

NEWSLETTER

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Vale Laurel O'Toole

By Cathy Jones

Mrs Laurel O'Toole (1942-2023) recently passed away. She was a long term resident of Strathfield and served as an Councillor and was a former Mayor of Strathfield.

Mrs O'Toole was first elected to Strathfield Council at the September 1991 Council election. She served two consecutive terms as a Councillor until July 2000. She was elected as Mayor in September 1998 and served until July 2000.

Mrs O'Toole grew up in Auburn and Homebush and completed her schooling at Strathfield Girls High. She had long term history in this district as her grandfather Syd Goodall was Station Master of Flemington Railway Station. She was a State Registered Nurse, training at Auburn Hospital and studying midwifery at Crown Street Women's Hospital. After her marriage, she and her husband Vic returned to live in Strathfield. In January 1979, the O'Toole's purchased 'Warragong' 30 Agnes Street Strathfield, an 1883 Victorian Italianate house, where they resided for over two decades with their three children.

Mrs O'Toole was endorsed as a Liberal Party candidate and elected at the Strathfield Council election held on September 14 1991. She stated that her interest in seeking office was in response to NSW Government proposals to build townhouses and villas in low rise residential parts of the Strathfield area. She considered that this would result in the potential loss of open space and tree coverage.

In her first term on Council, she gained experience serving on various committees including Chairman of Council's Library and Community Services Committee (1991-1992), Community Centre Management Committee (1991-1995), Homebush Bay Liaison (1992-1995), Traffic Committee (1993-1995), Development Committee (1993), Access Committee (1993) and Environment & Community Services Committee (1994-1995).

She contested the Strathfield Council elections in September 1995. She ran as an endorsed Liberal Party candidate on a ticket with Eve Dutton and Andrew Ho. All three candidates were elected. Cr O'Toole was appointed as Chair of Council's Engineering Services Committee (1995-1996), Traffic Committee (1995), North Western Transport & Planning Committee (1995-1996), RTA Consultative Forum (1995-1996), Corporate and Community Services Committee (1997-1998), Floodplain Management s.355 Committee (1998-1999), Centenary of Federation Committee (1999-2000).

During her two terms on Council, she was directly involved in many important projects and programs. She served on a number of committees for the 2000 Sydney Olympics which included representative to the Olympic Authority Events Committee (1997-2000), Strathfield Olympics Initiatives Committee (1998-2000) and Homebush Bay Local Government



Photo 1 Laurel O'Toole - Mayoral Portrait. Courtesy Strathfield Council.

Liaison Committee Representative (1999-2000). She was appointed by the NSW Local Government Association as their liaison member on the Olympic Security Group. Security was a major concern in the planning for the Sydney Olympics.

Mrs O'Toole also completed a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Sydney, where she undertook studies in government and economics of social services. She considered community involvement in local decision making was important particularly at the local government level. She said that serving on Council allowed her to put theories of community engagement into practice.

She was elected as Mayor in September 1998, was reelected in September 1999 and served until July 2000, when a Council election was called. She did not contest the July 2000 election.

As Mayor, she supported undertaking polling of the local community on proposals to amalgamate Strathfield Council with Burwood Council in 1999-2000. When polls overwhelmingly rejected the proposal, as Mayor, she proposed terminating amalgamation discussions, which angered the then Minister for Local Government, Harry Woods. As Mayor, she also successfully led the fight against boundary claims by the then Auburn Council who proposed claiming large parts of the Strathfield area.

During her Mayoral term, Council adopted a new housing strategy in 1999. The strategy involved significant public consultation. The strategy was an amendment to the Local Environmental Plan and also involved adoption of new Development Control Plans, which enabled the exemption of Strathfield Council from the Metropolitan Planning Strategy.

Cr O'Toole advocated to improve public access to Council meetings and debate on issues of the day including establishing open forum at Council meetings and sponsoring a public debate in the Strathfield Town Hall on the 1999 Referendum on an Australian Republic. The debate featured representatives from parliament, republican and constitutional monarchist groups.

As Mayor, Cr O'Toole wrote a regular newspaper column in order to inform the local community on current issues. She often closed with a favourite quote from philosophers, writers or politicians ranging from Socrates to Winston Churchill. One quote she wrote she valued was from John F Kennedy 'There are risks and costs to a program of action. But they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction'.

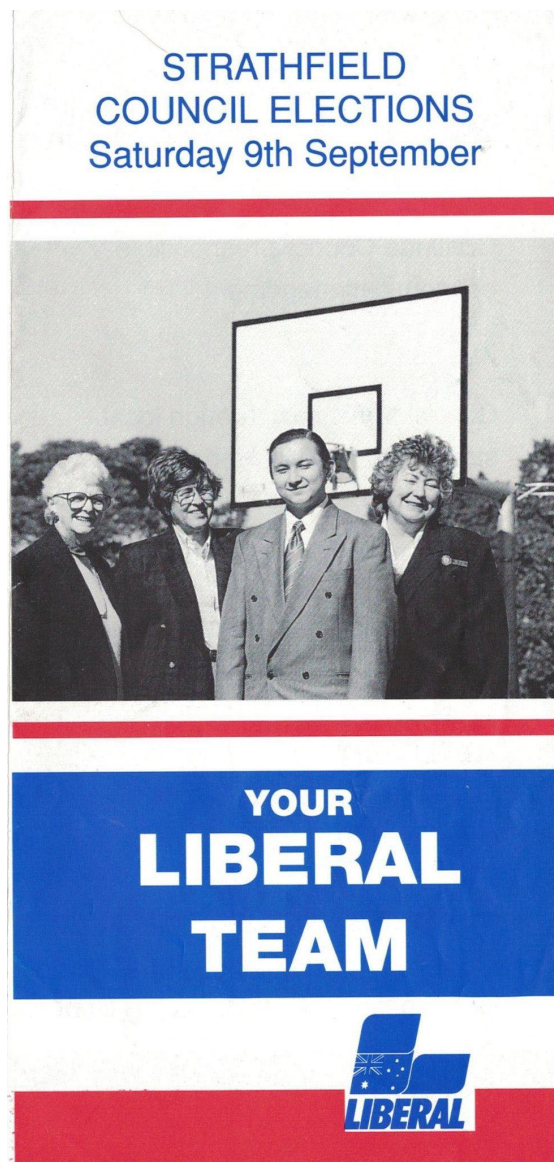


Photo 2 Liberal Party How to Vote 1995 Strathfield Council election. Featuring Eve Dutton (left), Robyn Drysdale, Andrew Ho and Laurel O'Toole (right)

'Warragong' 30 Agnes St Strathfield

By Cathy Jones

'Warragong' 30 Agnes Street Strathfield is a two storey cement rendered brick Victorian Italianate style villa with a hipped and gabled slate roof. It is a heritage item on Strathfield Council's Local Environmental Plan. The property is described as:

"Victorian Italianate style villa with a 'hipped and gabled roof of slate with terracotta ridging. A gabled wing is on the right side of the north (Agnes Street) elevation. The gabled wing has a faceted 2 storey bay with a hipped slate roof and the gable has elaborate timber fretwork barge boards. Three arched double hung windows are on each floor of the bay and are embellished with label moulds on the upper floor. A two storey verandah on the front of the house has an ogee form roof of corrugated steel and is supported on timber posts. Cast iron lace balustrading, brackets and valence embellish the verandah. French doors open to the verandahs on both floors. The house has two chimneys with rendered moulded corbels. Warragong is set well back from both streets. With its grounds, it is a prominent element in the local streetscape"^[1].



Photo 3 'Warragong' 30 Agnes Street Strathfield. Photo Cathy Jones 2023

'Warragong' was built on land originally granted to James Wilshire on 1 January 1810^[2]. The Wilshire grant was subdivided in 1867 as the Redmyre Estate. Land was acquired by James Emanuel Woodward in April 1877, who sold lots 8 and 9 to William Henry Watson in February 1882^[3].

'Warragong' was built for its owners William Henry Watson (about 1841-1922) and his wife, Mary (1843-1919) (nee Christison) in 1883. Watson is identified as a 'warehouseman' in Sands Directory and later as 'of independent means' in Electoral Rolls. Watson petitioned in support of incorporation of local government in 1884 (which was named Strathfield when incorporated in 1885). On the petition, which was published in the NSW Government Gazette of 25 September 1884, he is listed as 'owner at Agnes and Cotswold Streets, Redmyre'.

The house first appears in the 1885 Sands Directory for W H Watson, warehouseman and in later editions, it was known as 'Warragong'^[4].

In the period of Watson's ownership of the house from 1885-1914, the house was occasionally leased. From 1897-1900, the house was leased to Mrs Smith, from 1904-06, it was leased to Frederick Hall who called the house 'St Orme' and lastly from 1911-1912 to Alexander Melville who used the name 'Warragong'^[5]. Watson returned to the house in 1913 and in July 1914, Watson sold the property to Isabel Maud Manton, wife of Joseph Guy Manton, of Marrickville, clerk^[6]. In May 1928, part of the grounds were subdivided from the house, which now only occupied part of Lot 9^[7].

In November 1957, the house was sold to Arvids Medenis of Strathfield, storeman and Hermine Medonis, a school teacher^[8]. Hermine Medenis became the sole owner^[9] in March 1978 following the death of her husband^[9].

In January 1979, 'Warragong' transferred to Victor O'Toole, of Auburn, medical practitioner, and Laurel O'Toole, his wife as joint tenants^[1]. Laurel O'Toole was elected as an Alderman to Strathfield Council in 1991 and served until 2000. She was elected Mayor of Strathfield from 1998 to 2000.

References

^[1] Strathfield Council, "Warragong' 30 Agnes Street, Heritage Significant Statement. viewed at: <https://www.hms.heritage.nsw.gov.au/App/Item/ViewItem?itemId=2450211>

^[2] NSW Land Register, Certificate of Title v.283 f.43

^[3] NSW Land Register, Certificate of Title v.283 f.43

^[4] Sands Directory

^[5] Sands Directory

^[6] NSW Land Register Certificate of Title v.4171 f.28

^[7] NSW Land Register Certificate of Title v.4171 f.28

^[8] NSW Land Register Certificate of Title v.4171 f.28

^[9] NSW Land Register Certificate of Title v.4171 f.28

^[10] NSW Land Register Certificate of Title v.4171 f.28

'Understanding Heritage in Strathfield'

A talk will be held on Strathfield's cultural and built heritage and provide tips on how to maintain residential heritage properties. The talk is presented by the Strathfield-Homebush District Historical Society, with support from Strathfield Council. This is a free event with refreshments served.

Speaker: Alin Almasan, Strathfield's Council's Heritage Advisor.

Time: 2pm Sunday 24 September 2023

Place: Ironbark Room, Strathfield Library, 65-67 Rochester Street, Homebush.

Booking information on www.strathfieldheritage.com or www.strathfieldhomebushhistory.com

Enquiries call Cathy Jones on 9642 3145 or email: strathfieldhistory@gmail.com

Annual General Meeting of the Strathfield-Homebush District Historical Society

Meeting will commence at 1.30pm on Sunday 24 September 2023 before commencement of scheduled meeting (see above). Details of the AGM will be sent separately to members.