curtin's Letters 1907 to 1945 and the book was launched on 26 February by Professor Tom Stannage.

"There isn't another book that takes us as close to an Australian prime minister as this. I cannot think of published letters by any other Australian politician that are so intimate," said Professor Stannage to an audience of approximately 150 interested participants who attended the book launch.

For the first time the letters chronicling John Curtin's relationship with his wife Elsie, previously only revealed in fragments, have now been published in full. Also included is personal correspondence to colleagues, close friends and political allies which provides revealing insights into a man for whom love and affection remained constant from beginning to end. An inside view of historical events is provided through Curtin's own commentary on tumult-



Top: John Curtin at the Lodge Bottom: Prof. David Black at the book launch

uous eras in Australian history including the conscription referendum of 1916 and the dark days of World War Two.

Dr Vicki Williamson gratefully acknowledged the Curtin family's generous donation of material to the JCPML collection. This donation included hundreds of photographs from the family albums, books from Curtin's private library, personal papers and correspondence, sound recordings of Curtin's speeches, scrapbooks of newspaper cuttings from the 1890s through to 1945 and a range of memorabilia such as the dinner program commemorating General Douglas MacArthur's arrival in Australia

"Throughout all the words John Curtin



wrote to family, friends and colleagues for nearly 40 years there is not one sentence or thought which could be described as mean-spirited and not one occasion when matters in dispute degenerated into vituperation," said Professor Black. "From these letters we can form a revealing and important picture of John Curtin."

See enclosed flyer to order your copy.



Over the past few months the JCPML has continued its innovative development of ERA by digitising the sound in most of John Curtin's speeches and the JCPML oral histories so that users can link from transcripts to listen to the sound files. To check out a sample, visit "What's New" from our home page and listen to John Curtin's ANZAC Day message – as timely now as it was in the midst of World War Two, and one of the last speeches he made before his death in July 1945.

Innovation on the Web

"In Search of John Curtin"

Dr John Edwards, JCPML Visiting Scholar for 2000, gave a stimulating and thought-provoking lecture on 19 April. Taking a look at the way certain major events in the first six months of Curtin's prime ministership define our thinking about John Curtin, Dr Edwards said, "I want to argue that with the passing of time and the opening up of new materials we can see that Curtin is actually far more significant for his impact on the institutional and economic character of postwar Australia than for his resistance to the...Japanese."

Exposing the "national mythology" surrounding our wartime leader which places Curtin in the role of "accidental hero" and "reluctant" prime minister, Dr Edwards argued that new research reveals Curtin as a "sensible, talented and practical professional politician with a clear and instinctive grasp of the ways of power."

Dr Edwards feels that Curtin's enduring importance in Australian history rests not so much upon his wartime achievements as upon his postwar legacy in shaping Australian politics and economy. For instance Curtin was instrumental, within months of becoming prime minister, of instituting two central pillars of our postwar economy: Commonwealth control over income tax and central bank control over the private banks. As the Chief Economist for Australia and New Zealand for the global bank HSBC, Dr Edwards is well-versed to conclude that "the great globalising governments of postwar Australia...were in fact the inheritors and reworkers of the tradition of Curtin and Chifley".

The lecture will be shown on Channel 31 and can be accessed from the JCPML website.

JCPML has worked with various authors to publish information from the collection for easy access through a number of website projects.

At Home with John Curtin

Houses and their furnishings can suggest a great deal about the people who inhabit them and eventually John Curtin's house will be open to the public, allowing visitors to interpret its story. However, until then the JCPML provides the only means of exploring this house by *Visiting John Curtin at Home: 24 Jarrad Street* via the JCPML's website. Using photographs, video and sound, the JCPML has brought to life the story of the prime minister's modest home for people around the world to access.

Curtin the Journalist

Curtin's relationship with journalism has been ongoing in one way or another for most of his adult life. Before entering parliament, and for a few years in the early 1930s, John Curtin earned all or part of his livelihood as a journalist. He was the first parliamentarian to employ a press secretary and during his years as wartime prime minister, he took journalists into his confidence to a degree that is unheard of in today's politics. The story of John Curtin's development as a journalist and his special relationship with the media as prime minister is explored in *John Curtin: From Revolutionary Firebrand to Journalist in Spirit*.

A Man of Peace, A Time of War

Our very popular exhibition, *John Curtin: A Man of Peace, A Time of War*, has now become an online exhibition which can be visited by anyone anywhere in the world. The exhibition follows Curtin's journey from poor country boy to wartime prime minister.

He was the revolutionary young socialist turned political pragmatist, the pacifist called upon to lead Australia during its greatest wartime crisis. The online exhibition also features for the first time exciting panoramas which allow users to 'walk around' the exhibition viewing the displays in virtual reality.

New ERA Tutorial

The ERA (Electronic Research Archive) Tutorial is a series of user-friendly, interactive guides and quizzes designed to help interested people become more confident about searching for and viewing material from ERA. More than 40,000 items can now be accessed through ERA including:

- ◆ Images (photographs, documents)
- ◆ Full text (contents of documents)
- ◆ Audio (oral histories, sound recordings)
- ◆ Finding aids (information about material which has not been digitised)

The Tutorial concludes with a Tour and hints and answers are provided throughout to assist and encourage users.

Available soon:

Documenting our Society —

Have you ever thought of records as the glue that holds a society together? *Understanding Society through its Documents* is part of the JCPML's ongoing endeavour to contribute to the development and promotion of archives and in this project the JCPML addresses the concept of records and recordkeeping and their importance to society. The website will give users an overview of recordkeeping, reveal how records provide evidence of our lives and document our culture and let users explore how records, both personal and public, can empower justice and help to ensure a just society. Keep an eye out for this forthcoming site.

Digital Partnerships

The National Archives of Australia (NAA) is currently creating a unique web portal to provide access to the documentary history of Australia's 25 prime ministers, giving Australian citizens, as well as scholars and other researchers, a behind-the-scenes look at the first century of the nation's political history. Dr Lenore Coltheart, NAA Websites Curator, visited the JCPML to discuss ways in which the new NAA website will connect with significant online resources, such as the JCPML website, and create a 'route map' to the key collections of original material on the 25 prime ministers identified in Australia and overseas.



From Left: Kandy-Jane Henderson, Lenore Coltheart and Lesley Wallace



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

ERA “deep links” to other databases

An exciting new advance in collection access is being pioneered by the JCPML and National Archives of Australia (NAA). Previously, when John Curtin-related records were identified in the collections of other institutions, digital access was obtained in one of two ways:

- ◆ Copies were obtained and added to the JCPML collection, then digitised to become accessible to researchers through the Electronic Research Archive (ERA).
- ◆ Material held in other institutions has been remotely scanned as digital images to become accessible through ERA.

Recently the NAA commenced digitising their collection for access by researchers through the RecordSearch database.

Some of the first items that have been digitised are records identified by the JCPML as being of value to researchers of John Curtin. Ways to access these images directly through ERA have been investigated over the past few months. In February 2001 links to records concerning John Curtin's 1924 visit to the International Labour Organisation Conference in Geneva were successfully tested and added to ERA, along with records of the 1934 Grants Commission.

“Deep linking” in this way enables researchers to link directly to the item in another institution's database and view that record even though they entered their search through ERA, and not the other institution's search engine. This is a very powerful tool which will greatly increase convenience for researchers.



Mrs Francisco Ferrer (Frances) Shea (nee Gray) (1909-2000)

The JCPML offers its condolences to the Shea and Gray families, particularly to Ros and Norm Marlborough, on the recent death of Mrs Frances Shea. Mrs Shea was a very special JCPML friend, donor and supporter and the Shea family involved JCPML staff in several family celebrations including Mrs Shea's 90th birthday party.

Named after Francisco Ferrer, a Spanish socialist, Mrs Shea soon adopted the easier sobriquet of Frances and was affectionately nicknamed “Billy Gray” by John Curtin, whom she met as a young woman when she was employed by the *Westralian Worker*. Mrs Shea came to know the Curtin family well and became a great admirer of the prime minister.

Over the years Mrs Shea has been interviewed for a number of documentaries and articles about John Curtin and in 1995 she recorded an oral history for the JCPML. Mrs Shea's memories live on through her oral history with excerpts featuring in the JCPML's new exhibition and able to be heard through ERA on the JCPML website. She leaves behind a large and loving family who will long remember this sprightly, gracious lady.

Rest in Peace

Spreading Knowledge the Aim of Education

Spreading knowledge of John Curtin and his special qualities of vision, leadership and community service is the aim and passion of Ros Marshall, Education Officer at the JCPML. The JCPML Education Program began two years ago with the launch of a program for secondary schools.

Since joining the JCPML Ros has expanded the program to include a wonderful hands-on cooperative learning experience for metropolitan primary schools and has reached out to primary schools in country and remote Western Australia with the development of the JCPML Treasure Box – a travelling learning centre for students in Years 5-7. A further innovation for 2001 has been the instigation of JCPML visits to country schools, the Albany region being Ros' first destination in late March.

A feature of the JCPML Education Programs is the flexibility of program delivery and Ros has made it a priority to customize the program to suit schools' needs. This has been very successful resulting in a significant increase in bookings for 2001.



Contributions and Support since December 2000

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2001 Visiting Scholar

Prof. Peter Edwards, respected historian and writer, is the 2001 JCPML Visiting Scholar. Best known as the Official Historian of Australia's involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1975, Prof. Edwards is currently Consultant Historian to the Department of Defence, Senior Consulting Historian to the Australian War Memorial, and Honorary Professor at Deakin University in Melbourne. On Australia Day 2001 he was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his services to Australian history.

A graduate of the Universities of Western Australia and Oxford, where he was a Rhodes

Scholar, Prof. Edwards has also held a Harkness Fellowship for research in the USA and a Harold White Fellowship at the National Library in Canberra. In 2001-02 he will be an Honorary Visiting Professor in the University College of the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy.

Prof. Edwards is interested in Australian foreign relations, particularly Australian-American relations and as the JCPML Visiting Scholar he will be writing on Curtin's relationship with MacArthur and, in conjunction with the JCPML, will be producing a special issue of the *Australian Journal of International Affairs*.



Mrs Elsie Macleod (centre) visits the JCPML

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