

John Joseph Ambrose Curtin

Prime Minister of Australia 1941–45

A Victorian by birth, John Curtin moved to Perth, Western Australia in 1917 to become editor of the *Westralian Worker* newspaper. He was a known activist within the labour movement, and an outspoken opponent of conscription – the issue that split the Labor Party in 1917.

Curtin failed in his first two attempts in Western Australia to win a seat in federal Parliament – in the seats of Perth (1919) and Fremantle (1925). He won election as member for Fremantle in 1928, and held the seat in 1929, serving as a backbench member of the Scullin Labor Government (1929–31). Curtin lost the seat in 1931, when Scullin's government was defeated, but regained Fremantle in 1934 and held it for the remainder of his career. He succeeded Scullin as party leader in 1935 and led the opposition as the world drifted towards World War II.

John Curtin became Prime Minister in October 1941 when the short-lived Fadden Government lost its majority in parliament. As well as Prime Minister, Curtin served as Chairman of the Advisory War Council, member of the War Cabinet, Minister for Defence Coordination and Minister for Defence. He was also acting Minister for External Affairs in 1942, 1943 and 1945, during the absence overseas of HV Evatt. In 1944 Curtin attended the conference of dominion prime ministers in London and visited Canada and the United States.

In the face of the Japanese threat during World War II, Curtin took steps seen as necessary to protect Australia. In 1942, he invited American General Douglas MacArthur to Australia to prepare the combined force that would repel the Japanese from the Pacific. He also stood firm in a dispute with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill over the destination of Australian forces recalled from the Middle East.

John Curtin died in office on 5 July 1945.

John Curtin's records held in Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Copies of photographs of John Curtin (A duplicate of these photographs is held as PP975/1)	1938–44	M1422
Tape recordings of wartime speeches made by John Curtin	1939–44	M1219

<u>Photographs relating to John Curtin's term as Prime Minister</u>	1941–45	M1218
<u>Correspondence of John Curtin as Prime Minister – alphabetical series</u>	1941–44	M1415
<u>Correspondence of John Curtin as Prime Minister – special subject series</u>	1941–44	M1416
<u>Reports and conference papers maintained by John Curtin as Prime Minister</u>	1941–45	M2319

Records relating to Curtin during his time as Prime Minister may be found in various Departments' record series, especially the Prime Minister's Department and the Department of Defence. Some selected items appear below.

Other records relating to John Curtin – in Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Mr Curtin's broadcast talks over the national network</u>	1940–43	SP112/1, 31/3/5
<u>Prime Minister – Press messages – Hon. J Curtin</u>	1941	A461, S4/1/12
<u>Mr Curtin's speeches 1941 – [press cuttings]</u>	1941–42	A5954, 1931/1
<u>Exchange of cablegrams between Mr Churchill and Mr Curtin after outbreak of War with Japan</u>	1941–42	A5954, 581/17
<u>Prime Minister – Rt Hon. J Curtin</u>	1941–45	A461, R4/1/12
<u>Portrait of Rt Hon. John Curtin by Cav A Dattilo-Rubbo</u>	1941–47	A463, 1965/1998
<u>Federal Election, 1943</u>	1942–44	SP286/16, 5
<u>Books and journals – John Curtin – Australian</u>	1943	SP109/3, 323/26
<u>Biography of Prime Minister Mr John Curtin by Mr A Chester</u>	1943	SP112/1, 352/53/2
<u>Post War Reconstruction – Mr Curtin's proposal for Empire Council. UK comment on British/Commonwealth relations</u>	1943–44	A989, 1943/735/150/4
<u>Australia and the War – Statement by the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr John Curtin.</u>	1944	A5954, 667/4
<u>Mr Curtin's statement on international affairs – review of war situation [book notes relating to manuscript]</u>	1944	A5954, 826/23
<u>Death of the Rt Hon. John Curtin PC MP</u>	1945	A1066, PI45/88
<u>Successor to Mr Curtin as Leader of the Labor Party [press cuttings]</u>	1945	A5954, 2207/3
<u>Death of the Prime Minister John Curtin [press cuttings]</u>	1945–47	A5954, 2207/2

Other records relating to John Curtin – in Sydney

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Curtin, John – Declaration of War on Japan (audio tapes)</u>	1941	C102, 1552510
<u>The passing of John Curtin</u>	1945	SP286/16, 13

Other records relating to John Curtin – in Melbourne

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Booklet: 12 months Labour Rule: What the Government led by Rt Hon. John Curtin has accomplished</u>	1943	MP956/2, 1078

Research guide

- [John Curtin: Guide to the Archives of Australia's Prime Ministers](#)