



## REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

### 11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November, 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

#### 11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE\*

*John Curtin's House* is a competent example of the Inter War California Bungalow style residence, conservative in its approach to the style and not in any way distinguishable from its context by virtue of particular design qualities. (Criterion 1.1)

*John Curtin's House* contributes to the general context and tenor of the immediate district; an area that is highly regarded for its density of well-designed Federation period and inter-war residences. (Criterion 1.3)

#### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

*John Curtin's House* is of significance as the family home of John Curtin, Prime Minister of Australia during World War Two, from 1941 to his death in 1945. (Criterion 2.2)

*John Curtin's House* is of significance as the family home of John Curtin from its construction in 1923 to 1945, and is believed to have been designed by him. Journalist, political activist, Labor politician, leader of the Australian Labor Party, and Prime Minister from 1941 to his death in 1945 during World War Two, John Curtin was the first representative of a Western Australian electorate to serve as Prime Minister. (Criterion 2.3)

*John Curtin's House* is of significance also as the family home of John Curtin's wife, Elsie Curtin CBE, member of the Fremantle Women's Labor Organisation, State President of the Western Australian Labor Women's Organisation, member of the Central Council of the Red Cross Society, and Patron of the Cottesloe Ladies' Surf Life Saving Club, from 1923 to her death in 1975. (Criterion 2.3)

#### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

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\* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

#### **11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE**

*John Curtin's House* is valued for social and cultural reasons, as the home of John Curtin from 1923 to his death in 1945, by the community of Cottesloe as evidenced by its inclusion in the Municipal Inventory, and by the wider community of Western Australia and of Australia, as evidenced by its purchase by the Commonwealth and State governments. Further the naming of Curtin Avenue, Curtin House, Curtin University, and John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library after John Curtin constitute a mark of his significance and of the significance of the places associated with him. (Criterion 4.1)

With its acquisition by the State and Commonwealth, and with interpretation *John Curtin's House* may continue to contribute significantly to the wider community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.1)

#### **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

##### **12. 1. RARITY**

*John Curtin's House* has rarity value to the State as the longstanding residence of the only representative of a Western Australian electorate to be elected Prime Minister in the history of the State to 1999. (Criterion 5.1)

##### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*John Curtin's House* is representative of the Inter War California Bungalow style and is a conservative interpretation of the style. It is a typical middle class dwelling. (Criterion 6.1)

##### **12. 3 CONDITION**

*John Curtin's House* has received basic maintenance throughout its existence. There has been no thoroughgoing maintenance in recent times and there are a number of minor issues that require attention. There is evidence of termite infestation in the garages, a small amount of minor cracking in the house itself, and a general need to carry out regimes such as repainting. Overall the place is in good condition.

##### **12. 4 INTEGRITY**

*John Curtin's House* remains in use a dwelling, although this is likely to change following its acquisition by the State and Commonwealth. The long-term aim is conservation and interpretation, and as such the long term viability of the place appears sustainable. The present integrity of the place is high.

##### **12. 5 AUTHENTICITY**

*John Curtin's House* was constructed and then went through a number of minor alterations during John Curtin's time, with a further small number of changes undertaken during the Curtin family's remaining time in the house from 1945 to 1998. Curtains, bookshelves, built in cupboards and other quite minor detailed items remain intact. There were extensions of rooms into the verandah zone and room uses which changed pre World War Two. Overall the place retains a moderate to high degree of authenticity.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Robin Chinnery, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Philip Griffiths, Architect.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*John Curtin's House* is a single storey residence (1923), reputed to have been designed by John Curtin, as his family home, in 1923. Arnold Bullock of Cottesloe constructed it for him. The place is a single storey brick and tile residence in the Inter-War California Bungalow style.

In the early 1830s, the first Perth-Fremantle (sic) Road was made, and John Butler established his farm, 'Prospect Place' on 250 acres at the area of present day Peppermint Grove.<sup>1</sup> Travellers on the road would stop for rest at his farmhouse, which became known as the Halfway House. In the 1860s, a new Perth-Fremantle Road was constructed and the bridge over the Swan River at North Fremantle were constructed by convicts. Subsequently, there was a considerable increase in traffic on the road, which was declared a public highway in 1872.<sup>2</sup> The halfway House became a popular inn under licensee John Briggs from 1872, who sold it to Robert Napoleon Bullen in 1882.<sup>3</sup> Bullen recognised the possible opportunities that might be afforded following the opening of the Fremantle-Guildford railway line in 1881, and he began an ambitious plan for improvements, to build the Albion Pleasure Grounds.<sup>4</sup> To this date, there had been little development in the area.

In 1886, Governor Broome named the locality Cottesloe, to honour Captain Fremantle, whose brother had been raised to the peerage as Baron Cottesloe of Swanbourne and Hardwick. In the late 1880s, a few sub-divisions were commenced in Cottesloe; however, residential development was slow, and the district remained sparsely settled in the 1890s, with much of the land owned by investors. The period 1895 to 1910, saw the suburbanisation of Perth in the wake of the Western Australian gold boom, and Cottesloe grew from an estimated 300 houses and a population of 1,383 in 1901, to 541 houses and a population of 2,704 by 1911, as more land was sub-divided for residential use.<sup>5</sup>

Cottesloe and neighbouring Cottesloe Beach became popular, with some homes erected as permanent residences, whose owners often commuted to work via the railway. Other places were erected as holiday homes.

Cottesloe Lot 166 was transferred to Joseph Henry Barsden, Legal Practitioner, and Walter Stephen Finey, of Claremont, Freeholder, in 1913.<sup>6</sup> Lot 166 was sub-divided with a number of lots sold from 1914.<sup>7</sup> Their names are commemorated in the locality by Barsden and Finey Streets.

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<sup>1</sup> Arrowsmith's Plan of the town site of Perth, 1833, in Seddon, George, and Ravine, David A *City and Its Setting: Images of Perth, Western Australia*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1986, p. 100; and Marchant-James, Ruth, *Heritage of Pines: A History of the Town of Cottesloe Western Australia*. Town of Cottesloe, 1977, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Marchant-James, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Stannage, C. T., *The People of Perth: A Social History of Western Australia's Capital City*, Perth City Council, Perth, 1979, p. 241.

<sup>6</sup> Certificate of Title Cottesloe Lot 166, Vol. 576 Fol. 104, 22 December 1913.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 1914-1969.

On 24 June 1919, Lot 26 of Cottesloe Lot 166 was transferred to William Horatio Nelson Richardson, Railway Employee of East Guildford.<sup>8</sup> The lot remained vacant land during his ownership.<sup>9</sup>

On 9 February 1923, the Lot was transferred by endorsement to Elsie Curtin of 15 Napier Street, Cottesloe.<sup>10</sup> The capital value of the vacant land was assessed at £150, and its annual value at £11 in that year.<sup>11</sup> Cottesloe had continued to be a popular residential suburb in the post World War One period, with a demographic mix that encompassed all levels of society.

Journalist John Curtin had arrived in Western Australia from Victoria in February 1917, to take up the position of Editor of *The Westralian Worker*.<sup>12</sup> Born in Creswick, Victoria, in 1885, John Curtin had left school at the age of thirteen. His career as a Labor journalist had begun with contributions to the *Socialist* and the *Labor Call*, and he became a protégé of Frank Anstey, a left-winger, and future Member of the House of Representatives. In this pre World War One period, Curtin became involved with the working class movement and was an active member of the Socialist Party of Victoria in Melbourne. In 1912, as Secretary of the Victorian sawmillers' (timberworkers) union, he assisted with the establishment of the Tasmanian branch of the union. It was during this period that he became friends with Abraham Needham and his family, and met his future wife, Elsie Needham (b. 1890).<sup>13</sup> In 1914, Curtin stood unsuccessfully for Federal Parliament as a Labor candidate.<sup>14</sup>

John Curtin married Elsie Needham in Perth in April 1917, and the newly married couple resided for a short period in Leederville in 1917, prior to moving to Napier Street, Cottesloe.<sup>15</sup> As Editor of *The Westralian Worker*, Curtin 'rehabilitated' the newspaper, earned the respect of his fellow colleagues in the newspaper industry in Western Australia, and as President of the Western Australian Journalists' Association worked to improve members' employment conditions and their educational standards.<sup>16</sup>

It is believed that John Curtin designed the house for the lot in Jarrad Street, Cottesloe, himself in the contemporary and popular Inter-War California Bungalow style.<sup>17</sup> He wanted 'a house with a verandah all the way around so that he could walk around in the wintertime thinking out his speeches.'<sup>18</sup> However, he compromised with Elsie's wishes, and the design as built had verandahs on three sides, at the front on the south, the east side, and the rear

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8 Certificate of Title Cottesloe Lot 166, Vol. 576 Fol. 104, 24 June 1919.

9 Cottesloe Rate Books, South Ward, 1919-23.

10 Certificate of Title Cottesloe Lot 166 and being Lot 26 on Plan 3639, Vol. 712 Fol. 65, 9 February 1923.

11 Cottesloe Rate Book South Ward, 1923.

12 Marchant-James, op. cit., p. 116.

13 Serle, Geoffrey in Ritchie, John (ed), *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Vol. 13, Melbourne University Press, 1993, p. 550.

14 Hunt, Lyall, (ed), *Westralian Portraits*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1979, pp. 227-228.

15 Marchant-James, op. cit., p. 116.

16 Hunt, op. cit., p. 228.

17 Beverley Lane, oral history interview with Lesly Carman-Brown, 1 September 1998. JCPML/00306. Transcript p. 1.

18 Esleie Macleod, oral history interview with Rhonda Jameison, 10 May 1994. JCPML/00012. Transcript p. 4.

at the north.<sup>19</sup> *John Curtin's House* was constructed in 1923, by Arnold Bullock, builder, of Broome Street, Cottesloe.

Arnold Bullock was a neighbour of the Curtin family, and he and his mother were family friends of the Curtins and Needhams, Elsie Curtin's parents, who also lived in Napier Street in the early 1920s. John Curtin's family believes that *John Curtin's House* was the first project which Arnold Bullock undertook as an independent builder.<sup>20</sup> It appears to be among his early works, as he is not listed in *Wise's Post Office Directory* as a builder until a later period in the 1920s.<sup>21</sup> He became a well-known and highly respected builder in Cottesloe in the late 1920s and 1930s. Among his works extant are the shops and residences at the corner of Marmion and Loma Streets, which he built for Thomas Ireland, and which served as the local 'corner' shops for the Curtin family and other residents of the district.<sup>22</sup>

On completion in 1923, *John Curtin's House* comprised two bedrooms, living room, kitchen, bathroom off the rear verandah, verandahs on three sides, east, south and north, and with three outbuildings in the rear yard, a water closet of brick and iron located near the north-west corner of the lot, with a timber weatherboard woodhouse attached, and a timber weatherboard laundry located to the rear of the north-west corner of the house.<sup>23</sup> The entrance to *John Curtin's House* was at the east side, with steps to a path from the front boundary.<sup>24</sup> A ramp led down from the back door to the path to the outbuildings, and at the north-west corner of the lot, an exit to the lane at the rear of the lot.<sup>25</sup>

The Curtin family took up residence at *John Curtin's House* following its completion in August 1923.<sup>26</sup> Elsie Curtin's mother, Annie Needham, came to reside at the place following the death of her husband.<sup>27</sup>

In 1924, alterations were made to *John Curtin's House* to better accommodate Elsie Curtin's mother, Annie Needham, and John and Elsie Curtin's growing children, also named John (b. 1921) and Elsie (b. 1917). Elsie Macleod, John Curtin's daughter recalls these works were implemented in 1924, the year in which John Curtin went to Geneva as a delegate to the ILO Conference.<sup>28</sup> The rear verandah was enclosed at the north-east with timber weatherboards, and converted for use as a kitchen at the centre, with a small bedroom opening from it at the eastern end, in which Annie Needham was accommodated for a period.<sup>29</sup> The kitchen opened at the other side, at the west, to a small vestibule area from which the rear exit opened, and the bathroom at the north-west corner of the house.<sup>30</sup> The original kitchen was converted to a bedroom, which was occupied by Elsie Curtin.<sup>31</sup> The front verandah was enclosed at the south-east corner of the house, to provide

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19     ibid.

20     Beverley Lane, op. cit., p. 41.

21     *Wise's Post Office Directory* 1923-1930.

22     Ronald Ireland, conversation with Robin Chinnery, 17 August 1999.

23     Metropolitan Sewerage Municipality of Cottesloe PROWA Cons. 4156 Item 1221, August 1934.

24     ibid.

25     ibid.

26     Cottesloe Rate Books South Ward, 1922-23.

27     *Wise's Post Office Directory* 1924, p. 383, and p. 524.

28     Eslie Macleod, op. cit., p. 7.

29     ibid, pp. 5-6.

30     Metropolitan Sewerage Municipality of Cottesloe, op. cit., August 1934.

31     Elsie Macleod, op. cit., p. 5.

accommodation for the John.<sup>32</sup> The verandah space was considerably reduced, and it was no longer possible to walk around the house on the verandahs as John Curtin had planned. The capital value of the property was assessed at £200, and the annual value at £48 in 1924.<sup>33</sup>

John Curtin was active in the local community of Cottesloe in the 1920s. For 'many years' he was Vice-President of the Cottesloe Cricket Club, whose ground was located at the reserve farther west in Jarrad Street.<sup>34</sup> Curtin liked to walk with his dog across the nearby Sea View Golf Course, and along the beachfront at Cottesloe, chatting with those he met. He was renowned throughout his life and remembered affectionately for his common touch, in his own immediate community at Cottesloe and in the wider community. His home at *John Curtin's House* remained central to his life throughout his career, where friends and associates were welcomed.<sup>35</sup>

In 1925, Curtin stood unsuccessfully for the Federal seat of Fremantle, which he won in 1928 and 1929, when he was elected the Member of the House of Representatives for Fremantle. Elected to caucus executive in 1929, Curtin attained prominence in Parliament as an orator. Living in Canberra for much of the time over the next three years, he sorely missed his wife and family, and his home near the ocean at Cottesloe.<sup>36</sup> In December 1931, Curtin was defeated in the anti-Scullin electoral landslide.

In the period from late 1931 to September 1934, Curtin returned to journalism. He freelanced for a time, working from his home at Cottesloe and from an office at Trades Hall after his appointment as publicity officer in mid 1932, producing articles for a number of newspapers, including *The Westralian Worker* and *The West Australian*, and continuing to be active in political life.<sup>37</sup> Curtin 'settled down to enjoy home life' at *John Curtin's House* in this period.<sup>38</sup> He was a familiar figure on the morning train from Cottesloe to Perth.<sup>39</sup> He would often walk down Jarrad Street and across the golf course to the beach at Cottesloe, generally accompanied by his dog, and these walks provided the time for reflection in which he composed his articles and speeches.

The second bedroom, which had served as a bedroom during Elsie's infancy, and which had been shared at that time with her grandmother, Annie Needham, was converted to a dining room, and the original kitchen was converted to a bedroom for Annie Needham.<sup>40</sup>

Elsie Curtin was also active in the community in the inter-war period, as a member of the committee responsible for the erection of the Cottesloe Infant Health Clinic, as a member of the Subiaco Choral Society, and in the Fremantle Labor Women's Organisation.<sup>41</sup>

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32     ibid.

33     Cottesloe Rate Book South Ward, 1924.

34     Marchant-James, op. cit., p. 86.

35     Elsie Macleod, op. cit., p. 39.

36     Hunt, op. cit., p. 230.

37     Serle, Geoffrey in Ritchie, John (ed), *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Vol. 13, Melbourne University Press, 1993, p. 550.

38     ibid, p. 552.

39     Trevor Lane, conversation with Robin Chinnery, 12 August 1999.

40     ibid.

41     Popham, Daphne *Profiles of 150 Women who helped make Western Australia's History*, Carroll's Pty. Ltd., Perth, 1978, p. 118.

A sewerage drawing of August 1934, at which period the street number of *John Curtin's House* was 14 Jarrad Street, shows *John Curtin's House* with a path leading from the front boundary to steps to the verandah and the main entrance at the east side of the house.<sup>42</sup> The path continues along the east of the house, past a lattice fence extending from the east boundary marking the division between the front and rear yards; then the path continues across the rear of the house, where it is met by the ramp from the rear exit, past the laundry and two trees to the west, to the brick closet, with the timber weatherboard building attached at its east, and to an exit into the rear lane.<sup>43</sup> The verandah at the south-west corner of the place was open.<sup>44</sup> It was enclosed at a subsequent date, in the period before 1939.<sup>45</sup>

In September 1934, Curtin was re-elected as the ALP candidate to the seat of Fremantle, joining the federal parliamentary ALP in opposition. On 1 October 1935, following Scullin's resignation due to ill health, caucus elected Curtin leader, a position he was to occupy until his death nearly ten years later, in July 1945.<sup>46</sup> It was 'unique for any party' in Federal politics to have a leader who represented a Western Australian electorate.<sup>47</sup>

Curtin's political career required him to spend extensive periods of time in Canberra, from whence he returned as often as possible in the circumstances to his family and his home. His marriage to Elsie was 'happy', and her support throughout his career was 'incalculable.'<sup>48</sup> It is noteworthy that Elsie managed all the family finances, *John Curtin's House* and the family's other property was registered in her name, and she supervised and managed all the day to day affairs of John Curtin's life.<sup>49</sup>

Circa mid 1930s, further alterations were made to *John Curtin's House*, with the enclosure of the front verandah at the south-west end, which was converted to an extension of the living room to serve as a study for John Curtin, with the removal of the wall from the living room to the verandah.<sup>50</sup> Photographs of John Curtin at *John Curtin's House* often show him seated working in this area of the Curtins' home. It is probable that the alterations to extend the dining room, formerly the second bedroom, were carried out also at this date. The wall to the verandah on the east was removed, and that section of the verandah was enclosed, with the extension opening to the verandah at the south, and the new wall fitted with windows to the east.<sup>51</sup>

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42 Metropolitan Sewerage Municipality of Cottesloe. PROWA Cons. 4156 Item 1221, August 1934.

43 *ibid.*

44 *ibid.*

45 Note: Elsie Macleod had stated that the enclosures were completed in 1924, but they were not.

46 Hunt, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-232.

47 Serle, *op. cit.*, p. 552.

48 *ibid.*, p. 557.

49 Certificate of Title Cottesloe Lot 166, *op. cit.*; Cottesloe Rate Books, *op. cit.*; and Elsie Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

50 The date is estimated, as the alteration had not been implemented in August 1934, as evident on Metropolitan Sewerage Plan Municipality of Cottesloe PROWA Cons. 4156 Item 1221, August 1934, and based on the physical evidence, site visit by Robin Chinnery and Philip Griffiths, 12 August 1999. Note: Oral evidence per Curtin's daughter, Elsie Macleod, with Rhonda Jamieson, was that these works were carried out in 1924. John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library Acc. JCPML/00012, 10 May 1994 and 20 February 1995, transcript, p. 7.

51 Site visit Robin Chinnery and Philip Griffiths, 12 August 1999.

The detailing of the ceiling in the dining room suggests that it dates from these alterations.<sup>52</sup>

In the latter half of the 1930s, the street numbers in Jarrad Street were changed, and the number of *John Curtin's House* changed from 14 to 24.<sup>53</sup>

In the 1930s and early 1940s, there was a low picket fence at the front of *John Curtin's House*; however, it was removed c. 1965. A lemon tree was planted in the rear garden, the garden being tended by a gardener who came regularly. A trellis across the rear yard supported grapevines. Fig trees and a box tree grew in the rear yard, and roses were planted in the front garden.<sup>54</sup>

In 1940-41, the capital value of *John Curtin's House* had increased to £1,125, whilst the annual value had decreased to £48.<sup>55</sup> Nearby, 25 Jarrad Street, had been purchased by Elsie Curtin, and was tenanted by Robin Morris.<sup>56</sup>

On 28 August 1941, Menzies resigned as Prime Minister and he was succeeded by A. W. Fadden, leader of the Country Party. On 4 October 1941, he tendered his resignation to the Governor General after his defeat in the House of Representatives on the opposition's vote of censure on the Budget. Curtin had proved an excellent leader of the Labor opposition, giving the party unity and purpose; and in late 1941, he was recognised as 'the only person with any chance of forming a coherent government.', as his contemporaries acknowledged 'that no other politician was fit for the task.'<sup>57</sup> On 7 October 1941, John Curtin was sworn in as Prime Minister of Australia, the first person representing a Western Australian electorate to serve in this role.

*John Curtin's House* remained the family home to which he returned whenever possible. His home at *John Curtin's House* was central to John Curtin's life. In 1941, he wrote:

For eighteen years I have lived in Cottesloe and my wife and family regard Cottesloe as a pivot around which the life of Western Australia swings. To me it is and I believe it will ever remain home.<sup>58</sup>

During World War Two, Elsie Curtin became State President of the Western Australian Labor Women's Organisation, served on the Central Council of the Red Cross Society, and as Patron of the Cottesloe Ladies' Surf Life Saving Club.<sup>59</sup>

As Prime Minister, Curtin was a 'commanding and competent war leader', who inspired trust and respect in the Australian public, and whose intellectual capacity and outstanding oratory were well recognised.<sup>60</sup> In the latter years of World War Two, Curtin was seldom able to return home to *John Curtin's House*, where his family continued to reside, whilst his son, John, served in the Australian forces. His wife, Elsie, joined him in Canberra for one or two

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52 *ibid.*

53 Cottesloe Rate Books South Ward, 1922-1930, and Central Ward, 1940-41; *Wise's Post Office Directory* 1924-30; Metropolitan Sewerage Municipality of Cottesloe PROWA Cons. 4156 Item 1221, August 1934.

54 Elsie Macleod, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101.

55 Cottesloe Rate Book Central Ward, 1940-41.

56 *ibid.*

57 Reese, Trevor, *Australia in the Twentieth Century: A Short Political History*, F. W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1964, p. 121; and Serle, *op. cit.*, p. 558.

58 John Curtin, quoted in Marchant-James, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

59 Popham, *op. cit.*

60 Reese, *op. cit.*, p. 122; and Serle, *op. cit.*, p. 555.



months each year, and on his trip overseas in April-June 1944, during which he became ill with high blood pressure and neuritis.<sup>61</sup> In early November 1944, Curtin suffered a coronary occlusion, and he remained in hospital for two months.<sup>62</sup> Elsie was with him for much of the remainder of his life. Curtin returned to duty in January 1945, but his health was not fully recovered, and he was re-admitted to hospital with congested lungs in April.<sup>63</sup> Several weeks later he returned to the Lodge in Canberra, where he died on 5 July 1945.

State funerals for John Curtin were organised in Canberra and Perth. The funeral procession in Western Australia began from his residence at *John Curtin's House*, and continued through Cottesloe to Karakatta Cemetery, where the service was conducted by his friend and neighbour, Reverend Hector Harrison.<sup>64</sup> Eulogies flowed from all who had known and worked with Curtin, and in typical understatement, the general Australia wide remark was 'He did a good job.'<sup>65</sup>

After Curtin's death in 1945, *John Curtin's House* remained in the Curtin family, and Elsie Curtin continued to reside there with her daughter, Elsie, and her family for the rest of her life. Ownership of 25 Jarrad Street was transferred from Elsie Curtin to her son, John Curtin in the mid-1940s.<sup>66</sup>

On 14 July 1948, *John Curtin's House* was transferred from Elsie Curtin to her daughter, Elsie Macleod.<sup>67</sup> Elsie Curtin continued to reside at *John Curtin's House* with her daughter and her family, until her death in 1975. In 1955, Elsie Curtin was appointed a Justice of the Peace, and she sat on the bench of the Married Women's Court for a number of years, as well as assisting with visits to Fremantle Gaol.<sup>68</sup> She was made a Life Member of a number of bodies, including the Royal Association of Justices, the Women's Justices Association of Western Australia, the Fremantle Labor Women's Organisation, and the Perth branch of the Association of Civilian Widows.<sup>69</sup> In 1970, Elsie Curtin was appointed a C. B. E.<sup>70</sup>

The place remained much as it was in John Curtin's father's lifetime from his death in 1945 to 1998, when his daughter, Elsie Macleod, moved from the family home. Many artefacts, including furnishings and furniture, associated with John and Elsie Curtin and their family during the period 1923 to his death in 1945 have remained at *John Curtin's House*, along with items associated with the continued occupation of the place by the Curtin family. They require assessment and cataloguing to ensure their preservation and conservation as part of the unique record of John Curtin's life, and for inclusion in the proposed John Curtin Cottage Museum.

John Curtin's contribution to the history of Western Australia was commemorated in the renaming of the nearby major road, Curtin Avenue, and in the nomenclature chosen for Curtin University, Curtin House, and

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61 Serle, op. cit., p. 557.

62 *ibid.*

63 *ibid.*

64 *ibid.*

65 *ibid.*, p. 558.

66 Cottesloe Rate Book Central Ward, 1945-46.

67 Certificate of Title Cottesloe Lot 166 and being Lot 26 on Plan 3639, Vol. 712 Fol. 65, 14 July 1948.

68 Popham, op. cit.

69 *ibid.*

70 Serle, op. cit., p. 557.

more recently, the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library at Curtin University. In September 1995, *John Curtin's House* was included in the Municipal Inventory for the Town of Cottesloe.<sup>71</sup>

*John Curtin's House* has been occupied by a caretaker since about September 1998.<sup>72</sup>

In late July 1999, *John Curtin's House* was purchased by the Commonwealth and State Governments for 'more than \$500,000', to ensure its preservation, with its possible future use as a cottage museum.<sup>73</sup> Announcing the purchase of *John Curtin's House*, Prime Minister John Howard said *John Curtin's House* 'would eventually take its place in the Australian political pantheon, along with Ben Chifley's family home.'<sup>74</sup>

*John Curtin's House* continues to be occupied as a residence, on a caretaker basis.

### 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*John Curtin's House* is a tuck-pointed brick walled clay tiled roof Inter War California Bungalow style suburban house, with timber construction verandahs. It is set on a generous suburban lot in a garden of lawns, together with an eclectic collection of exotic plantings. The house uses elements of the Inter War California Bungalow style, but is not a full rendering of the style. It is a very simply expressed design, which retains design elements of the Federation Bungalow style in its execution, particularly with respect to its interior treatments.

Jarrad Street links Stirling Highway to Marine Parade running in the east west direction. It crosses the Fremantle to Perth railway line and bisects the Seaview Golf Course en route. The street is a wide two chain (40,1m) road reserve, with a two way bitumenised road, grass verges, Flame trees (*Erithryna christi galli*) as street trees, and concrete pedestrian pavements. Most of the houses in the street are from the post Federation period, with a small number of more recent replacement houses. The place is very similar to the majority of places in its immediate context in its period of construction, the use of materials and style, contributing to the density of Inter War development that is characteristic of the locale. Jarrad Street has a south to north cross fall in the vicinity of the house, so that *John Curtin's House* and its immediate neighbours are set in a slight hollow. The houses on the northern side of the street retire into their garden settings.

*John Curtin's House* is set about 27'0" (9m) back from the block frontage, with a 3'0" (0.9m) set back from the western boundary and 10'0" (3m) or so setback from the eastern boundary. There is no driveway and a narrow footpath winds from the front boundary to the eastern side of the house, where the main entry is located, and thence on to the rear garden. The side entry to the house is a characteristic feature in the Cottesloe area. The front garden consists of a stretch of lawn, a border of mixed exotic plants, including camellias, across the front of the house and plantings against the boundary fences, which include hibiscus (*Hibiscus spp.*), oleander (*Nerium oleander*), cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster spp.*), and roses (*Rosea spp.*). There is no trace of the open picket fence that is indicated in the photographs up to 1945.

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71 Municipal Inventory Town of Cottesloe, 27 September 1995.

72 Trevor Lane, conversation with Robin Chinnery, 12 August 1999.

73 *Local News Cottesloe* Vol. 8 No. 4, 4 August 1999, p. 1.

74 *ibid.*

The generous rear garden includes a number of structures, together with a large Queensland Box tree (*Lophostorum conferta*), a Fig tree (*Ficus caracus*), lemon tree, hibiscus, Chilean pepper (*Schinus tribenthifolia*) Camellias and Japanese jade.

While the main house occupies the front half or southern end of the site, other structures include a timber framed and weatherboard clad washhouse or laundry near the house on the western boundary, a brick and iron construction outside water closet in the north west corner and two interlinked timber framed, fibrous cement and corrugated iron clad garages on the north east corner, with access to the rear right of way. There is a short run of lattice screen to the west of the garages and the boundary fences remain the close-boarded timber picket type. There is a rotary clothes hoist in the middle of the lawn. There are narrow paths linking the built elements, and a raised area behind the lattice screen, which is suggestive of a vegetable garden.

The core of the house is constructed in tuck pointed brickwork, with timber construction verandahs on the south, east and north faces of the house, though the majority of the verandah perimeter has been enclosed for additional accommodation. The roof is constructed in a high main and sub-gable format, and all roof sections are covered with clay Marseilles pattern tiles. The overall design effect is a simple Inter War California Bungalow.

The plan form is based around a brick core containing the principal rooms. See figure 2. The entry is located to the east side of the house which gives rise to a short corridor of hall that runs east-west. This section of corridor serves the principal southern rooms of the house. The corridor turns a right angle and runs to the rear of the house serving the two remaining principal rooms. The three sided verandah across the southern, eastern and western faces of the house have been infilled to provide bedrooms on the south and eastern sides and a kitchen and bathroom on the northern side of the house.

The external walls of the original house, together with those of the living room extension, are constructed in tuck-pointed brickwork. The western face of the building has been rendered. The main walls have a stucco string course band at window sill height and rendered sills. The windows in the main walls are predominantly single pane casement sashes. The extension to the living room, on the western side of the front elevation, has a concrete awning over the window. The gables have large oversailing fascias similar to those that are a characteristic feature of the California Bungalow style. The gable infill treatment consists of rendered planes and vertical timber battens.

The verandah, which extends around three sides of the house, has been infilled completely along the southern and northern sides and partly infilled along the eastern side, leaving on sufficient verandah for the entry. The entry is approached via a modest flight of steps with low sweeping balustrade walls, which terminate at piers at the bottom of the flight. The verandah retains its timber boards and quad moulding.

The remaining sections of open verandah and the traces that can be seen amongst the cladding infill indicate that the verandah has twin posts on the corners and single stop chamfered posts between corner posts, with a deep fascia beam and simple post brackets.

The sections that have been infilled are mostly clad with vertical timber boarding and the majority of windows are small pane timber sliding windows with alternating fixed panels. The glass in these windows is stippled, in common with many of the smaller windows in the original sections of the house, which face the public domain.

The rear or northern elevation has a small porch outside the back door and a timber ramp down to the garden level.

The entry hall (Room 2) sets a theme for most of the main rooms of the house and has lath and plaster ceilings without a cornice, a ceiling rose, picture rails and plastered walls. It has four panel doors with plain mouldings, plain architraves and skirting blocks and a simple hat and coat rail. All this joinery is finished with a dark varnish and most rooms in the house retain this varnish finish. The timber floors have been carpeted. There is minor cracking in the hall walls, particularly at the western end of the space.

The main bedroom (Room 3) is similar to the hallway with its treatments, but has decorated wall vents above the picture rail. There is a small two-pane awning light in the east wall with stippled glass and a pair of 10 pane glazed doors leading out onto the verandah infill to the south. The room remains in good condition.

Rooms 4 and 5 are verandah infill spaces or sleepouts. In Room 4, the tuck-pointed brickwork has been painted, but in Room 5, the original finish remains. The soffits are lined out with fibrous cement with battens to the joints. There are shelves built into the studwork and a small area has been closed off in Room 4 and lined with shelves. Both rooms have timber-sliding windows. The brickwork in Room 5 is in very good condition and is a useful reference for conserving the exposed tuck-pointed brickwork.

The Lounge (Room 6) consists of the original large room and a small extension to the south, which is slightly greater than the width of the verandah. The original room has a lath and plaster ceiling with a traditional rose, leaf motif wall vents, a picture rail, plastered walls and a carpeted timber floor. The plain skirtings, architraves and mantle are stained dark timber. The fireplace is set diagonally in the north west corner of the room. The over mantle is a large piece and a dominant feature in the room. There is a small highlight window in the west wall and a large opening, which extends almost the full width of the original south wall, leads into the extension. The extension has plasterboard and batten ceiling with an Art Deco influenced pattern-ceiling rose. There are short lengths of picture rail as elsewhere in the house, but the wall vents differ in that they also employ an Art Deco influenced motif.

Room 7 was the original kitchen that later became a bedroom and is the similar to Room 3, but has a simple dark stained jarrah tongue and grooved board lined cupboard built into the eastern wall. The cupboard is simply constructed in carpenter's work. The room retains its original chimney breast and a fireplace.

The north south corridor (Room 8) follows the same pattern as the preceding rooms, but has two built in simple dark stained jarrah tongue and grooved board lined cupboards, one at the southern end of the corridor and one against the west wall. All of these cupboards are simple carpenter's work.

The present dining room (Room 9, originally a bedroom) consists of the original section of the house and an extension onto the verandah. The dark stained joinery has been painted over in this area. The room has an art deco influenced pattern ceiling rose, lath and plaster ceilings, a picture rail, and a half-glazed door leading into the kitchen. The eastern wall has a large almost full width opening leading into the extension. The windows are casements, with a central fixed pane between them.

Room 10, currently used as an ironing room, is part of the infilled verandah and has vertical timber lining to dado height and plasterboard and batten lining to the upper walls and soffits. The timber floor has been covered with sheet vinyl. There is a pair of four pane casement windows overlooking the garden to the north.

The current kitchen (Room 11) follows the same pattern as Room 10. The kitchen fitout appears to have been executed in the 1950s and consists of a timber cupboard with a double bowl stainless sink and drainer, bench, timber construction range hood, cooker, refrigerator and partition to screen off the passage from the rear of the main house to the back door.

The bathroom (Room 12) is also a part of the verandah infill, and is probably part of the original construction. It is completely lined with wall papered fibrous cement and has a vinyl-covered floor, two painted jarrah tongue and groove board lined cupboards, a shower, wash hand basin and water closet pan.

The alterations include the partial infilling of verandahs, the alteration of room functions through time, and the addition of two garages in two stages at the rear of the property. Original rooms contain substantially original construction and features. Most of the verandah infilling contains detail that is strongly suggestive of having been built shortly after the completion of the house, completed in separate stages prior to the Second World War. The continual widening of Jarrad Street carriageway has emphasized the difference in levels between the crown of the road and the front of the lot boundaries so that *John Curtin's House* now appears to be in a much deeper hollow than it was in the earliest photographs.

The house is generally in a good state of repair, with minor instances of wall cracking, ceiling cracking and some deterioration of opening treatments, together with a small amount of subsidence in the verandahs. The timber-framed laundry is in a fair state of repair and the brick construction outside toilet and timber framed garages are in fair condition, with some evidence of termite activity in the latter. The mature trees are in good health but the gardens generally are in needs of attention.

### 13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Ben Chifley's home in Bathurst, New South Wales is of similar importance in the history of Australia in World War Two, and is being preserved also as part of the nation's heritage by the Governments of Australia to commemorate the service to the nation of these war time Prime Ministers. The House is managed by the Bathurst City Council.

In Western Australia, the homes of several prominent politicians are included in the Register of Heritage Places, namely Sir James Mitchell, Sir Walter James, and Edith Cowan, all of whom served Western Australia with distinction. John Curtin, as the first Prime Minister representing a Western Australian electorate, has an unique position in Australian history, and as his family home throughout his career as journalist, political activist, Labor politician, leader of the Australian Labor Party, and Prime Minister of Australia, *John Curtin's House* has exceptional significance in the cultural heritage of Western Australia.

### 13.4 REFERENCES

Molyneux & Assoc. '24, Jarrad Street, Cottesloe: Towards a conservation policy. A Report' 16 September 1998.

Vicki Williamson 'Proposal to Acquire former Prime Minister John Curtin's Home at 24, Jarrad Street, Cottesloe and Establish a Cottage Museum', 23 July 1999.

### **13. 5 FURTHER RESEARCH**

Further research may reveal more information about the design of *John Curtin's House* and the alterations to the place in the 1920s and 1930s. However, records of the building applications and licences for the period are no longer extant.