2015 Visiting Scholar

The John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library (JCPML) is seeking applications for the 2015 Visiting Scholar Program.

The John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library (JCPML) Visiting Scholar program is designed to encourage research on John Curtin and the use of the JCPML Archival Collection. The program has been successful, with research on John Curtin resulting in the publication of several books, the production of an award winning play, the creation of online resources for the JCPML website and the presentation of public lectures by historians and academics.

Project information

The focus of the 2015 JCPML Visiting Scholar Program is to improve the discovery of the North West and Kimberley tour records from the McCallum collection. The aim of the project is to develop an image rich geolocation resource using a social networking site; which will include date and location information, historical documents and photographs.

Applications are sought from candidates with the experience or skills to:

- Create a geolocation history project e.g. Historypin;
- Creatively reuse and interpret digital collections;
- Link and combine digital collections.

Visit the 2015 JCPML Visiting Scholar Program webpage for full position and application details.
Over the years there have been speakers with a variety of political and/or academic backgrounds who have accepted the invitation to deliver the annual John Curtin Prime Ministerial Anniversary Lecture. This event is customarily scheduled for a day in July or August to commemorate Curtin’s death on 5 July 1945 (within weeks of the Japanese surrender). Curtin was the second of the only three Australian prime ministers to die in office.

Of the fifteen lectures held between 1998 and 2014, eight were delivered by political leaders (including a former Western Australian Premier). The other lectures featured a variety of speakers including historian Geoffrey Serle, renowned journalist and author Paul Kelly, prominent academics and the United States Ambassador to Australia. Even allowing for this diversity of speakers, this year’s address by Peter FitzSimons AM was perhaps the most extraordinarily varied of all. Delivered on 27 July 2015, the lecture covered a diverse range of issues, but consistently focussed on the central theme of what it means to be Australian. The Hon. Julia Gillard, attending her first JCPML lecture as Patron, introduced Peter FitzSimons.

It is no exaggeration to suggest that Peter FitzSimons has followed a most interesting and varied career path, commencing with his club and international rugby career. Peter’s active journalism career commenced with the Sydney Morning Herald in 1988. Peter has continued his connection with the Sydney Morning Herald and the Sun Herald as a columnist. Peter became Australia’s bestselling non-fiction author, with an output of 27 books to date. The subjects of his books include former opposition leader Kim Beazley, boxer Les Darcy, war heroine Nancy Wake and Ned Kelly.

Two of Peter’s more recent books - Kokoda and Gallipoli, draw attention to the Australian tendency to highlight failures rather than successes when defining what it means to be Australian. This was one of the major themes of Peter’s Anniversary lecture. For Peter FitzSimons, it is the successes at Kokoda, Tobruk and Eureka which should be at the forefront of the Australian ethos, rather than the ‘magnificent failures’ (as was the case with Gallipoli). Peter contended that what should be highlighted about Gallipoli is the extraordinary ineptitude of the British planning and the achievements and humanity displayed by soldiers on all sides of the battle. He told the Gallipoli story with particular insight from the Turkish viewpoint.

Peter FitzSimons recently accepted the role as Chair of the Australian Republican movement (in succession to Geoff Gallop who delivered the Anniversary Lecture in 2014). In the online version of his lecture, Peter rounds off his paper with his concern that:

“115 years after Federation, even though Australia is a separate nation which prides itself on its egalitarianism, on its embrace of the fair go, we still draw our hereditary Head of State from the most elite family on the planet, living 25,000 kilometres away in a palace in London.”

The central argument of Peter’s lecture concerned what should be Australia’s ‘found story’. In his view, this should not be Gallipoli (extraordinary story as it is) or Federation (“…which hardly stacks up against the USA’s War of Independence against Great Britain, France’s storming of the Bastille, and Great Britain’s signing of the Magna Carta”). Instead it should be something that “…is homegrown, magnificent and embodies our greatest value as a people” specifically the events at Eureka in the 1850s.

In an original and relevant comparison, Peter focussed on the aims and ambitions of the Chartist movement which published the People’s Charter in Great Britain in 1838. The six basic planks in its platform were a vote “for every man of sound mind not in gaol”; secret ballots in elections; no property qualifications for members of parliament; pay for parliamentary
members, enabling the poor to stand for parliament; equal constituencies, so everyone’s vote is worth the same amount and annual parliaments with all members elected for one year only (the one aspect of the charter which was never achieved). The events which followed in Great Britain and in many parts of Europe led to great changes in the Old World and in the New World of Australia.

Peter contended that the Australian counterpart of the People’s Charter was never achieved). The events linked to subservience beyond Australia’s story to be told with a focus on Australia’s foresight and substantial achievement; not on events linked to subservience beyond our shores. Quoting from Imagining Australia: Ideas for Our Future (published for the 150th anniversary of the events at Eureka) he argued:

“...fealty of a large body of colonists has been sworn to an entity other than the British crown. Instead these men and women [had] sworn loyalty to each other, to their rights and liberties, and to this land beneath the Southern Cross.”

In this context, the overriding message of Peter FitzSimons’s lecture was that the stories which underpin Australian identity should be stories concerning Australians successfully fighting for their own identities, rather than stories of magnificent failures linked to the mother country. The link with John Curtin arose during the time Peter was on the one hand writing a biography of Kim Beazley, the son of the man who succeeded Curtin as member for Fremantle in 1945, and on the other telling the story of the events on the Kokoda Track, when the Japanese were halted there. These events led to a focus on the man who, almost accidentally, became prime minister within weeks of Pearl Harbour. In Peter “s own words:

“...feel a primary obligation to save Australia.” In Peter’s words:

“That was John Curtin. A great leader of his country, of his people came from such modest beginnings. A truly great Australian…and the people loved him for it.”

Peter FitzSimons dealt with a range of issues in his substantial and comprehensive address. However, the constant theme was a desire for Australia’s story to be told with a focus on Australia’s foresight and substantial achievement; not on events linked to subservience beyond our shores. Quoting from Imagining Australia: Ideas for Our Future (published for the 150th anniversary of the events at Eureka) he argued:

“Australia should re-elevate Eureka to its previous position as a central legend of Australian nationalism, standing for those distinctly Australian values—egalitarianism, mateship, fairness—together with democracy, freedom, republicanism and multiculturalism …Obviously, Australian nationalism can never be reduced to just one legend, but Eureka offers great potential to a nation floundering for a national story.”

And in his own words:

“When we become a republic what better flag to choose than the Eureka flag.”
Open Day

Open Day is a significant day in the Curtin University calendar when thousands of visitors attend the campus to explore the university and learn about courses on offer.

This year the JCPML participated in Open Day, held on Sunday 2 August, by offering archives and library treasures tours.

The collections of both the JCPML and the University library special collections are held at the JCPML, and Open Day provided an opportunity to showcase some of the most precious and rare items from these collections together.

Visitors were able to tour the Reading Room and Researchers’ Lounge to view the briefcase used by John Curtin, alongside his gold pocket watch, letters from the collections, and the presentation volume Four Freedoms, featuring the artwork of Norman Rockwell (given to Curtin during his visit to the United States in 1944). Rare books on display included limited editions and some of the oldest items owned by the University library, including the journal of John Hunter, published in 1795.

The JCPML will continue to encourage visitors to learn about the collections, and offers a Public Tours program to interested groups.

For bookings contact the Library Archivist at s.laming@curtin.edu.au.

ABOVE LEFT: JCPML00287/4 Gold pocket watch presented to John Curtin on the eve of his departure for the Geneva conference, 1924.
ABOVE RIGHT: JCPML00288/1 Prime Minister John Curtin’s briefcase.

ABOVE: JCPML001138/2 People dancing in the street in celebration of the end of the war, High Street, Fremantle, August 1945. Records of Owen Marks.