

# The Robert Menzies Collection at the University of Melbourne

Caitlin Stone and Jim Berryman

Sir Robert Gordon Menzies (1894–1978) is best remembered as the founder of the Liberal Party and Australia’s longest-serving prime minister, a role he occupied in two terms from 1939 to 1941 and 1949 to 1966. Menzies was also an alumnus of the University of Melbourne and, from 1967 to 1972, its chancellor. His long association with the university is reflected in many of its collections. This article focuses on just one of these, his personal library.<sup>1</sup> Accumulated over his lifetime, the Robert Menzies Collection casts

light on Menzies’ public and private worlds, his varied interests and tastes, and his vast political and social networks.

Enrolled as a student at the university from 1913 to 1918, Menzies was awarded his Bachelor of Laws in 1916 and Master of Laws in 1918. His student record card (illustrated below) reveals that he failed Latin in his first year, but passed his other subjects with honours. In 1917 Menzies won the Bowen Prize (awarded to the best English essay) for ‘The rule of law

during the war’.<sup>2</sup> Menzies was active in student politics and clubs: he was involved in the Law Students’ Society, the Students’ Christian Union and the Historical Society, and was president of the Students’ Representative Council.<sup>3</sup> But his association with the university did not end with his student days. On 21 March 1959, as prime minister, Menzies officially opened the Baillieu Library; later, in 1967, he was made the first honorary member of the Friends of the Baillieu Library.<sup>4</sup> Before Menzies finished his term as chancellor in 1972, the members of the University Council commissioned William Dargie to paint a portrait of Menzies in his academic gown (illustrated page 46). This picture, the last official portrait of the former prime minister, is displayed in the Council Chamber.

## The Robert Menzies Collection

Since 1979 the Leigh Scott Room in the Baillieu Library has housed the Robert Menzies Collection, Menzies’ personal library of around 4,000 books, photograph albums, pamphlets and student lecture notes. Of all of the Menzies-related objects held in the university’s collections, the personal library is the most compelling testament to Menzies’

Name		Address		ENROLLMENT No.	
Menzies, Robert Gordon				130119	
Preliminary Examination				Matriculated	Comp. Subj.
J. P. Dec 1908				Date 20/3/13	✓ Law
S. P. Feb 1911				No. 7942	✓ Arts
1st Year or Division	2nd Year or Division	3rd Year or Division	4th Year or Division	Year or Division	Year or Division
Lat. I	Lat. II	Lat. III	Lat. IV		
Dec 1913	Mar 1914	Dec 1914	Dec 1915	Dec 1916	Dec 1916
Lat. I	Lat. II	Lat. III	Lat. IV		
Law	Law	Law	Law		
Latin I N P	Lat. II H	Turkish and unc. Rom. Law H	Prin. Inst. Law P		
Decl. Log. H	Court Hist. P	Law of Prob. H	Admin. Law P		
Eng. I H	Pol. Econ. P	Law of Cont. H	Equity P		
Contract H	Court Hist. P	Law of Hist. P	Law of Warr. P		
4th Eng. I H	Law of Prob. H	Law of Hist. P	Law of Proc. P		
		Law II H	Law of Cont. P		
			Law III P		
			Law III P		
Single Subj.					
Latin I					
Comp. Subj.					
Pract. Work					
Lectures					
Year or Div.					
Completed	Dec 1913	Dec 1914	Dec 1915	Dec 1916	
DECEASED 15-5-78					
S. & M. D. Pty. Ltd.—No. 1004					

**Previous page:** Robert Gordon Menzies' student record card. Reference no. 1988.0051, Student Administration (formerly Student Records), University of Melbourne Archives.

**Below:** William Dargie, *The Rt Hon. Sir Robert Menzies KT AK CH FRS OC*, 1971, oil on canvas, 106.5 × 92.5 cm. Accession no. 1971.0052, commissioned by members of Council, 1971, University of Melbourne Art Collection.



**Opposite below:** Robert Menzies (seated, centre front) as president of the University of Melbourne Students' Representatives Council, 1916, *Melbourne University Magazine*, vol. 10, no. 3, October 1916, p. 74. Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.

life and times. Menzies had formally approached the university to suggest donating his personal library in January 1976, two years before he died. In a letter to Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir David Derham, Menzies set out the terms of the donation:

That my library would remain intact, housed in one room in the Baillieu Library.

That the books would be used as a Reference Library.

That the portion of the Library housed at 2 Haverbrack Avenue, Malvern, would not be available until my wife indicated that she was closing the house or on her death.

That the portion housed at 95 Collins Street, Melbourne, would be available when the office closed or upon my death.<sup>5</sup>

Derham accepted the offer. He wrote to Menzies on 3 February 1976: 'Your books will be a much valued and distinguished part of our great Library'.<sup>6</sup>

Menzies died on 15 May 1978, reportedly while reading in his study.<sup>7</sup> About a year later, most of his library was relocated to the university. Menzies had already given away some of his books: in the mid-1970s, he donated about 50 cricketing books to

**Right:** Prime Minister Robert Menzies and Chancellor Arthur Dean at the opening of the Baillieu Library, 1959, photographic print, 20.7 × 15.8 cm. Robert Menzies Collection, Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.

**Far right:** Dedication in A.R. Chisholm, *Men were my milestones: Australian portraits and sketches*, Melbourne University Press, 1958. Robert Menzies Collection, Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne. This book was presented to Menzies at the opening of the Baillieu Library on 21 March 1959.



*To the Rt. Hon. R. G. Menzies, C.H., O.C., LL.M.,  
from the Library staff  
as a memento of his visit to the  
Baillieu Library, 21st March, 1959.*

the Melbourne Cricket Club Library.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, a significant collection, ranging from rare and collectable editions to common paperbacks, remained. The formal acceptance of the collection took place on 25 September 1980. Menzies' widow Dame Pattie presented the collection to guests who included Chancellor R.D. 'Pansy' Wright, Sir Ninian Stephen, Sir John Bunting, Alfred Stirling and Hubert Opperman.<sup>9</sup> Vice-Chancellor Derham also spoke:

The library is a very personal one. It says much of Sir Robert's public life, both in this country and in the world of international affairs ... The marks of that service over more than 40 years can be seen in books of this library.

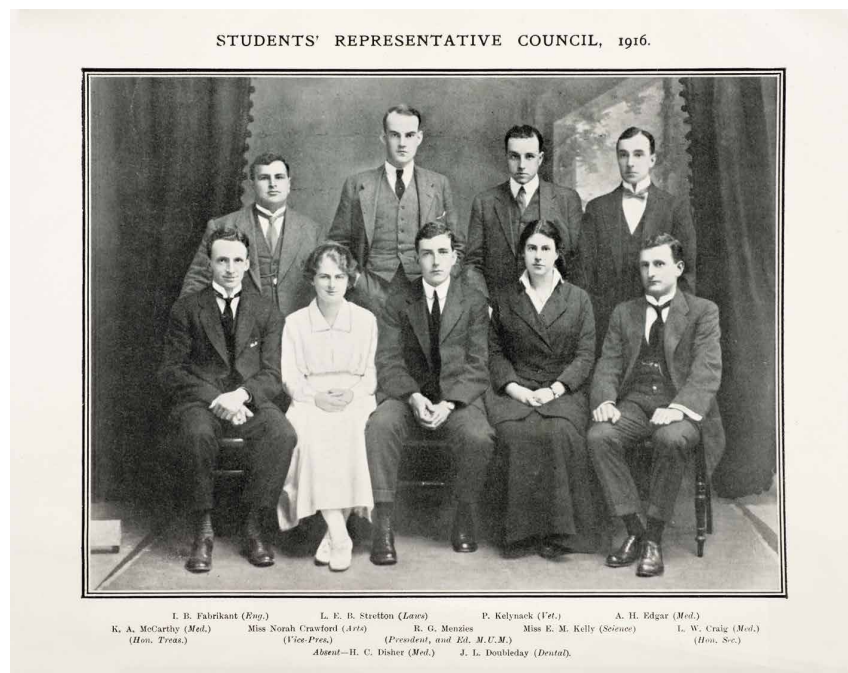
He went on to describe the library as 'a reader's library, not a collector's collection'.<sup>10</sup>

The 'marks of service' Derham referred to encompass Menzies' entire student, legal and political careers. Some of the earliest material dates from Menzies' student days. In 1916 he was elected president of the Students' Representative Council (see photograph right). That year he also began editing the *Melbourne University Magazine*. Menzies must have remembered his student years

with fondness; he kept his personal set of the magazine, many issues of which show his editorial markings. As well as editing the student paper, he contributed numerous poems and articles. Titles like 'An autumn reverie', 'To a mountain' and 'Nocturne' reveal an adolescent taste for romantic themes and Edwardian aestheticism.

To fully appreciate the significance of the collection, it pays to understand that most of the books were gifts. These range from books

given to Menzies by his family and close circle of friends to official gifts presented by political contemporaries. In November 1972, Arthur Calwell presented Menzies with a copy of his book, *Be just and fear not*; it contains the inscription, 'For my good friend Bob Menzies, with every good wish'. Other books came from Richard Casey, Paul Hasluck, Percy Joske (an old school-friend as well as politician) and George Foster Pearce. Menzies also kept books by and about his political adversaries. He had several



**Right:** Author's dedication in Winston Churchill, *Marlborough: His life and times*, London: Harrap, 1933. Robert Menzies Collection, Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.

**Below:** Author's dedication in Arthur Calwell, *Be just and fear not*, Melbourne: Lloyd O'Neil in association with Rigby, 1972. Robert Menzies Collection, Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.

76  
Robert Gordon Menzies  
my comrade in anxious days  
from  
Winston Churchill  
September 1941

For  
my good friend  
Bob Menzies  
with every good wish.  
Arthur Calwell  
November 5, 1972.

of Herbert Vere ('Doc') Evatt's books including *Australia in world affairs* (1946) and a signed copy of *The task of nations* (1949).

An astonishing number of international dignitaries and officials also contributed to the library. Menzies was a globetrotter and a statesman, and the list of dedications from presidents and prime ministers reads like a who's who of 20th-century world affairs: United States presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter; British prime ministers Stanley Baldwin, Clement Attlee, Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan; and Commonwealth leaders including Jawaharlal Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan all presented books. Menzies' friendship with Winston Churchill is reflected strongly in the collection. Churchill, a prolific writer and winner

of the Nobel Prize for literature, presented Menzies with numerous signed copies of his literary works. These books attest to the two men's close rapport, especially during the early war years when Menzies was in London during the blitz. To 'my comrade in anxious days', Churchill wrote in a copy of his *Marlborough: His life and times* presented to Menzies in 1941 (illustrated above).

It is clear that Menzies valued all of his books. His student volumes were usually signed or initialled 'R.G.M.' In professional practice, each new addition to his growing library was marked with a blue ink stamp, 'Robert G. Menzies, Barrister at Law'. The most elaborate evidence of ownership was Menzies' personalised bookplate (illustrated right). Designed in 1940 by a close friend, the artist Lionel Lindsay, this wood engraving depicts a barrister's wig, a dispatch box, eucalyptus blossom, books and a wine decanter. In the foreground is the declaration of war, which Menzies broadcast to the nation on 3 September 1939. Each emblem represented a facet of Menzies' character. Hundreds of bookplates were printed, with one affixed to almost every volume in the collection; even unsolicited gifts and ephemera were almost always marked in this way. An earlier, rarely

seen bookplate was produced by J.S. MacDonald, another artistic friend of Menzies. MacDonald was a controversial figure and future director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Victoria. Some books also show signs of their previous owners. Books belonging to Henry Bournes Higgins (T.M. Cooley, *Constitutional history of the United States as seen in the development of American law*, 1890) and to Owen Dixon (H.R. Curlewis, *The mirror of justice*, 1906) provide evidence of Menzies' legal training and burgeoning professional network.

What more can scholars of history and politics learn about Menzies from his books? As was noted by A.W. Martin, his official biographer, Menzies lived a very private life outside politics; his public persona was not necessarily indicative of his private personality.<sup>11</sup> The collection reflects Menzies' predilections for art, literature, history, music, travel, food and drink (and weight loss) and, as is well known, cricket. It also reflects his extensive—and sometimes unexpected—connections. Noël Coward was a dinner companion in London and dedicated his *Australia visited, 1940* to 'R.G. Menzies gratefully and with admiration'.

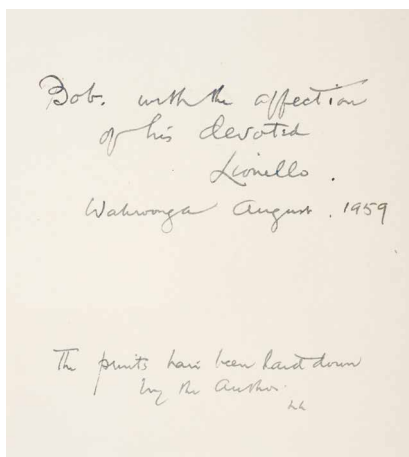
**Right:** Author's dedication in Richard Nixon, *Six crises*, London: W.H. Allen, 1962. Robert Menzies Collection, Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.

**Below:** Two Robert G. Menzies bookplates: by Lionel Lindsay, 1940 (left) and by J.S. MacDonald (right), affixed to C. Maclaurin, *Post mortem: Essays, historical and medical*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1923. Robert Menzies Collection, Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.

To  
 The Right Honourable  
 Robert Gordon Menzies  
 with best wishes  
 from  
 Richard Nixon



Author's dedication in Lionel Lindsay, *Discobolus, and other verse*, Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1959. Robert Menzies Collection, Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.



Lionel Lindsay not only designed Menzies' bookplate but presented him with several books, signing himself 'Lionello' (illustrated above). Labor leader Arthur Calwell was a good friend. In many cases, evidence for these connections is in the hundreds of dedications and personal messages that reside within the books. These inscriptions impart unique historical information contributing to a complex picture of Menzies' private and public relationships.

We are currently undertaking a project to describe each item in the Menzies collection and document the key people, organisations and events represented in it. This involves identifying the presenter of a book (if any), recording and digitising significant markings—including Menzies' annotations—and transcribing all dedications. Provisionally titled 'The Robert Menzies Collection: A living library', the aim is to discover more about Menzies' interests and connections through his library and to publish an online resource based on our research. We are using the Online Heritage Resource Manager (OHRM)—a relational database developed by the eScholarship Research Centre in the University of Melbourne Library—to map the relationships between books, people, organisations and events.

As with all experimental projects, there are many questions to answer. The most immediately relevant concern is the relationship between Menzies and the objects he acquired, and the circumstances that led to their acquisition. Did Menzies buy the book for himself or was it given to him? Was it a gift from a friend, colleague or family member, or a formal presentation from an organisation or international dignitary? Does it relate to any specific event? Does it include a contribution by Menzies himself? (Menzies regularly wrote forewords to books by his friends.) And did the book previously belong to someone else? Ultimately, through this project we hope to produce a greater understanding of Robert Menzies as revealed through his library.

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- 1 For other brief descriptions of the collection, see Alan Attwood, 'Menzies between the covers', *The Age*, 22 July 1982, p. 9; Amanda Buckley, Richard McGregor and Peter Ryan, 'A black hole in Australia's history', *National Times on Sunday*, 31 August 1986, pp. 6–7.
- 2 Robert Gordon Menzies (with a foreword by W. Harrison Moore), *The rule of law during the war* (The 1917 Bowen Prize essay, University of Melbourne), Melbourne: Charles F. Maxwell, 1917.
- 3 A.W. Martin, *Robert Menzies: A life* (vol. 1, 1894–1943), Melbourne University Press, 1993, pp. 20, 22.
- 4 Robert Menzies, 'Address to the Friends of the Baillieu Library dinner at Union House, University of Melbourne, 22 November 1967'. MS 4936, Sir Robert Menzies Papers, National Library of Australia.
- 5 Robert Menzies, Letter to David Derham, 28 January 1976. Reference no. 1994/47, box 74, Records Services, University of Melbourne.
- 6 David Derham, Letter to Robert Menzies, 3 February 1976. Reference no. 1994/47, box 74, Records Services, University of Melbourne.
- 7 Peter Bowers, 'Menzies dies at 83', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 May 1978, p. 1.
- 8 Melbourne Cricket Club, MCC Library website, [www.mcc.org.au/About the MCC/Heritage/MCC Library/History](http://www.mcc.org.au/About%20the%20MCC/Heritage/MCC%20Library/History), accessed 3 January 2013.
- 9 Invitation list for reception of Sir Robert Menzies Collection, 25 September 1980. Reference no. 1994/47, box 74, Records Services, University of Melbourne.
- 10 'The Robert Menzies Collection presented to university', *Staff News*, vol. 8, no. 8, October 1980, p. 104.
- 11 Martin, *Robert Menzies: A life* (vol. 1); A.W. Martin, *Robert Menzies: A life* (vol. 2, 1944–1978), Melbourne University Press, 1999.