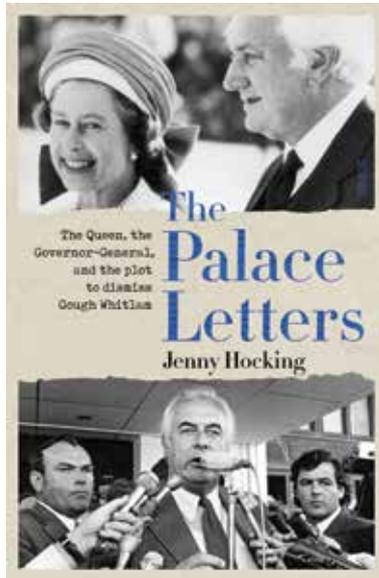


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The Palace Letters

By Jenny Hocking

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Reviewed by Cat Jones,
Strathmore Secondary College

For many people, the Whitlam Dismissal in 1975 would be one of the most important events in Australian political history. It dominated the newspapers of the time, and has been studied and re-examined as a pivotal moment in Australian democracy. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam was seen as the victim, Governor-General Sir John Kerr the villain, and the Australian public as helpless bystanders. Much has been written about the Dismissal, including by Jenny Hocking. *The Palace Letters* adds a different chapter to the documentation of these events.

Hocking's work primarily discusses her ongoing legal struggle to view letters between Kerr and the Royal Palace, battling in and out of court to have the National Archives of Australia release the documents to her. Also woven throughout the tale are fundamental questions on the relationship between the Royal Family, Australia and the government institutions of the Commonwealth. How much influence should the Palace have on decisions relating to these institutions? What constitutes private letters or public documents?

The text is an incredibly interesting read. The documentation of what happened during Hocking's attempts to have the letters released also provides more depth to Kerr's thinking during his time in office. The information contained in the letters is presented to the reader sporadically, mimicking the way that Hocking herself discovered it. The correspondence between Kerr and the Palace is, obviously, interesting reading and shows that Kerr did indeed seek advice about how he should handle Whitlam's government.

For those who have read much about the Whitlam Dismissal, this text adds more to the story. It creates a more vivid picture of the workings of Kerr's mind and how much he was speaking to the Palace during his time as Governor-General. For those interested in the legal system in Australia, the text will draw out interesting questions about procedure, and the nature of the relationship between Australian citizens and documents relating to our history, as well as the relationship between government institutions and British royalty.

In terms of its value in the classroom, there is no doubt that this is an accessible read for more confident students. It draws on questions of historical documentation that could be used as case studies for students of Australian History and also politics. It helps to provide a different viewpoint to how historians and researchers interact with government institutions, such as the National Archives of Australia, to help deconstruct important events in our history. Quotes used from Kerr's correspondence in *The Palace Letters* can easily be used to spark discussions around context and differing viewpoints in the senior classrooms.

Overall, *The Palace Letters* is an engaging read that adds another chapter to the Whitlam Dismissal event. It thoroughly documents the legal battle while also giving readers an insight into why the letters were such an important part of Hocking's research. It will please both history lovers and the politically minded with its depth and engaging storytelling.