

Patron: Lord Cobbold DL
Ivry, Lady Freyberg
Nicholas Cobbold OBE

THE HON. ELEANOR MARY PLUMER MA

May 2013

Eleanor Plumer (1885-1967) #2555 in the tree, was the great, great granddaughter of Sir Thomas Plumer (1753-1824) #855, Master of the Rolls, 1818-1824, and the eldest of three daughters of Field Marshal Herbert Charles Onslow Plumer, 1st Viscount Plumer (1857-1932) #2546 and Annie Constance Goss (1858-1941) #2547

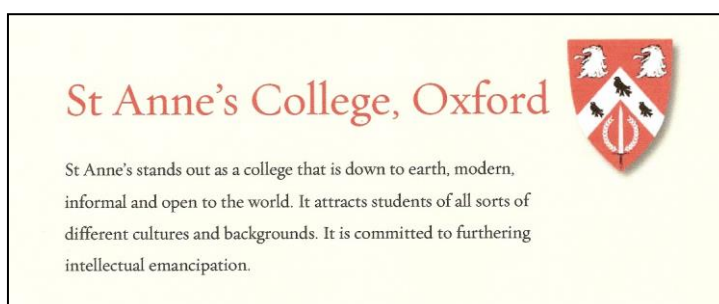
Eleanor became a great British educator. She read English at Oxford as an external student from King's College in London, where she stayed on as Lecturer and Tutor to women students, later becoming Warden of the Mary Ward Settlement from 1923 to 1927. Her next appointment was at St Andrew's Hall in the University of Reading where she was again Warden from 1927 to 1931.

In 1940 she was selected from an eminent short list to become Principal of the Society of Oxford Home Students. In the early days of women's education the home student society was one of the best routes available. Between 1940 and her retirement in 1953 she employed every ounce of her innate skill and determination overseeing the, far from easy, transition of her Society to a fully fledged St. Anne's College within the University of Oxford. During the war years she spent her long vacations as a factory hand at the Morris works in Cowley and for a time the Library's Fulford Room served as a highly productive munitions factory!

A book of collected student memories of their principal was published to mark the opening of Eleanor Plumer House, a graduate centre in Oxford. The few extracts we reproduce here give a good indication of the affection and respect felt by her pupils.



The only available picture of Eleanor Plumer



The Plumer crest adopted by St. Anne's College, Oxford



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1938 *She was a skilful and humorous friend to students and colleagues, a wise and courageous leader. I wish I had known her better.*

1942 *I see now her slight, frail figure, always immaculately dressed in a dark suit, as concealing enormous will and spirit.*

1943 *Later when I was working in London and just strolling along Piccadilly I was surprised to be caught by her umbrella handle and asked how I was getting on.*

1946 *Miss Plumer had a quiet but penetrating sense of humour, and was a great inspiration to me, to St. Anne's and to the University.*

1947 *For a full five years this wonderful woman loyally supported me and I shall always be extremely grateful to her.*

1948 *She was so sharp, funny and wise that we all looked up to her and trusted she would bring the College to its new status.*

1950 *We all wholeheartedly shared her delight in the celebrations surrounding the granting to the Society of full college status, with its own coat of arms (those of the Plumer family).*

1951 *I remember a small, brisk, elderly woman, upright in deportment and business-like. Eye contact was difficult behind the strong 'pebble' lenses of her glasses.*

1952 *She had a considerable presence, and expectations of mental as well as physical embodiment of wisdom were not disappointed.*

Alumni of St. Anne's include Mary Archer (1962); Edwina Currie (1965); Polly Toynbee (1966); Libby Purves (1968); Tina Brown (1971); Simon Rattle (1971) and Danny Alexander (1990).

Interestingly, the present Principal, appointed in 2004, is Tim Gardam who was awarded a double first in English at Gonville & Caius, Cambridge, a college with which the Cobbold family has a substantial connection and Jack Cobbold (1994-) goes up to St Anne's in autumn 2013.