

Jenny Hocking on the dismissal

In 1975 the governor general, John Kerr, removed a democratically elected Labor government, amid great intrigue and subterfuge. The dismissal of the Whitlam government remains one of the blights on our democracy – perhaps the most controversial event in Australian political history. And yet the full record of what happened in the weeks and months leading up to the dismissal is still unavailable to Australian citizens because of the intransigence of Queen Elizabeth and the expensive lengths to which the National Archives of Australia have gone to suppress access to John Kerr’s correspondence with Buckingham Palace.

Jenny Hocking – emeritus professor of history at Monash University and biographer of Gough Whitlam – has led the case to overturn the National Archives ban. Her article ‘At Her Majesty’s Pleasure: Sir John Kerr and the royal dismissal secrets’ appears in the April issue of *ABR*.



An extract appears below. The complete article will be released on March 30. Jenny Hocking will appear on an episode of the [ABR Podcast](#) on March 25 (available from the *ABR* website, iTunes and other pod-cast apps).

‘In terms of the historiography, the last decade has been sharp corrective to history, propelled by a series of archival revelations that have gradually and collectively recast our understanding of the dismissal and challenged even its most established historical facts. It is remarkable that even today, more than four decades later, critical documents about the dismissal remain secret, hidden from public view and from history. The “Palace letters”, correspondence between Queen Elizabeth, Sir Martin Charteris (her private secretary from 1972 to 1977), and Kerr relating to the dismissal are among Kerr’s papers held in the National Archives of Australia. They are embargoed “on the instruction of the Queen” until at least 2027, after which their release requires the approval of both the governor-general’s official secretary and the monarch’s private secretary, giving the monarch an effectively indefinite veto over their release. We cannot see the letters until the queen or her successor, King Charles, says we can.’

Further information:

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