

Oatley Heritage and Historical Society

By John Whitbread

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Personalities of Oatley

MRS. MINNIE COLE

Minnie Mary Moss was born at Molong on the 14 September 1877. She died at age 91 on 6 February 1969.

Her ashes are interred with her husband's in the Anglican Monumental Section 0796 at Woronora Cemetery, Sutherland. Her funeral service was held at All Saints, Oatley West.

She married Arthur George Cole in 1903 (Certificate 292/1903). He was acting headmaster at the Central Bankstown School when he died on 1 January 1932 at the early age of 53.

They had 2 children, Norman (c1910-1973) and Alys (1913-1968) and lived at 26 Wonoona Parade, Oatley. They also owned the adjoining vacant block, 28 Wonoona Parade.

Physically Mrs. Cole is described as "short and stout".

INTERVIEW with BERYL BUTTERS on 15 December 1980 by JOAN HATTON

Norm and Beryl Butters were next door neighbours, living at No.24.

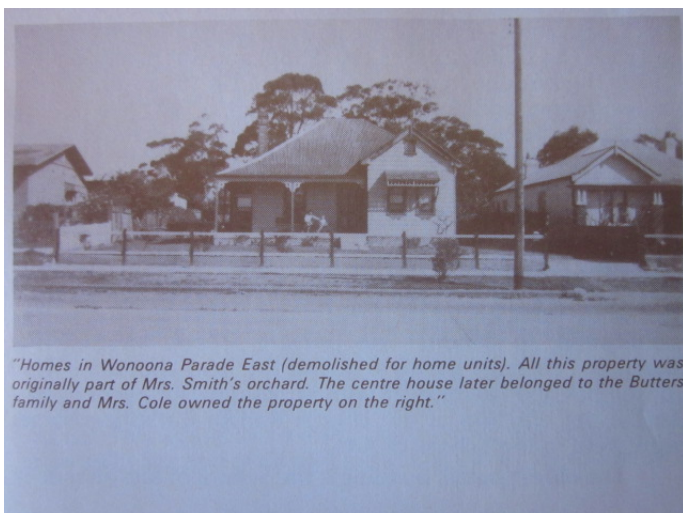
Mrs. Cole lived at 26 Wonoona Parade. It had belonged to Smith's previously and had been part of an orchard. The house was built for the Smith's daughter.

The Cole's had 2 children, Norman and Alys. Norman was a chemist on the North Shore and he lived at Turramurra. Alys (known as Diddy) married Cecil Propsting. Cecil's parents ran a grocery store in Oatley. Cecil died playing bowls at Oatley in 1966. Alys and Cecil had a daughter, Eunice, born about 1948, now living in Western Australia. Eunice married Trevor Baxter.

Gran Cole lived at home with her daughter Alys but she was deteriorating. Alys told neighbours that she was to go to a home but Mrs. Cole did not want to go. That same day Alys took a turn and died. Gran Cole went to Delaney Hall at Mortdale and lived for a few more months.

Eunice was the descendant who got all the Cole things, sold furniture etc.

The Rev. W. McCarthy of All Saints Oatley West was a frequent visitor of the Cole family.



"Homes in Wonoona Parade East (demolished for home units). All this property was originally part of Mrs. Smith's orchard. The centre house later belonged to the Butters family and Mrs. Cole owned the property on the right."

PLAQUE AT THE OATLEY LIBRARY

The inscription reads:-

THIS PLAQUE WAS ERECTED TO
COMMEMORATE THE SERVICE GIVEN BY
MRS. MINNIE COLE
IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OATLEY
SCHOOL OF ARTS WHICH PROVIDED THE
FIRST LIBRARY SERVICE IN OATLEY

The School of Arts was built in 1905.



WAR MEMORIAL AT OATLEY PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mrs. Cole was the Organising Secretary of the committee behind the building of the original memorial, built in 1924. Refer the attached photo of the new plaque placed on the site in 2016. The new plaque recognises her as follows:-

“Mrs. Cole of Oatley was reputed to be the driving force of the committee. The older residents of Oatley recall her many years of social work with admiration and respect. With her wonderful personality she achieved. Mrs. Cole assisted the church, school, Red Cross, School of Arts, charities and other local activities.

Mrs. Cole described some of the methods used to raise finance for the memorial. Included in the list were a children’s concert, a dance evening, an afternoon fete and art union (i.e. lottery)”.



For further recognition of Mrs. Cole’s efforts refer the attachment “OATLEY WAR MONUMENT AND PUBLIC SCHOOL” written by Jack Fisher in 1960.

Mrs. Cole was guest of honour when the new War Memorial was dedicated in 1962. She said how happy she was to see the original work carried to a successful conclusion, and she congratulated the R.S.L. on the achievement.

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND, OATLEY

Before her involvement with All Saints, Oatley West Mrs. Cole attended services at St. Paul's. The attached newsletter article titled "Princess Chrysanthemum" records the performance of this operetta, arranged by Mrs. Cole, to assist in the Fencing Fund for St. Paul's. St. Paul's was built in 1911 so the operetta would probably have been held during the following years. Thanks to Beryl Butters for supplying a copy of the article.

ALL SAINTS CHURCH OF ENGLAND, OATLEY WEST

Mrs. Cole was the leader in getting the Church of England (All Saints Church) built in Oatley West in 1931.

Mrs. Cole has a memorial plaque in the Columbarium at All Saints. The inscription reads:-

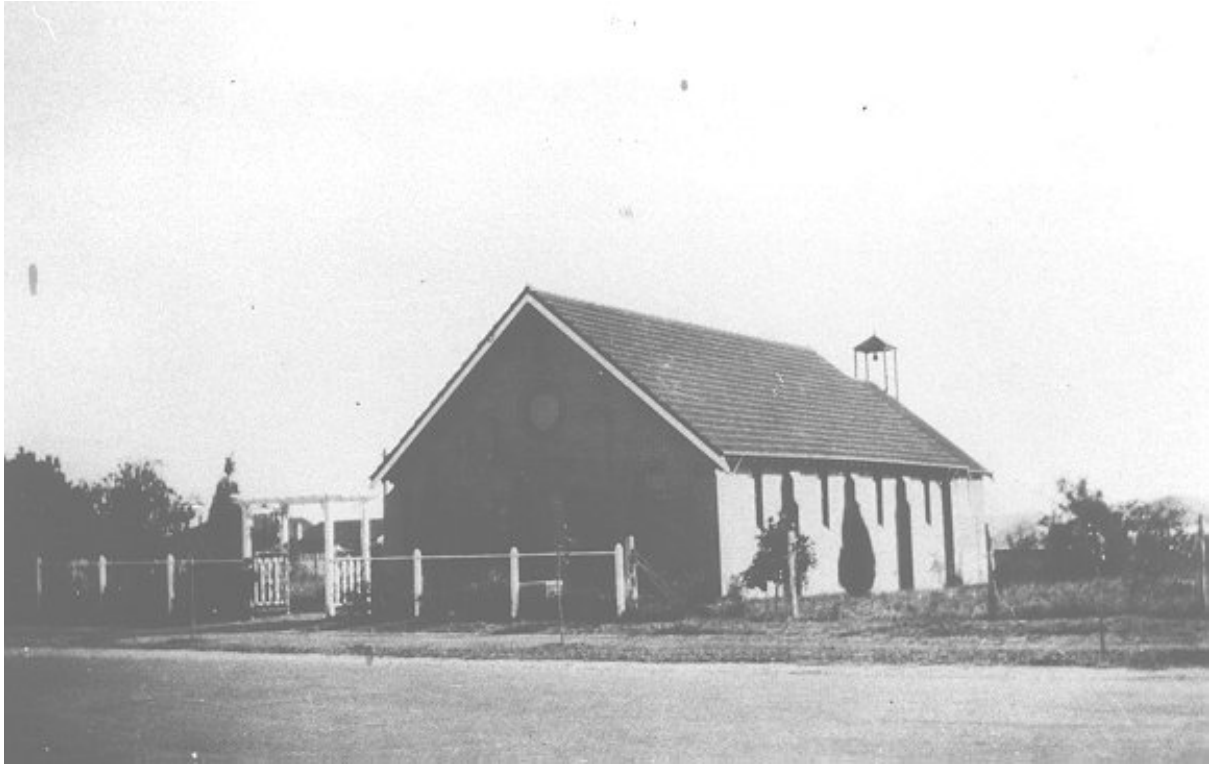
MINNIE MARY COLE
BORN MOLONG 14 SEPTEMBER 1877
A LIFE-LONG CHURCH AND COMMUNITY WORKER
DIED 13 FEBRUARY 1969

She donated two stained glass windows, St. George and St. Andrew. The pulpit was purchased by the Sunday School, of which she was the Superintendent. The font was given in memory of Arthur George Cole, by his children, Alys and Norman; and a special pew dedicated to Mrs. Cole to mark her 25th anniversary as Sunday School Superintendent.

D.J. (Joan) Hatton in Oatley in the Early Days writes, "Special mention in the activities of this parish must be made of Mrs. Minnie Cole and her daughter, Mrs. Alys Propsting, who supervised the Sunday School for over forty years".

Oatley Heritage and Historical Society has heard comments from two now senior men who were sent to Mrs. Cole's Sunday School as very young boys. Their unhappy memories were of a strict, forceful lady who ran the class with a cane. They didn't return, one saying that she "turned him off religion for life".

This photo is an early one of All Saints.



MRS. COLE REMEMBERED IN “OATLEY WRITES” (1983)

Even newcomers to Oatley have heard of the legendary Mrs. Cole. There is a plaque in the library to commemorate her work in the community, work that spanned half a century and all the major undertakings of those times. Church and Sunday School at All Saints, West Oatley; School of Arts; War Memorial; Red Cross and the Oatley Service League.

Besides her organising ability and generous participation in so many activities, Mrs. Cole was remembered for her own social talents and very attractive personality.

And again in Oatley Writes under the heading REMEMBER THESE ITEMS? – Mrs. Cole’s famous raspberry syrup (“the weakest in Australia”) at Sunday School picnics.

RECOGNITION IN “OATLEY IN EARLY DAYS” BY JOAN HATTON (1981)

A plaque in the library commemorates the work of Mrs. Minnie Cole, for her activities in the life of Oatley. For long-time residents of Oatley, Mrs. Cole is perhaps the best remembered public citizen of the township. For fifty years, seemingly ageless, she participated in its activities, gaining the admiration and respect of all. She taught the youth of Oatley to dance the New Vogue- Mazurka and Boston Two Step, and every year a ball was held for the pupils. She lived in Wonoona Parade near Letitia Street. Her* tennis court was used to raise funds for the Junior Red Cross, with social tennis organised by Mr. Stenhouse, admission one shilling, and sweets and jams for sale. Her energy and appealing personality assured success in all her voluntary undertakings – the church, school, Red Cross, School of Arts, War Memorial. She was not only on the executive of the committees, but she also followed up decisions with active work and the involvement of others with encouragement and example.

*Norm & Beryl Butters say that Mrs. Cole did not have a tennis court on her block of land.

A GREAT ORGANISER AND COMMUNITY WORKER

The attached page included in the OHHS project on Oatley Public School shows 3 photos. No doubt Mrs. Cole would have been an important member of those attending the opening of the War Memorial in 1924. The other photos demonstrate Mrs. Cole's involvement with community events.

Mrs. Cole is mentioned in Elaine Howard's book, OATLEY, THE WORKING MAN'S PARADISE: - "During the war (WW2) Mr. E Lawson had helped form the Oatley Service League, sending comforts to servicemen overseas, and a wonderful Oatley woman, Mrs. Cole had organised many successful functions for the Red Cross". Her work for the Oatley Service League is further mentioned in Oatley in Early Days: "Mrs. Cole was again active and worked with other ladies in spinning "greasy wool" which was knitted into garments for use by the Navy men at sea".

OHHS members Jim Nicholson and Alec Leach remember Mrs. Cole. Jim as the violinist in an orchestra that Mrs. Cole formed; and Alec played the part of a piglet in one of Mrs. Cole's plays.

Information on Mrs. Cole compiled by OHHS members Beryl Butters, June Bennett, Betty Goodger and John Whitbread 2016.