John McEwen

Prime Minister of Australia 1967–68

A former clerk in the Crown Solicitor's Office, Melbourne, John McEwen enlisted in the First AIF in the last year of World War I (1918). He later became active in the Victorian Farmers' Union and the Victorian Country Party. McEwen was elected to the House of Representatives in 1934 as a Victorian Country Party representative, but he soon shifted his allegiance to the federal Country Party, which was the junior partner in the coalition government led by Joseph Lyons.

McEwen was promoted to the ministry in 1937 as Minister for the Interior. He ceased to be a minister when the Country Party dropped out of the governing coalition when Robert Menzies first became leader of the United Australia Party. But he became Minister for External Affairs and, later, Minister for Air and Minister for Civil Aviation when the Country Party, by then led by Arthur Fadden, re-joined the government.

In Opposition for most of the 1940s, McEwen again became a minister in the Menzies government, which was formed in December 1949. He was Minister for Commerce and Agriculture (1949–56), Minister for Trade (1956–63) and Minister for Trade and Industry (1963–71). He remained in the ministry of the Liberal–Country party coalition until his retirement from politics in 1971.

McEwen was narrowly beaten for the Country Party leadership in 1939, losing to Arthur Fadden. But he was successful in 1958, when he succeeded Fadden as both Party leader and Deputy Prime Minister. McEwen became Prime Minister on 19 December 1967, replacing Harold Holt, who had disappeared while swimming off the Victorian coast. His period in office was short, ending on 10 January 1968 when the Liberal Party chose John Gorton to be its leader.

John McEwen died in 1980.

Records relating to John McEwen held by the National Archives

The National Archives holds a collection of McEwen's personal records, as well as many records about John McEwen and the issues he was involved in during his years in government.

In the tables below, reference numbers direct you to the item or series in RecordSearch, the National Archives database. There you can find more information. In many cases you can view entire digitised records. The information will appear in a new browser window.

Personal records of John McEwen

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Papers relating to redistribution from Press Secretary (WR Carew)	1932–68	AA1971/180
Miscellaneous filing	1933–70	AA1971/178
Folders of 'Alphabetical electorate and general filing' (including departmental and subject files)	1951–74	M58
Photographs assembled by Rt Hon. Sir John McEwen	1951–70	M60
Papers relating to the Brigalow lands	1961–62	AA1972/206
Portrait of McEwen painted from a photograph by Mr J Dainer	1962	M59

Fact Sheet 144 - Harold Holt's disappearance also refers to records of John McEwen's period as Prime Minister.

Other records relating to John McEwen – in Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
First AIF dossier – McEwen, John – Service number V79136	1918–34	B2455, McEwen J
Press file. Statements by Mr John McEwen	1943–48	A5954, 2215/3
Personal correspondence (Australia) The Hon. J McEwen	1945–70	A5954, 64/1
GATT review. Statement by the Rt Hon. J McEwen, leader of the Australian delegation	1950	A10455, 119
Correspondence with John McEwen [Menzies papers]	1954–65	M2576, 1
Press file. Statements by Mr McEwen, Minister for Trade.	1956	A5954, 1623/6
Copies of speeches in the name of Sir John McEwen as Minister	1956–71	A4115
European Economic Conference – Mr McEwen's discussions	1962–70	A1838, 727/4/2/5
Senate election campaign 1964 – Speeches by Sir Robert Menzies, Hon AA Calwell, J McEwen, Senator GR Cole	1964	A5954, 1118/6
McEwen, J – report on talks with British ministers	1966	A6706, 43

Other records relating to John McEwen – in Sydney

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
McEwen, Rt Hon. J (audio tape)	1966	C102, 1499523