

# MOLLY RAYNOR



**MOLLY  
RAYNOR**  
**1903–1976**

NOTES ON A  
NEW ZEALAND  
MOVIE STAR

by

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Molly Raynor; Full plate glass negative, probably by Spencer Shier, 1927. Robin Healey portrait collection, State Library of Victoria, H90.108/128.

**CONTENTS**

**Chapter 1: the Rayners were entertainers**

**Chapter 2: Molly's early life in New Zealand**

**Chapter 3: Molly goes to Sydney**

**Chapter 4: Molly turns professional!**

**Chapter 5: shipwrecked on the New Zealand coast!**

**Chapter 6: Molly & John's Little Theatre in Bathurst**

**Chapter 7: John McIntosh Beattie *aka* John Warwick**

**Chapter 8: Molly stars in the talkies**

**Chapter 9: Molly & John tackle England**

**Chapter 10: what Molly did in the War**

**Chapter 11: return to New Zealand**

**Chapter 12: in London once more**

**Chapter 13: the plays Molly wrote**

**Chapter 14: the movies & plays Molly acted in**

**Chapter 15: was she a star?**

**Cover:** Molly Raynor from the *Spotlight* casting directory, Autumn 1939.

## Chapter 1: the Rayners were entertainers

Her mother and father were entertainers and Molly Rayner was always going to be one too. They trained her for the limelight from childhood.

She was the third child (second daughter) of Frederick Rayner, vaudeville artist and sketcher and Rhoda (Duckworth) Rayner, who acted and sang on stage until her marriage.

Rhoda Blanche Duckworth was born at the home of her parents Ellen and Charles White Duckworth in Papanui road, Christchurch, on 29 April 1867,<sup>1</sup> the fourth of their five children.

The earliest record of Rhoda Duckworth on stage is at age 21, in 1888,

### CONCERT AT KIRWEE.

A concert in aid of the district school prizes took place on the 13th, when a varied programme, consisting of an extravaganza, *tableaux vivants*, quartettes, songs, recitations, and a reading, was gone through. The extravaganza "Cinderella" was performed admirably throughout, and went without a hitch, provoking rounds of applause from the audience. The dresses were very gorgeous, especially that of the Prince, and the whole made a scene the people of Kirwee are not likely to forget for a while. Miss Davies took the part of the Fairy; Miss Seymour, Cinderella; Miss Tosswill, the Queen; Mr Robert Tosswill, the King; Mr F. Andrews, the Courtier; and Miss Ethel Davies, the Prince, while Misses Rhoda Duckworth and L. Davies took the parts of the sisters, Caroline and Bella, respectively. The *Tableaux Vivants*, "The Sleeping Beauty" and "The Gipsy Encampment," were also very nicely got up, the

stage for the latter representing an encampment of Gipsies in a forest, and the Queen (Miss Rhoda Duckworth) telling the fortunes of an English lady and gentleman. The magnesium fire in this tableau had a very pretty effect, but unfortunately the curtain was allowed to fall rather too soon to please the audience. "Father Christmas" represented a quarrel amongst the flowers as to who should be elected queen of them. This was performed by the school children, who wore wreaths of the flowers they represented with dresses suitable for the characters. Mr Simpson as Father Christmas was very majestic. The songs of Mrs Alfred Amyes, Misses Rhoda Duckworth and Roe, and Mr A. Simpson were well rendered, and consequently much applauded. The duets by Misses R. Duckworth and Seymour, and by Mrs Davies and Miss R. Duckworth went very nicely, while the Quartette "The Carnivale," by Misses Davies, Seymour, and R. Duckworth, and Messrs F. and A. Simpson was very much appreciated.<sup>2</sup>

In 1891 her brother WA Duckworth, farming in Hawera, applied to transfer some land to "Miss Duckworth";<sup>3</sup> on 21 June 1892 she arrived on the *Mahinapua* at New Plymouth<sup>4</sup> and in August wore fancy dress to the Manaia School ball.<sup>5</sup> She played tennis for Hawera against New Plymouth; she and her now widowed mother arranged the music and refreshments for the Hawera Horticultural Society's show.<sup>6</sup>

In 1893 she was appointed to a committee to form the Hawera Musical Society<sup>7</sup> and in May, on the Queen's Birthday, at the opening ceremony for a grand Exhibition, before Mr Maguire MHR and the mayors of Hawera and Patea...

... the special choir furnished by the Hawera Musical Society rose to give the opening ode.... (which) opened with & grand maestoso chorus in E flat major on the words "On this auspicious day," the harmonies being

very full and massive, and the contrary movement of soprano and bass being very noticeable and effective. This was followed by a brilliant symphony by the orchestra. The key then changed to C minor, with a soprano solo by Mrs Swinburne, on the words, "See round this hall displayed." The key again suddenly changed to F major with a tenor solo, which speaks of the beautiful things assembled. The solo was well taken by Mr Stuart. This was followed by an alto solo in E flat major, which terminates with a beautiful and effective modulation to one flat, which was done full justice by Miss Duckworth.... an andante alto solo, splendidly sung by Miss Duckworth, was the most beautiful passage in the whole composition....<sup>8</sup>

At the Musical Society's performance of *The Pirates* in October, "Miss R. Duckworth was very successful in the part of Ruth, singing nicely and acting very effectively, her dialogue being especially good".<sup>9</sup> At a Church of England concert at Manaia in August 1894, "'Three old maids of Lee,' Mrs Parsons and Misses Duckworth, kept the audience in continual laughter, and the act was, in answer to an encore, repeated"—and Rhoda sang "Beauty's eyes".<sup>10</sup> She sang "'When we meet' in her usual good style, and elicited loud applause" at the Oddfellows' Social in September,<sup>11</sup> and she "capitally filled" the part of Dame Carruthers in *The Yeomen of the Guard* in New Plymouth in November.<sup>12</sup> "Miss Duckworth sang the grand old song 'She wore a wreath of Roses'" at a charity concert,<sup>13</sup> and as one of the *Mikado's* three little maids from school, "sang admirably" in New Plymouth in June.<sup>14</sup>

\* \* \* \*

Frederick Richards Rayner was also in Hawera.

He was born in 1860 in Swansea, Glamorganshire, South Wales, the son of Frederick John Rayner, ironmonger and

Margaret Matilda (Richards) Rayner; they had married in September 1857 when he was 18 and she 17.

When he was ten Fred heard the family doctor telling his parents he was too delicate and would never live to adulthood: he decided he would therefore enjoy to the utmost what little time he had. It was a life script.

Some time between 1881 and 1888 he emigrated to Australia and began working for the Sydney *Bulletin*. Rayner recorded that he “had the pleasure of meeting Phil May in Melbourne at Exhibition time,”<sup>15</sup> no doubt during the Jubilee of Victoria Exhibition held 1884–1885. When Rayner travelled to London in 1899–1890, it was May he sought out. Rayner clearly admired and was inspired by the great caricaturist, later emulating his publications and his Arts & Crafts style.

The *Auckland Star* reported in April 1892, Mr. Frederick Rayner, a representative of the Sydney Bulletin, is at present in Auckland on a holiday tour.<sup>16</sup>

In August 1892, in Wellington, at the Commercial Travellers and Warehousemen’s Association concert, “Mr Raynor gave some inimitably funny banjo solos.... A capital evening’s amusement was brought to a close shortly before midnight by the singing of “Auld Lang Syne.”<sup>17</sup> At the second quarterly “social” of the Federated Tailoresses’ Union, “Mr Raynor contributed a banjo... solo”.<sup>18</sup>

But Rayner was to find his greatest creative outlet in cartooning. Years later he would write to his daughters about his introduction to sketching on stage. He was about to leave Dunedin and called at the offices of *The Triad*, Charles Nalder Baeyertz’s “monthly magazine of music, science and art” to say goodbye to Baeyertz. He was out, so Rayner did a quick sketch of himself, wrote under it “I called” and left.



Somewhat later when he got back to his hotel Baeyertz was waiting for him.

He was quite excited. Would I help him with his popular concerts, held at the Garrison Hall? “Delighted,” I said, “what can I do?”

“Sketch some of our characters.”

“I can’t sketch.” I said.

“This is clever,” he said, holding up the sketch I had left on his desk. “Do that and tell some stories. I’ll give you ten pounds.”

He gave me a room and an easel, paper and charcoal for me to practise with. I could write doggerel so I decided to sketch six girls, a sport, a sour spinster, etc, then play my banjo and sing some rhymes about the girls.

I was struggling the next day with the sketch of the sporty girl, whose eyes persisted in squinting when the hall keeper came in. Heaven sent! “Stand still!” I ordered and began sketching him. He had a hard old face with a broken nose and enough hair to send a barber insane. I had nearly finished the sketch when his wife came in. She dropped her dust-pan and burst into such lovely gurgling laughter, so warm, so eloquent, so luscious, that I could have kissed her on her little moustache.

From that moment I knew I was an artist.<sup>19</sup>

He settled in Dunedin and in March 1893 was performing—as a “lightning sketcher” now—at charity events there,

The fifteenth People’s Concert will be held to-night in the Garrison Hall. In addition to the usual musical programme Mr Rayner will give some lightning sketches of well-known persons; and that everyone may have an opportunity of seeing, a platform has been rigged up in the hall. Mr Kelly will take up the second part of the

programme with Edison's phonograph, when instrumental and vocal solos, humorous and otherwise, will be rendered.<sup>20</sup>

... the lightning sketches of Mr F. R. Rayner were exceedingly good. They were executed with much cleverness in a very short space of time, and the artist was enthusiastically applauded for his work.<sup>21</sup>

Of the next concert, the *Evening Star* wrote, "Mr F. R. Rayner will give another series of rapid portraits of 'men about town'"<sup>22</sup> "Mr Rayner's sketches are becoming quite a feature of these concerts. There should be a large attendance."<sup>23</sup> The *Star* went on,

POPULAR CONCERTS.... The main attractions for the fifteenth concert were Mr Rayner's clever lightning sketches and the ventriloquial performance provided by Mr Dickie. Both these gentlemen afforded abundant amusement....<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore Rayner had printed a set of his sketches and as an added attraction, would provide one free with every concert ticket sold.<sup>25</sup>

This was *Fifteen Lightning Sketches of Dunedin Celebrities with Apocryphal Biographies*. Fergusson & Mitchell Print, Dunedin 1893. The wit is schoolboyish and the sketches undisciplined: Rayner was still uncertain of his style.

Nonetheless his publication was popular, people enjoyed identifying those he caricatured and he quickly saw a further opportunity: he would make each publication an "art competition", not naming but numbering his subjects and inviting readers to identify them, the most accurate responses to win a prize.

Long lines waited outside the printers on publishing days to get the first copies. He used to tell his daughters that

if his friends were not in it they came and congratulated him on the number, but if they were, they never spoke to him again.<sup>26</sup>

Years later, after Fred had died, Molly would write a play about a family whose father is a cartoonist on a magazine, but owing to his satirical drawings of the most prominent citizen, his services are dispensed with. Eric Olssen wrote,



The Sketcher at 36: Frederick Richards Rayner, a portrait published in the flier for "The Trilby Art Competition" in 1896. Photographer unknown.

Most of his local sketches presupposed an intimately small society where those he singled out would be readily identified by most readers. Leading men (and sometimes women) featured.... Rayner was a fierce enemy of cant and humbug. He skilfully mocked "wowsers" and the "unco guid"....<sup>27</sup>

At the second meeting of Chistchurch's newly formed Savage Club on 8 May 1893, though somewhat

May 1893, "The sparkling,

democratic\* Sydney *Bulletin* was represented by a member of its staff, who savage like chanted his merry roundelay to the accompaniment of the festive banjo”:<sup>28</sup> this was Fred Rayner’s first performance in Christchurch.

A week after the Savage Club Rayner was the headline act at the Tuam Street Theatre.

The feature of the entertainment was Mr Rayner’s clever lightning sketches; these, which included the pictures of well-known people, evoked loud applause.<sup>29</sup>

In September the *Press* noticed,

Christchurch Celebrities.—Mr F. R. Rayner, who is well known in Christchurch as a lightning sketcher of considerable ability, has published a little sketch book containing caricatures of Christchurch celebrities with comic biographies. The various “subjects” of Mr Rayner’s facile pencil have been hit off remarkably well, and one cannot be mistaken in the identity of any of the thirty. The price, sixpence, is remarkably cheap for so amusing a collection of the counterfeit presentiments of our notables.<sup>30</sup>

This was *Thirty lightning sketches of Christchurch celebrities: with apocryphal biographies*. Dunedin: Fergusson and Mitchell. Again, he offered the booklet as part of the sixpenny ticket for the concerts. It must have been a profitable formula and the celebrities of the western lower North Island were the next in line. The *Taranaki Herald* told its readers,

Mr F. R. Rayner, who was in New Plymouth a month or so since, sketching, has sent us a copy of a little work he has produced called “Rayner’s Reminiscences of

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\* Fie! not democratic, surely!

Peculiar Pakehas.” It contains 16 pages of caricatures of well-known men in New Plymouth, Wanganui, and Wellington.<sup>31</sup>

The *New Zealand Mail* liked it,

We have received from Mr F. R. Rayner a copy of a very clever skit on local celebrities which has just been published by him, under the title of “Rayner’s Reminiscences of Peculiar Pakehas.” It contains 16 full-page caricatures of men well known about town.... Accompanying each is a piece of descriptive letterpress “wrote sarcastic” and the remaining space of the brochure is filled up with advertisements. The publication fits the pocket easily, and is sold for sixpence, but contains far more than sixpenn’orth of the sure specific for melancholia—in fact, it is brimming over with fun.<sup>32</sup>

He gave a copy to each visitor to the weekly Popular Concert at Wellington’s Theatre Royal in May.<sup>33</sup>

By now Rayner was in Napier,

Mr Fred R. Rayner met with a tremendous reception in a sketch he gave, entitled “A Napier Serenade,” with banjo accompaniment. This was full of local and topical allusions of a humorous kind, and brought down the house. An imperative recall followed the conclusion of this number. Mr Rayner responded by some sketches illustrating a short song descriptive of (imaginary) events at the Caledonian ball. This caused roars of laughter....<sup>34</sup>

In September Rayner was interviewing Napier celebrities for another booklet of caricatures and it was published on 17 October: *Fred Rayner’s Sketch Book of 50 Caricatures: “Things You See When Your (sic) Out Without Your Gun” in*

*Napier, Hastings & Waipawa*. Not everyone was happy: a correspondent to the *Hawke's Bay Herald*...

SIR,—Mr F. Rayner's little book of sketches of some of our local celebrities, which was issued to the public yesterday, has been eagerly inquired for, and very varied were the facial expressions of the purchasers as they turned over the pages and discovered who were depicted thereon. But, although there is undoubted cleverness in many of the sketches, one cannot help thinking that the artist has exceeded the limit of fairness in some of his portraitures and descriptions, and I believe the agent has expressed regret that he has unwittingly lent himself to the circulation of what may have caused pain to the individuals concerned. Still, as the book is only produced and issued for the humor of the thing it is to be hoped that none will make too serious an interpretation of what it contains.—I am, &c.,  
B.B.H.<sup>35</sup>  
 October 18, 1894.

Indeed, JW Craig, Napier bookseller, sole agent for Rayner's *Sketch book*, "recognising that the publication is one that is needlessly offensive",<sup>36</sup> withdrew it from the market,

"Disgusted" wrote,

SIR,—Since reading the anticipatory notice in your columns of Mr Rayner's booklet, I have been much exercised as to the meaning of the word "snappy". Unable to find it any dictionary, I concluded that it meant lively, pungent. Now, having read the pamphlet to which it was applied, I should define "snappy" writing as that which combines the minimum of ability with the maximum of coarseness, for never have I come across such a compound of dulness and vulgarity. "Save me from my friends!" must, I think, have been the exclamation of the gentlemen whom be intended to

flatter, whilst among the portraits of those whom he feebly satirises, few would have been recognised had he not put their names underneath, as children write "this is a horse." An honest laugh is a good thing, especially when it is at the expense of knaves, fools, and imposters who can be reached in no other way, and has a substratum of fact; but Mr Rayner does not make us laugh, and instead of facts he draws on his own imagination. The cause of the peculiar coarseness of some of the sketches and descriptions is not far to seek. One refers to a scandal of a class always attractive to prurient minds; whilst one of the subjects furnished by Hastings is a zealous and respected clergyman striving to check the spread of profanity and coarseness. *If* I could get up any interest in a writer of his stamp I should like to know (1) whether he has ever studied anatomy; 2. whether he is ever the author of the criticism of his own books; 3, whether he is still on the staff of a Sydney paper. If so, I pity Sydney.—I am, &c.

DISGUSTED.<sup>37</sup>

October 19, 1894.

Another who palpably demonstrated his disgust was wealthy runholder Spencer Herbert Gollan of Mangatarata Station, a sportsman who excelled in rowing and golf, and who was also a race horse owner. My copy of Rayner's *Sketch book* has a note in longhand, "Spencer Gollan very offended and pulled Rayner round the lawn at the Park Race course by the nose".<sup>38</sup> Rayner's nose was "sharp".

The Napier locals nonetheless paid Rayner the compliment of a concert in his honour and Rayner performed,

#### THEATRE ROYAL.

#### COMPLIMENTARY CONCERT.

The complimentary concert given to Mr Fred. R. Rayner by the Napier amateurs attracted a very large audience to

the Theatre Royal last evening. Owing to Mr F. S. Pope having been removed to Wellington his place on the programme was taken by Mr Rayner, who sang "Here Upon My Vessel's Deck." .... Mr F. R. Rayner then gave a series of lightning sketches of local celebrities, and this part of the entertainment was well received, some of the portraits being plainly recognisable.... Mr Rayner sang excellently a comic song, "Poor Pierrot," one of the latest London successes. His business was good, and the "patter" was nearly all local, so that it is needless to say that it "took" immensely. A most pronounced encore followed, and Mr Rayner replied by singing a Dutch serenade with jodelling chorus.<sup>39</sup>

Rayner performed at a social in aid of new instruments for the Hawera Brass Band in February 1895, with a vocal item and his lightning sketches of local residents.<sup>40</sup>

In April 1895 Newspapers throughout the country happily repeated the story of Rayner having been assaulted in the street by an enraged New Plymouth Member of the House of Representatives, EM Smith.

In June he sang at the Hawera Horticultural Society's social.<sup>41</sup> On 11 October he advertised his *Winter Annual* in the *Hawera & Normanby Star*.

\* \* \* \*

The two entertainers could hardly have missed each other and on 31 December 1895 Rhoda Duckworth and Fred Rayner were married,

**RAYNER-DUCKWORTH.**—At St Mary's, Hawera, on 31st December, 1895, by the Rev. W. H. Kay, Frederic Richard Rayner, Swansea, South Wales, to Rhoda Blanche, third



daughter of the late Charles White  
Duckworth, Christchurch.<sup>42</sup>

### Wedding.

#### RAYNER—DUCKWORTH.

At the early hour of 8 o'clock this morning, the marriage of Miss R. Duckworth, second daughter of Mrs Duckworth, of Hawera, with Mr F. R. Rayner, was celebrated in the English Church, the Rev. W. H. Kay officiating. The choir, of which Miss Duckworth had been a member for many years, assembled in good force to lead the musical part of the service, and Mrs Fanhall, organist, played the "Wedding March." The bride, who was given away by her brother, Mr W. A. Duckworth, wore her travelling dress, a gray tweed, trimmed with pale blue silk; her hat, a gold coloured straw, being trimmed to match. Miss Florence Duckworth acted as bridesmaid in a dress of gray tweed, trimmed with dark blue silk. The bride carried a beautiful spray bouquet of white roses and heath, while her sister's was composed of Marguerite daisies and cornflowers. Mrs Duckworth wore black silk, Miss Duckworth white, and Mrs W. Duckworth gray and navy blue. Mr and Mrs Rayner left for Wellington by the through train, amid showers of rice. They received many handsome presents.<sup>43</sup>

A son Trevor Charles was born in Christchurch (on 27 September 1897)<sup>44</sup>, Joan Ellen (1901), Molly (1903), Garth Richards (1906) and Rhoda ("Betty") Elspeth (1907) followed. They were as different—as a farmer uncle said—as a bad litter of pups... no two alike.<sup>45</sup>

In Mavis Thorpe Clark's *Strolling players*, a biography of Rhoda's daughters Joan and Betty, there are several references to Rhoda. She had a life interest in philanthropy, playing the piano at an orphans' Christmas party, always aware of those who had less, despite her own varying fortunes. She tried to

instil consideration for others into her children (“perhaps because Fred so often forgot”). She had periods of “blanketing depression”, but also “great wit and spontaneity” and on the whole the family was joyous, though “an artistic father and a freethinking mother did not always make for harmony.”<sup>46</sup>

She told her daughters, “Artists really shouldn’t marry”.... Their father was an artist and this part of him always belonged to himself. He couldn’t share it with anyone; because of this their mother had had her own little hell.<sup>47</sup>

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1 *Lyttelton Times* 1 May 1867.

2 *Press* 17 January 1888.

3 *Taranaki Herald* 15 December 1891.

4 *Taranaki Herald* 21 June 1892.

5 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 9 August 1892.

6 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 23 November 1892.

7 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 10 March 1893.

8 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 25 May 1893.

9 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 5 October 1893.

10 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 14 August 1894.

11 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 8 September 1894.

12 *Taranaki Herald* 15 November 1894.

13 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 4 May 1895.

14 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 21 June 1895.

15 *Sketcher* 14, 1901.

16 *Auckland Star* 9 April 1892.

17 *New Zealand Times* 2 August 1892.

18 *New Zealand Times* 9 August 1892.

19 Mavis Thorpe Clark 1972. *Joan & Betty Rayner: strolling players.*

Lansdowne, Melbourne. p44.

20 *Otago Daily Times* 11 March 1893.

21 *Evening Star* 13 March 1893.

22 *Evening Star* 16 March 1893.

23 *Evening Star* 17 March 1893.

24 *Evening Star* 20 March 1893.

25 *Otago Daily Times* 14 April 1893.

- 26 Mavis Thorpe Clark 1972. *Joan & Betty Rayner: strolling players*.  
Lansdowne, Melbourne. p.45.
- 27 Olssen E 1998. In *Southern People - A dictionary of Otago Southland  
Biography*. Jane Thomson Ed. Longacre Press.
- 28 *Press* 9 May 1893.
- 29 *Press* 19 May 1893.
- 30 *Press* 26 September 1893.
- 31 *Taranaki Herald* 20 April 1894.
- 32 *New Zealand Mail* 27 April 1894.
- 33 *Evening Post* 18 May 1894.
- 34 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 28 June 1894
- 35 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 29 June 1894.
- 36 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 20 October 1894.
- 37 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 23 October 1894.
- 38 Spencer Gollan, son of Donald Gollan, owned Mangatarata Station.
- 39 *Hawke's Bay Herald* 18 October 1894.
- 40 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 27 February 1895.
- 41 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 1 June 1895.
- 42 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 2 January 1896.
- 43 *Hawera & Normanby Star* 31 December 1895.
- 44 *Press* 28 September 1897.
- 45 Mavis Thorpe Clark 1972. *Joan & Betty Rayner: strolling players*.  
Lansdowne, Melbourne. p.16.
- 46 *ibid.* p.20.
- 47 *ibid.* p.46.

## Chapter 2: Molly's early life in New Zealand

Molly Rayner (their name was spelled “Rayner” or “Raynor” but Molly adopted “Raynor” in her theatrical career, for better character balance with “Molly”) was born on 6 May 1903 in Dunedin and Fred Rayner wrote, “For a fine, fluent, picturesque study of sturdy English, (readers) should hear me any morning about **2.30 a.m.** It would be a lesson in their mother tongue that would astonish....” The piece is accompanied by a self-portrait with the baby, Molly.<sup>1</sup>



Fred used his family in advertisements in *The Sketcher*: here Joan and baby Molly advertise Fry's chocolates and Hudson's biscuits.<sup>2</sup>

Life was not always easy for the Rayners. Making caricatures made enemies as well as friends and though Fred was immensely popular in some quarters, he was intensely disliked in others. He had been assaulted in Hawke's Bay and Taranaki and threatened with legal action in Dunedin for his work and his art needed new subjects in new cities: Dunedin until 1906, Christchurch, Wellington, Auckland from 1912. He published his last cartoon in 1908 and gave his last performance as a lightning sketcher in 1913.

# Fry's Chocolates!

HER FIRST CHOCOLATE!



*Morris, Photo.*

*A longing stare, a scrumptious sigh,  
And Babs was introduced to Fry.*

## PLAYING SHOP!



*Mathe, Photo.*

**Customer: "Pees div me Hudson's!"**

Molly's schooling before Auckland is unknown but once there she attended Melmerly College, St George's Bay Road, Parnell, a "Kindergarten, Day and Boarding School for Girls", principals Mrs Albert Boulton and Miss HJ Thompson.<sup>3</sup> It is now St George's Bay Guest House.



In 1911 she received a school prize for good work. In September 1917 she took part in a duet, "Bumble Bee" and a dance "Poppies" in a musical and dance recital at the Theatre Royal Hamilton. Each item "was splendidly executed and much enjoyed by the audience".<sup>4</sup> In November,

"ALICE IN WONDERLAND."

The performance of "Alice in Wonderland" by Miss Vera Burmester's child pupils at His Majesty's Theatre

on Saturday night, in aid of the “Baby Week funds,” attracted a very large audience. Considerable enthusiasm was evoked by the clever juveniles, who were seen in a series of prettily-dressed and well-arranged dances, besides interpreting the well-known story on the lines of pantomime.... Of outstanding merit as a danseuse and elocutionist was Miss Molly Raynor as the Frog and in other characters. Her eccentric dance, and her pas seul as Mercury, were both excellent, and her dialogue in the quaint illustrated monologue, “The Minuet,” was well delivered.<sup>5</sup>

Fred carried that review in his wallet for years. Vera Burmester had arrived in Auckland from Dannevirke where she performed dances at local events. By 1915 she was teaching dance in Auckland and Hamilton.

The Gisborne Competitions Society’s annual festival had begun in 1917, and in 1919, “The Society’s (third) festival this year has exceeded all previous occasions”.<sup>6</sup> Molly Rayner won the Ladies’ Shakespearean Recitation (“Lady McBeth’s Soliloquy”), the Recitation (girls under 18),<sup>7</sup> was second in the Story without words with “Alarm that would not go off”,<sup>8</sup> was placed first in the Ladies’ recitation, “A song of War” (she, “said the judge, made some mistakes in articulation, but gave a sympathetic performance”) and was second in the Musical monologue (humorous) with “Hello, Tu Tu”.<sup>9</sup> She was second in the Prepared reading and won the Humorous recitation (“The Inventor’s Wife”) and the Dramatic or pathetic recital (“The Taking of Ratisbon”).<sup>10</sup> She received the Gold Medal for the boy or girl winning most points, the Gold Medal for the humorous stories competition and two guineas and the Gold Medal for the lady gaining most points.<sup>11</sup>

Molly and her mother stayed a week or two in Gisborne, no doubt to bask in the glow of success. Afterwards she performed at “a delightful entertainment” at the Gisborne Childrens’



Home; Rhoda donated a guinea to the Home.<sup>12</sup> At a concert at His Majesty's, Gisborne,

Little Miss Molly Rayner, who was so successful in the competitions last week, sang "Hello, Tu Tu" with pronounced success, also Shakespeare's "Puck" (in character). She was obliged to respond on each occasion with an encore.<sup>13</sup>

Back in Auckland the following month,

#### MRS. GRIFFITHS' RECITALS.

There was a refined touch about the work of all the performers at a recital given last evening at the Town Hall Concert Chamber by Mrs. Arthur Griffiths and her advanced pupils.... Elocutionists can either be very dull or very interesting, and the applause of the audience last evening showed the success of the methods used in Mrs. Griffiths' school.... Miss Molly Rayner... was a delightfully impish "Puck"....<sup>14</sup>

Mrs Arthur Griffiths had been teaching elocution in Dunedin until late 1917. In June 1918 she was advertising her services in Auckland and Molly Rayner was by 1919 clearly an "advanced pupil".

But it was time for a change of teacher. In June 1920 Molly Rayner was a pupil of Madame Mabel St. James, performing in a one act "comedietta" in the Town Hall Concert Chamber.<sup>15</sup>

MADAM MABEL ST. JAMES  
Of London and Birmingham  
Professor of Elocution  
RECITATION—GESTURE—GRACE  
Next term commences Sept. 15.  
Address: THE STUDIO  
22 Commercial Bank Chambers.<sup>16</sup>

DRAMATIC RECITAL.  
 DRAMATIC RECITAL.  
 DRAMATIC RECITAL.

MADAME MABEL ST. JAMES  
 MADAME MABEL ST. JAMES  
 AND HER PUPILS.

CONCERT CHAMBER, TOWN HALL

TUESDAY, JUNE 22,

AT 7.50 SHARP.

PROGRAMME INCLUDES:

Costume Recitals. Humorous Monologues  
 Quarrel Scene from "School for Scandal."  
 "The Pot on Scene" ("Romeo and Juliet")  
 "The Banishment of Rosalind"  
 ("As You Like It").

And

"THE MERE MAN."  
 Comedietta in One Act.

Scene—The Drawingroom at the Emancipated  
 Ladies' Club, London.  
 The President . . . . MISS DE LYLE  
 Lady Betty . . . MISS VIVIAN HIGGINS  
 (A Serious Girl.)  
 Dolly . . . . MISS MARGARET BALI  
 (A Lazy Girl.)  
 Maisie . . . . MISS MYRTLE LEE  
 (A Blushing Girl.)  
 Irene . . . . MRS. E. KISSEN  
 (An "Up-to-date" Girl.)  
 Miss Goadsby . . MISS MOLLY RAYNER  
 (A Girl No Longer.)  
 Hon. Mrs. Rickaby . . MISS INEZ TAYLOR  
 (A Widow.)  
 Amelia . . . MISS HILDA PARKINSON  
 (A Maid.)

INCIDENTAL ORCHESTRAL MUSIC.

Reserved Seats, 3s; Admission, 2s.

Box Plan and Tickets at Messrs. Lewis L.  
 Eady and Son, Ltd., Queen Street (opposite  
 His Majesty's Theatre.)

A week later she had corrected Madam to “Madame”.<sup>17</sup>

“Miss” Mabel St. James had been an actress in the English provinces until 1899 when she was advertising for work. She then disappeared from public attention until her arrival in Auckland in 1920. In her Auckland advertisements she said she had been Professor of Elocution at Midlands Conservatoire of Dramatic Art—probably the Birmingham Conservatoire.

But soon Molly was off to the Sydney Conservatorium. “Women’s World” in the *New Zealand Herald* of 28 July 1920 announced,

Mrs. Raynor and Miss Molly Raynor are leaving by the Maheno for Sydney, where Miss Raynor will continue her studies in elocution.

The 1919 electoral roll had Fred and Rhoda at 50 Gillies Ave, Epsom (now under the motorway)—his occupation listed as “agent”. There are a number of references to money difficulties in Mavis Thorpe Clark’s biography of Joan and Betty Rayner and there are other references to Rhoda’s family being wealthy so she may have inherited money.

In July 1921,

Mrs. F. R. Rayner and family leave by the Niagara for Sydney, where they will remain for at least a year. During this time Mrs. Rayner has let her house in Gillies Avenue. Miss Molly Rayner has been in Sydney for the last twelve months, studying dramatic expression.<sup>18</sup>

LAND Agents.—Take notice, I have sold my property in Gillies Avenue, Epsom.—  
Mrs. F. R. Raynor.<sup>19</sup>

Rhoda, recognising the potential their daughters had “to do something interesting,” insisted, against Fred’s wishes, on moving the family to Australia where their opportunities would be greater. On 8 July 1922 Rayner himself left on the *Ulimaroa* to join them in Sydney.<sup>20</sup>

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- 1 *Sketcher* No. 20. Dunedin: Wilkie print.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 *Auckland Star* 20 February 1915.
- 4 *Waikato Times* 27 September 1917.
- 5 *New Zealand Herald* 12 November 1917.
- 6 *Poverty Bay Herald* 6 September 1919.
- 7 *Poverty Bay Herald* 1 September 1919.
- 8 *Poverty Bay Herald* 3 September 1919.
- 9 *Poverty Bay Herald* 4 September 1919.
- 10 *Poverty Bay Herald* 6 September 1919.
- 11 *Poverty Bay Herald* 6 September 1919.
- 12 *Poverty Bay Herald* 9 September 1919.
- 13 *Poverty Bay Herald* 11 September 1919.
- 14 *Auckland Star* 15 October 1919.
- 15 *New Zealand Herald* 19 June 1920.
- 16 *New Zealand Herald* 30 August 1919.
- 17 *Auckland Star* 6 September 1919.
- 18 *Auckland Star* 29 July 1921.
- 19 *New Zealand Herald* 17 November 1921.
- 20 *New Zealand Herald* 8 July 1922.

### Chapter 3: Molly goes to Sydney.

Sydney's *Evening News* had noticed the Rayners' arrival,

#### SOCIAL AND OTHER NEWS

Mrs. F.R. Rayner, of New Zealand, wife of the well-known caricaturist, has arrived in Sydney, accompanied by her daughter Molly. Miss Rayner, who is 17 years of age, is a gifted entertainer. Recently in New Zealand she won three gold medals at an elocutionary competition, one for her interpretation of Shakespeare, one for funny stories, and one for the highest number of marks in sections. She is now studying singing and piano at the Conservatorium, and is the guest of Mrs Clunies Ross, at Roseville. Miss Rayner assisted at the girls' campaign concert at the huts in Moore-street, and won much favourable comment.<sup>1</sup>

Molly studied at the Sydney Conservatorium's Music School.

The curriculum included Harmony and Composition, Elementary Theory and Rhythm, Musical History and Literature, Diction and Elocution, as well as ensemble and choir classes and private tuition.... Examinations were held in individual subjects with certificates and diplomas granted to those students who met the required conditions.... The large number of students who attended the Conservatorium were either private music tuition students, or those who studied selectively the courses on offer.<sup>2</sup>

The Conservatorium records show she paid for private lessons. In October 1921 she supplemented her funds with weekend work,

**ELOCUTION—MISS MOLLY  
RAYNER,**  
Pupil of Madame St. James, London,  
will receive Pupils at her studio, 23,  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Carnegie's, between 11  
a.m. and 1 p.m. Saturday. Tel.,  
N1114.<sup>3</sup>

That year, at age 18, she joined the “Cheer-Oh Girls”, her first performance with them noted by the *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate* on 9 December 1921.

The Cheer-Oh Girls was an amateur concert party of seven to ten women, formed in Mosman, Sydney by Mrs Bennett White (aka Meta Hayter) to raise funds for patriotic appeals. It began at the Mosman Town Hall on 10 November 1916. The Cheer-Oh Girls made many appearances and tours in Sydney and New South Wales, and later performed on radio. Molly Raynor did character sketches with the Cheer-Ohs from 1921 to 1926.<sup>4</sup> In 1921,

By reason of their entertaining powers the “Cheer Ohs” soon became general favourites, and their concerts drew bumper houses. They appeared throughout the State, and altogether, as the result of several hundred performances, the sum of nearly £20,000 was raised for patriotic and charitable purposes.<sup>5</sup>

The critics liked Molly.

The character sketches by Miss Molly Raynor were cleverly given, the restaurant scene being a gem.<sup>6</sup>

Miss Molly Raynor... scored similar honors (encored again and again) with her character sketches.<sup>7</sup>

Miss Mollie Raynor, an undeniably clever character sketch artist, also made herself a favorite, and, a bad throat notwithstanding, reached very close to the best

that country districts see in this line from even professional artists.<sup>8</sup>

Mrs Bennett White and Miss Molly Raynor, in their sketches, fairly “brought down the house.”<sup>9</sup>

Miss Molly Raynor also delighted with her humorous comedy sketches.<sup>10</sup>



The Cheer-Oh Girls: Molly is at right in the back row.  
*Sydney Morning Herald* 5 December 1921.

The sketches by Molly Raynor were highly appreciated, and the audience clamoured for more.<sup>11</sup>

Miss Molly Raynor had her house in uproar in “Our Army” a fond mother’s description of her V.C. hero son; and her picture of an imbecile fetching the beer was one of the funniest things ever heard. She is a natural comedienne, and, after receiving a bouquet at one end of the stage, saw Miss Dickerson receive a beautiful bouquet of white chrysanthemums and place them on the piano. She strode across the stage and made off with them, to the delight of the audience and the dismay of the pianiste.<sup>12</sup>

In Molly Raynor the band has a story-teller and character-sketch artist fit for any company.<sup>13</sup>

The portrayal of the ill-used drudge of the family, by Miss Mollie Raynor, was a piece of first class acting and richly deserved the plaudits gained.<sup>14</sup>

Miss Mollie Raynor was in great form and kept the audience in happy mood with her comic stories.... Mrs. Bennett White and Miss Mollie Raynor’s duet, “Don’t I look like Harold Lloyd” was something out of the ordinary, and they were vociferously encored.<sup>15</sup>

The Cheer-Oh Girls celebrated ten years of performances in November 1926 and on the 4<sup>th</sup> the *Daily Telegraph* ran a feature, with photographs of all the members.





Molly Raynor: *Daily Telegraph* 4 November 1926

In February 1927 the Cheer-Oh Girls gave a tea party at the Astor Café to say farewell to “Miss Mollie Raynor who will leave Sydney for Melbourne”.<sup>16</sup> She did make further appearances with the Cheer-Ohs, the last time in October 1933, with her husband John Warwick,

In the Mosman Town Hall on October 12 the revived “Cheero” girls will make their appearance, in aid of the training farm for unemployed boys at Dee Why. Six of the original cast will be in the company, which will include Molly Rayner. This clever comedienne has written some original sketches, in which she will act with John Warwick.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, in January 1935, the Cheer-Oh Girls entertained her at a party before she left for London.<sup>18</sup>

In 1922–23 she performed for the Caledonian Society,

**TO-NIGHT** **TO-NIGHT.**  
**CALEDONIAN SOCIETY OF SYDNEY.**  
**POPULAR MONTHLY CONCERT.**

ST. JAMES’S HALL, Phillip-street (up King-street).

Commencing at 8 p.m. prompt.

The Songs of Scotland, by the following Artists:  
 Misses Dorrie Ward, Mabel Batchelor. Molly Rayner, Joyce Collins, F. McEachern. Messrs. Richard McClelland, Ernest Archer. Pupils of A. S. Bellamy, Sydney Thistle Pipe Band.  
 Admission: 1/ to all parts (plus Tax).<sup>19</sup>

In January 1923 she appeared in a vaudeville show at the Tivoli.<sup>20</sup> In December,

Miss Marjorie MacDonald entertained a number of her friends at the Highland Society’s rooms yesterday afternoon, when she, and a number of her pupils, gave a

display of eurhythmics. Miss Mollie Rayner, Miss Enid Conley, and Miss Thelma Houston added further to the enjoyment of the guests by contributing musical and elocutionary items.<sup>21</sup>

Then, on 10 December 1923 the *Sydney Morning Herald* announced,

**The Shakespeare Society Players' Club**

Those interested in the formation of this new Repertory Club are invited to attend to-morrow, Tuesday, the 11th inst., at 8 p.m. in the Assembly Hall, Education-building, Loftus-street.... His Honor Judge Beeby will preside.

George Stephenson Beeby was politician, judge, playwright, author, producer, administrator. In proposing the new Club he upset some,

“A municipal theatre is badly needed in this city. It would not be necessary to start it on a big scale. The three requisites are a hall, a stage, and a small subsidy.” This was the opinion advanced by Judge Beeby last night, in presiding over a meeting called to form “The Shakespeare Society Players' Club.” The objects of the proposed club are threefold—first, the production upon the stage of Elizabethan, Restoration, and other drama of outstanding merit, and of human and social interest; second, the encouragement of the work of Australian playwrights and the production of their work upon the stage; third, the ultimate establishment of a national or municipal theatre in Sydney.

“Whenever it is suggested that the commercial theatre is not performing its functions properly,” went on Judge Beeby, “the taunt is levelled at the critics that they are ‘highbrows’ aiming at the erection of a temple of boredom. The best answer to that taunt is the work of the Sydney Repertory Society, which has made us

acquainted with many plays—those of Shaw, Chesterton, and Granville Barker, for example—which the commercial theatre refuses to touch. Whether or not there is room for a wider movement is another matter. Attacks on the commercial theatre are uncalled for, for that theatre exists frankly and solely for the profit it can make. It is a reflection of the public mind. If the public wants musical comedy it gets musical comedy, even though it may be minus music and minus comedy. The commercial theatre has ceased to be an educational medium. There are, however, signs of reaction, and it is quite possible to raise the public taste in dramatic art.”<sup>22</sup>

The commercial theatres were affronted and the Repertory Society felt threatened by the potential competition. Beeby moved to reassure them and the Players Club thrived.

In the summer of 1923–24 Molly’s sister Joan arrived back from England after two years’ hard work in her godmother Constance Smedley’s Greenleaf Theatre, keen to enlist Molly to work with her.

THE matinee musicale at the Royal Colonial Institute on Tuesday gave members an opportunity of viewing picturesque interpretation by Joan and Mollie Raynor, youthful apostles of the Greenleaf Theatre; their quaint costumes of the strolling player variety gave their folk songs and stories a special piquancy and put a little force into Society’s usual anaemic hand-clap.<sup>23</sup>

Already Sydney society was noticing the Rayner girls. In the headmaster’s party at a dance at the Sydney Grammar School, given by the Old Sydneians Club, were “Miss Joan Rayner, who wore a powder blue marocain gown; Miss Mollie Rayner, in vellum georgette”.<sup>24</sup>

But by now Molly was immersed in little theatre.\* Their sister Betty would join Joan in the new dramatic concepts of the Greenleaf Theatre and their story is told in two books—Mavis Thorpe Clark’s *Joan & Betty Rayner, strolling players* (Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1972) and the Australian Children’s Theatre Foundation’s *Strolling players’ spirit lives on: the life of Joan and Betty Rayner* (2015).



◀ Joan and Betty Rayner

The *Daily Telegraph* assessed the Players’ Club’s ethos and performance,

**THE PLAYERS’ CLUB**  
**“THE MELTING POT”**

The Players’ Club of Sydney is a new organisation. It is a repertory theatre society, which has made great progress in its activities during the past year. It is a society of people whose interest is in the drama and its practice by amateurs.

The club has arranged a series of monthly studio evenings, at which a programme of one-act plays is presented, at the Highland Society’s Hall in Phillip Street. Such a programme gives many opportunities for

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\* “Little theatre” means “a small independent theatre used for experimental or avant-garde drama, or for non-commercial community productions”.

those who find delight in acting and in stage craft. Each one-act play is made the subject of separate study by a group of amateurs under a leader or producer, and during the year as many as 30 of these short plays can be produced. The works of Australian dramatists can be tried out in this way without expense. Experiments in scenery and lighting will be made, as time progresses and the membership of the club increases.

This club is, in fact, the beginning of the Little Theatre movement in Sydney. It has for its main object the formation of a theatre organisation independent of the commercial stage.

Besides the studio evenings the Players' Club gives four public shows during the year. So far, its productions have been up to the highest repertory standard. The next production will be Israel Zangwill's "Melting Pot," a drama of intense interest, full of delightful humor.<sup>25</sup>

Mollie Rayner is listed in the cast for the four act play, *The Melting Pot*, 4 July 1924.<sup>26</sup> The *Herald* thought

Mollie Rayner was cleverly in character as the fashionable, ungracious Baroness with her French accent....<sup>27</sup>



The *Sun* (2 November 1924) published her photograph ►

<p><i>The Players' Club, Sydney</i> Presents <b>"THE MELTING POT"</b> <i>A Drama in Four Acts, by Israel Zangwill.</i></p>		<p><b>MUSICAL PROGRAMME</b> By <b>Miss E. de COURCY BREMER (Piano)</b> And <b>Mrs. K. SHIRLEY (Violin).</b></p>	
<p><b>CAST.</b></p>		<p>Overture .. "Grottoque" .. R. Schlegel First Interval (4) Ed Niddi .. (Helenische Melodie) (5) Macken .. Victor Schotzinger (6) Madchen .. Fritz Kreider Second Interval (4) Liebesfreud .. Kavalstein (5) Romance .. Chausade (6) Pierrot .. (Air de Ballet) .. Dvorak (7) Huncuopus .. Fritz Kreider (8) Solon Bouissin .. Grand Third Interval Selection "Homo un Julek"</p>	
<p><b>OFFICE-BEARERS:</b> Chairman: His Honor Judge Beely. Hon. Director: Mr. Eric Howell. Hon. Secretaries: Mr. W. F. Jackson, B.A., LL.B. Mr. Geoffrey T. Rex, LL.B. Hon. Treasurer: Mr. Robert Harris.</p>		<p><b>SYNOPSIS OF SCENES.</b> Act. I.—The living-room of the small home of the Quinzanos, Richmond, New York. Time: About 3 o'clock of a February afternoon. Act. II.—The same. Time: An afternoon a month later. Act. III.—Miss Revendal's sitting-room at the Settlement House. Time: April, about a month later. Act. IV.—The same. Time: Saturday, July 4th, evening.</p>	
<p><b>THE PLAY PRODUCED BY</b> Walter Hunt. <b>STAGE MANAGER:</b> Geoffrey R. Rex.</p>		<p>Characters in order of their first appearance. Mondel Quinzano .. .. FRANCIS JACKSON Kathleen O'Killy .. .. MOLLIE KIRWAN Vera Revendal .. .. ALATHEA SOLOMONS Fras Quinzano .. .. MADAME BALTER David Quinzano .. .. WALTER HUNT Quincy Davemport .. .. CLIVE COPPARD Herr Pappenhelzer .. .. EDWARD BEEBY Baron Revendal .. .. NORMAN SHIELDS Baroness Revendal .. .. MOLLIE RAYNEIL</p>	

The Players' Club, Sydney: programme for *The Melting Pot*.

She appeared in the Players' Club's one act play *Fancy Free* in September.<sup>28</sup> Her next stage performance was in Beeby's play *The Point of View*, produced at the Conservatorium. It dealt

with the labour problem, and one of its episodes was a court trial. The *Australian Worker* was not impressed with the judge,

JUDGE BEEBY, chairman of the Sydney Players' Club and Shakespeare Society, has written a play, entitled "The Point of View," which is to be staged in June. Let us hope that his play will be better than some of his industrial judgments.<sup>29</sup>



◀ Sir George Stephenson Beeby

The play received lukewarm reviews, though "The most convincing part was played by Miss Mollie Raynor. She was blithe, gay, natural; but, oh, that dress!"<sup>30</sup>

In November she played the puzzling figure of Pauline Cheverelle in the Sydney Players' production of *Art and Opportunity* at the Adyar Hall. The *Herald* critic was picky,

Miss Mollie Rayner did not fulfil the right idea of the role of Pauline, who should have been more subtle and designing. Miss Rayner played the part gracefully, it is true, but without the definite characteristics clearly intended by the dramatist.<sup>31</sup>



The *Sun* (29 November 1925)  
published another photograph ►



In March 1926 her mother organised a cabaret at the Wentworth Hotel in aid of the Barnado Homes; Molly performed, as did a Chinese comedian named Bon Nee One.<sup>32</sup>

In June 1926 23 year old Mollie Raynor, “comedienne”, was on the wireless,<sup>33</sup> and by December was finding regular work in broadcasting,

### **WIRELESS BROADCASTING**

2BL Sydney, 9.11 p.m., Molly Raynor and John Rutherford (humorous sketch).<sup>34</sup>

They had become known as the “Broadcasters’ Players”.

A large number of new artists have been engaged by Broadcasters. These include Molly Raynor and Jack Rutherford who are giving some excellent comedy sketches. Miss Raynor is one of the well-known Cheero Girls who, during the war, did great work for the sick and wounded soldiers.<sup>35</sup>

- 1 *Evening News* 4 October 1920.
- 2 Julia Mant. "... and she played the piano beautifully." Students at the Conservatorium of Music. University of Sydney Archives.
- 3 *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 October 1921.
- 4 <https://ozvta.com/troupes-digger-companies/> accessed 10 January 2019.
- 5 *Sydney Morning Herald* 5 December 1921.
- 6 *Grenfell Record and Lachlan District Advertiser* 19 December 1921.
- 7 *Nepean Times* 3 June 1922.
- 8 *Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser* 20 June 1922.
- 9 *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate* 23 September 1922.
- 10 *Scrutineer and Berrima District Press* 27 September 1922.
- 11 *Robertson Advocate* 18 May 1923.
- 12 *Cootamundra Herald* 28 May 1923.
- 13 *Blue Mountain Echo* 19 June 1925.
- 14 *The Land* 14 August 1925.
- 15 *Gundagai Times and Tumut, Adelong and Murrumbidgee District Advertiser* 1 October 1926.
- 16 *Sydney Morning Herald* 15 February 1927.
- 17 *Daily Telegraph* 11 October 1933.
- 18 *Daily Telegraph* 15 January 1935.
- 19 *Sydney Morning Herald* 14 October 1922.
- 20 *Sydney Morning Herald* 5 January 1923.
- 21 *Sydney Morning Herald* 11 December 1923.
- 22 *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 December 1923.
- 23 *Truth* 9 March 1924.
- 24 *Sunday Times* 11 May 1924.
- 25 *Daily Telegraph* 18 October 1924.
- 26 I am grateful to Janet McGaw for an image of the programme.
- 27 *Sydney Morning Herald* 4 November 1924.
- 28 *Sydney Morning Herald* 20 September 1924.
- 29 *Australian Worker* 18 February 1925.
- 30 *Sunday Times* 12 July 1925.
- 31 *Sydney Morning Herald* 11 December 1925.
- 32 *Sydney Morning Herald* 30 March 1926.
- 33 *Wireless Weekly: the hundred per cent Australian radio journal* 4 June 1926.
- 34 *Otago Daily Times* 4 December 1926.
- 35 *National Advocate* 19 November 1926.

## Chapter 4: Molly turns professional!

The magazine *Everyones* announced on 2 March 1927,

**Molly Raynor**, well-known Sydney amateur actress, will be included in the cast of Kate Howarde's "Gum Tree Gully," which commences a season at the Palace Theatre, Melbourne, on Saturday.<sup>1</sup>

This was the premiere of the much anticipated sequel to Kate Howarde's celebrated *'Possum Paddock*. Melbourne's *Herald* enthused, "Molly Raynor will have excellent opportunity for comedy as Steve's sweetheart"<sup>2</sup> and "Miss Mollie Raynor gives a clever interpretation of *Polyanthus*," said the *Argus*.<sup>3</sup>

In April *'Possum Paddock* itself returned and the *Age* was cynical,

### AMUSEMENTS.

#### PALACE THEATRE.— 'POSSUM PADDOCK.

There is in every community a large section of people who desire to be amused, and are prepared to laugh at any entertainment devised to that end, and it is never critical. Such an entertainment is *'Possum Paddock*, played at the Palace Theatre on Saturday night before a full house that found full enjoyment in what was provided.

Whether the bush people represented were portraits or caricatures was immaterial; nor did it matter whether the incidents and machinery resembled something else which has secured a place as Australian farce-drama—based on Steele Rudd's famous story of life on an Australian selection. Miss Kate Howard is to be congratulated on being able to accommodate the people who want more to laugh than to think, and in the mixing of the stock ingredients for their fare. Required:— An honest farmer,

with patient wife: a rascally land-owning neighbor, a mortgage, clownish sons and daughters, a handsome young settler and sweet creature for him to love against opposition; mixed well and throw in lost collars, ties, braces, and a liberal sprinkling of an adjective that rhymes with jam, and serve hot. With a loutish son like Walter Cornock, a squatter of Vivian Edwards's type, an Old Selector moulded from S. M. Fitzgerald, a bad one out of Fred Patey, Cora Warner's "Mum," an attractive personality such as Miss Mona Thomas, and gawky girls typified by Jean Crossley and Mollie Raynor, the whole is seasoned to taste.<sup>4</sup>



"Molly Raynor, the charming comedienne as Poly-anthus Pebble, in 'Gum Tree Gully,' the Australian play at the Palace Theatre"

*Table Talk* 24 March 1927.

**“POSSUM PADDOCK.”**

The Thrilling and Sensational Comedy. All Melbourne is Talking About It. See Waller Cornock and Molly Raynor in Their Amusing Comedy Work.<sup>5</sup>

*Table Talk* (12 May 1927) published her photograph.



“MOLLY RAYNOR who plays Mary Ellen in “Possum Paddock,” at the Palace Theatre.” *Table Talk* 12 May 1927.

*Gum Tree Gully* moved from a successful fifteen week season in Melbourne, to the Prince of Wales Theatre in Adelaide in July: Adelaide’s *News* commented, “The stagecraft of Molly Raynor as Polly Anthus Pebble so shy at the attentions of Syd. was an outstanding performance and provoked much laughter”<sup>6</sup> and *The Advertiser*, “Miss Molly Raynor displayed a rare gift for low comedy as the shy and love-sick Polly.”<sup>7</sup> The *Register* thought she made Polly Anthus “an outstanding character”.<sup>8</sup> Jack Beattie’s name appeared in the Adelaide cast on 29 July 1927 towards the end of its run.<sup>9</sup>

Radio 2BL’s evening session on 7 July 1927 presented a Cheer-Oh Girls’ concert with Molly Raynor (“soubrette”) singing “Good bad girl”, “Little blue hat” and “Home, little Maori

home". In November the programme included "a humorous sketch (Miss Molly Raynor and Jack Beattie);<sup>10</sup> these continued till 14 November and again later. She performed again with the Cheer-Oh Girls on radio for their eleventh anniversary.<sup>11</sup>

Then came *The Alarm Clock*,

An ingenue role in Avery Hopwood's farce comedy "The Alarm Clock" will be played at the Athenæum from tonight by Molly Raynor, from New Zealand. Miss Raynor began stage work professionally only in February, but she had experience as an entertainer from the time when the "Cheer-oh Girls" gave performances to help the Red Cross.... Miss Raynor has been concerned recently in the broadcasting of plays and sketches.<sup>12</sup>

*The Age* loved her in *The Alarm Clock*,

... the Mary Kent of Miss Molly Raynor, was the outstanding piece of acting in the cast. She acts the part with a natural spontaneity tempered by the art of emotional constraint, and must become a firm favorite with theatregoers.<sup>13</sup>

*Table Talk* too,

Molly Rayner has the leading role as far as the ladies are concerned. She has a good part, which, as the ignorant gauche young woman from the country, shows her possessed of good comedy sense. Later, when transformed by a shingle and a visit to the leading London dressmakers, she is pretty enough and sweet enough to reform a whole army of hardened roués.<sup>14</sup>

The *Herald* was effusive,

**A BRILLIANT DEBUT**  
**Molly Raynor May Become a Star**

No young actress in recent years has shown such skill and understanding on her first appearances as Molly Raynor, who gives a capital performance as Mary Kent in “The Alarm Clock” at the Athenaeum Theatre.

As the Australian wayback Polly in “Gum Tree Gully,” Miss Raynor gave evidence of her talent in broad comedy. In “The Alarm Clock” she has a much wider field, and the sentiment of the last scene is her best work. There are many who predict she will become a star.

Miss Raynor is a New Zealander. When a child she sang and danced at amateur entertainments in Auckland, and was a recognised figure in local pantomime productions.

Proceeding to Sydney more than six years ago, she joined the Cheero Girls, who have raised about £50,000 for charity in New South Wales. Miss Raynor was for a number of years the comedienne of the party. As such she gave as many as 11 items with seven changes of costume in a night.

Miss Raynor was taken from the Cheero Girls for Kate Howarde’s play, and as a result of her work in that was asked to join the company at the Athenaeum.<sup>15</sup>

Even the cynical theatre critic of the *Bulletin* was positive,

This papers recommends “The Alarm Clock,” at the Athenaeum, with a very fair degree of confidence. It also calls attention to the excellent performance of Molly Raynor as the star. With its usual uncanny discernment, it detected the natural—born actor—talent in this bright, bonny and intelligent Maorilander when she made her first appearance a year ago as a moronic bush maiden in a rather feeble Australian bush comedy at the Palace. In “The Alarm Clock” she shows that this is not the only item in her repertoire....<sup>16</sup>



“Molly Raynor, who will appear in the ‘Alarm Clock,’ a laughable three act comedy opening at the Athenaeum Theatre on Xmas Eve.”

*Table Talk* 22 December 1927.





"MISS MOLLY RAYNOR. She will take one of the principal parts in 'The Alarm Clock,' a humorous play at the Athenæum Theatre".  
*The Australian* 24 December 1927.

Celebrity gossip was perhaps kinder in those days: Perth's *Daily News* reported, with only mild cynicism,

All rising young actresses have to make sacrifices. The most important offering on the altar of art to be made by Molly Raynor, who has stepped into a congenial role in Avery Hopwood's frisky comedy "The Alarm Clock," is her temporary abandonment of sun-bathing. Six weeks before the opening of "The Alarm Clock" she was wearing an earnestly acquired coat of rich tan. As her appearance in "The Alarm Clock" necessitated her wearing a pleasantly revealing frock with a nice white neck, it was necessary for her to forego the delights of baking on the beach, wear anti-actinic clothing, and do her best within the allotted time to restore her shoulders to their natural hue. She succeeded, and now only goes swimming at dawn and sundown.<sup>17</sup>

Molly Raynor, the young New Zealander,\* who will appear in an attractive ingenue role at His Majesty's Theatre to-night, in Avery Hopwood's laughable comedy, "The Alarm Clock," is extending a stage career which began professionally only last February. Miss Raynor's experience of theatrical work, however, dates back to the war, when she was a member of the Cheer-Oh Girls' Company of entertainers. This combination, which made frequent appearances in Sydney, besides visiting the larger country centres in New South Wales, raised the handsome total of £50,000 for the Red Cross. Later, Miss Raynor undertook radio work, helping to broadcast sketches and plays, and as a result of these experiences, she has slipped easily into the stage roles which have lately been made available to her.<sup>18</sup>

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\* On the same page she is referred to as "a talented Australian girl".

*Table Talk* (5 January 1928) published a full page with photographs by Spencer Shier.<sup>†</sup>

**“AIN’T SHE SWEET?”**



Molly Raynor, Melbourne’s new leading lady, before and after visits to the dressmaker and hair dresser. She is a little Australian (*sic*) girl taking the leading role in “The Alarm Clock” at the Athenaeum Theatre, and succeeds to the place usually occupied by highly paid actresses from London and New York with distinction and charm.

◀ Here is Molly Raynor straight from Camm’s corner—just arrived in London feeling very awkward and gauche in her country clothes.

But——wait till you see her after she has visited a famous West End dressmaker and had her hair trimmed. She hardly dares look at herself as you can see. ▼

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<sup>†</sup> Spencer Shier was a commercial portraitist who specialised in the photography of prominent people: politicians, actors and society figures. The unattributed frontispiece photograph was clearly taken on the same day.



Here she is in her new bright colored plaid taffeta afternoon frock which has a slightly raised waistline.





Confidentially, what is YOUR answer to the question at the top of the page? This two-toned jumper suit, which she wears in the second act, has the latest bow effect on the hips.



▲ The evening frock with which the country mouse first dazzled her Uncle Bill. It is of pink taffeta and gold lace, the skirt being made with a pannier effect and edged with rows of tiny picot frills.<sup>19</sup>

The *Sydney Mail* noticed,

... Messrs. Richard White and Eric Edgely... have for the past twelve months been associated with the E.J. Carroll proprietary in Melbourne, where at the local Athenaeum they have presented various successful plays, including the current attraction "The Alarm Clock," in which, by the way, they have given a big opportunity to a young Australian, Miss Molly Raynor, who has justified their choice by making the hit of the piece.<sup>20</sup>

New copy for the show's advertisements had her as "The Charming Young Australian Artist",<sup>21</sup> the *Bulletin* remarking the advertisement "risks international complications with our friends across the Tasman".<sup>22</sup> *The Alarm Clock* was hugely successful in Melbourne, ending only because of a previous booking at the Athenaeum by another show.

The company moved to the Theatre Royal in Adelaide with a panel of plays,

**"SPORT OF KINGS"**  
**Theatre Royal Attraction**

A well-balanced company will shortly be seen at the Theatre Royal in a series of fine comedies, the first being "The Sport of Kings," by Ian Hay. During a successful season of 10 weeks at the Athenaeum Theatre, Melbourne, this play was well received. Others comprised "Eliza Comes To Stay," "The Unfair Sex," "Outward Bound," and the great comedy-mystery play, "The Last Warning." The comedies will be presented by J. C. Williamson Limited in conjunction with Richard White and Eric Edgely. Included in the cast will be Frank Bradley, Basil Radford, Campbell Copelin, Kerry Kelly, Reginald Kenneth, Douglas Calderwood, Edward

Landor, Beryl Barraclough, Henrietta Cavendish, and Molly Raynor.<sup>23</sup>

The outstanding piece of acting in the show was given by Molly Raynor in the character of Mary Kent. She acted the part with a natural spontaneity tempered by the art of emotional restraint.<sup>24</sup>

Molly Raynor, a vivacious young miss who hails from Maoriland.<sup>25</sup>

Sparkling wit appeared in the rapid line-to-line dialogue, clever repartee, remarkable rejoinders, and unexpected replies. Attractive and novel, the performance of Molly Raynor will find favour with most. Her pert pouting and pretty posing were a surprise, while the lowering of her voice in pathos and raising it in moments of passion were a revelation in voice production.<sup>26</sup>

Mollie Raynor, the piquant Australian product, had a much better chance than her last part gave her, and she took full advantage of it. There was a faint flavour of Judith Anderson about her performance in “The Alarm Clock.” perhaps because of the husky defiance she expressed through most of the play.<sup>27</sup>

The company finished the Adelaide season with *The Last Warning*— “one of the best (plays) that has been seen in Adelaide for a long time”<sup>28</sup>—and on 25 February 1928 opened at Brisbane’s His Majesty’s Theatre with *The Alarm Clock* and a new play each week. Brisbane’s *Daily Standard* picked up the “Ain’t She Sweet?” theme from *Table Talk* and thought fit to review Molly’s clothes rather than her performance,

Miss Molly Raynor, as Mary Kent, the little country grub who changes into a city butterfly, has to make herself a fright in the first act, but to make amends she wears some gorgeous gowns in the later acts.<sup>29</sup>



The *Brisbane Courier* was more appreciative,

The outstanding performance on Saturday night was that of Miss Molly Raynor as Mary. Awkward, clumsy, and dull before she blossomed, she was yet the same girl after, but alive, self-appreciative, knowing her power, perhaps aware of her beauty, certainly aware of the power of fine clothes. Miss Raynor yet depicted her inner self, her youthfulness unspoiled by her new acquaintance with sophistication, her natural emotions unimpaired. With a voice, capable of infinite inflection, Miss Raynor can throw deep meaning into a single word....<sup>30</sup>

The *Telegraph*: “the Mary Kent of Miss Molly Raynor is an outstanding piece of acting”.<sup>31</sup> A week later she started in *The Unfair Sex* and Brisbane’s *Daily Standard* thought she “handled very skilfully the exacting role of Diana”,<sup>32</sup> while the *Sunday Mail* also liked her work,

Miss Molly Raynor who, as Diana Trevor, set herself the task of winning over Harvey Fane, the silly ass, played by Mr. Basil Radford. She, too, had a big part—one crammed with exciting moments, perplexities, and romance—in which she acquitted herself well.<sup>33</sup>

The *Telegraph* expanded on her clothes,

Miss Molly Raynor as Mrs. Diana Trevor, looked charming in a frock of eau de nil crepe de chine, finished with a pleated skirt. An attractive model was of black and tan crepe de chine worn in jumper effect, the tan jumper being finished with touches of black. In the last act Miss Raynor appeared in an evening dress of ivory mariette beaded in silver. The skirt was finished with tiers of beaded fringe.<sup>34</sup>

The *Courier*, not to be outdone,

Attractive frocking was again a feature of this comedy, each act providing opportunity for the feminine members of the cast to appear in becoming and appropriate costumes. As “Diana Trevor,” Miss Molly Raynor appeared first in a frock of lettuce green crepe de soie, with fine inlets of hand veining, and the skirt box-pleated in the front width producing an apron effect. A salmon pink shoulder flower made an effective finish. In the second act, her two-colour frock had a cedarwood silk bodice attached to a pleated navy skirt, a wide folded belt outlining the waist. The navy blue satin extended above the waist in the front, and also formed cuffs for the long sleeves. Miss Raynor’s evening frock in the last act was of white crepe meteor starred with silver bead designs, and having wide bands of silver bead embroidery outlining the hips and forming a U-shaped decoration on the bodice, while the skirt was veiled with long ivory silk fringe.<sup>35</sup>

In her letter to the *Cairns Post*, regular correspondent “Veronica” wrote from Brisbane,

Molly Raynor, who is a very attractive girl, wore some very beautiful frocks, and her evening frock of white, starred with silver beads, the skirt veiled with silk fringe from the shaped hip yoke, was particularly becoming.<sup>36</sup>

The company went on to *The Last Warning* and *Eliza Comes to Stay* (Molly Raynor in the title role)—of which the *Sunday Mail* wrote,

When Eliza (Molly Raynor) first arrives at her guardian’s home she wears a shapeless frock of navy blue serge with a small lace collar finished with a scarlet bow, and a straw sailor hat. She carries an unsightly brown paper parcel and covers her eyes with unattractive spectacles. After a time Eliza is desirous of being

“cherished,” and, realising that her appearance must be altered, puts herself into the hands of a modiste, with astonishing results. Very becoming is a frock of apple green and silver shot taffetas made in bouffant period style, with a deep transparent yoke of apple green georgette piped with gold, and a hem of georgette finishing the ankle-length hem. Another frock becoming to Eliza is of powder blue georgette adorned with ruchings of bebe cream lace on the hem, and bebe sleeves, and showing a cascade collar of ruched bebe lace opening over a lace vest. With this she wears a simple tagel straw cloche of cyclamen mauve bound with ribbon velvet. The first toilette Eliza chooses for herself is an eccentric wrap coat frock of navy and white morocain, patterned in Chinese effect, and finished with navy silk fringe. The costume is matched by a capeline of black hatters plush.<sup>37</sup>

The *Daily Standard* did mention her acting, “A most ridiculous and laughable Eliza was portrayed by Miss Molly Raynor, who showed real genius”.<sup>38</sup> The *Courier* feared she was in danger of being typecast,

Molly Raynor, who played “Eliza,” triumphed again. The part admirably suited her genius. She, perhaps, unfortunately for herself, seems made for such a part. Twice she has shone in Brisbane as “Mary Kent” in the “Alarm Clock” and as “Eliza” in impersonations of similarly placed persons. This may seem a restriction on Miss Raynor’s abilities. But it is something to be able to do one thing extremely well. A dozen actresses might, and would, give a dozen different interpretations of the role of “Eliza” unless copying the original creation, but not one could be more satisfying than that of Miss Raynor.<sup>39</sup>

*The Alarm Clock* moved to Newcastle where,

Pride of place must be given Molly Raynor. Her whimsicality and charm have established her as a firm favorite. Not only does she prove herself an irresistibly funny comedienne in the first act, but in succeeding acts she shows, by her clever handling of the more romantic passages, that she is an accomplished all-round actress as well.<sup>40</sup>

After Newcastle the company disbanded and in July 1928 Molly appeared in Sydney's Grand Opera House in *When London Sleeps*. Also in the cast was John Warwick. A fortnight later, in *The Face at the Window*,

An excellent company, that included... lively little Molly Raynor, (who) gave a crowded house all the thrills that the most shock-absorbing modern audience could demand.<sup>41</sup>

In August it was *Robbery Under Arms* and *Sonia of the Circus*, in September *The Rosary*, in which,

The brogue of Molly Raynor, the altogether delightful ingenue of "The Rosary," was something to marvel at. And never once did she forget it. Miss Raynor gave an entirely satisfactory performance.<sup>42</sup>

THE dragging hours of "The Rosary," in which each pearl was indeed a tear, were enlivened by the fresh and smiling confidence of Mollie Rayner. In the play she appears as "Kathleen, the light of Father Kelly's life," but in real life she is an independent lass with ambition and no words to waste.<sup>43</sup>

In October 1928 both Molly and John joined the Philip Lytton company, touring Victoria;<sup>44</sup> *Everyones* coupled them in its snippets of news: "Molly Raynor and Jack Beatty have joined up with Philip Lytton's company."<sup>45</sup> In January 1929 Molly was again playing in Newcastle, this time in *The Forbidden Woman*

with the Newton Carroll Dramatic Company in a large tent, the “Marquee Theatre”; John Warwick was also in the cast.<sup>46</sup> Next was *Whom God Hath Joined* and *A Mad Marriage*. In February she was playing *The Family Upstairs* at Sydney’s Newtown Majestic theatre,<sup>47</sup> (it was Molly’s first play in Sydney as a professional actor) and in April began work at the new Savoy Theatre on the first Sydney production of *The Alarm Clock* with a distinguished cast, including John Warwick<sup>48</sup> (“A remarkably fine cast by the look of it—Molly Raynor, whom Melbourne already loves and whom Sydney awaits with interest” said the *Sunday Times*).<sup>49</sup>

### **Shy Little Girl**

MOLLY RAYNOR, playing Mary Kent in “The Alarm Clock,” at the Savoy relates an amusing experience during a run of a piece at the Melbourne Athenaeum. “An admirer from the audience came round to my dressing room to make acquaintance with the ‘quiet, shy little girl, Mary Kent.’” She happened to be demonstrating a Maori Haka to a fellow actress just as the admirer arrived at the door. “I heard afterwards,” she laughs, “that he went away without knocking, sadly disillusioned as to my meekness.”<sup>50</sup>

The *Truth* loved the play (“Capital comedy played by capital comedians”),

Why have we not heard of Molly Raynor before? Here is a fresh, charming, and gay young actress.<sup>51</sup>

The best performance of the evening was given by Molly Raynor, as the country mouse, Mary, a simple character into which the breath of life was breathed by the artist’s imagination, and her understanding of the little subtleties of human nature. John Warwick did very well as Bobby Brandon....<sup>52</sup>

Two decidedly outstanding performances are those of that experienced comedienne Miss Marie La Varre, who is largely responsible for the success of the presentation, and Miss Molly Raynor, who, as the pretty, unsophisticated Mary who so speedily responds to the allurements of life in New York, exhibits histrionic ability of a very high order.<sup>53</sup>

In the play *Bobby* (John Warwick) announces he is going to marry Mary (Molly Raynor).

“Puck” wrote in the *Sun*,

### **MOLLY RAYNOR, COMEDIENNE**

Molly Raynor is an acquisition to any company. If Dion Boucicault had seen her play her present part in “The Alarm Clock” at the Savoy Theatre she would probably have been on her way to England by this time, in search of wider honours. She is a very young actress with a method, and they are rare. She knows what she wants to get into a part and out of a point, and she goes after it and gets it. There are not so many young actresses who can. Most of them are carefully “produced,” until long experience teaches them to get effects for themselves. Molly Raynor is, moreover, a real comedian. Like Compton Coultts (now playing the butler in “The Baby Cyclone”), she has the fun inside her. Those two—and let us add to them Gus Bluett and Elsie Prince—are funny for the pure fun of being funny. The four of them seem to say across the footlights; “Gosh, I am enjoying myself! Are you?”<sup>54</sup>



“MOLLY RAYNOR, youthful and surprising star of the Savoy’s Avery Haywood comedy, ‘The Alarm Clock.’ A brilliant performer.”

*The Truth* 19 May 1929.

In the same issue the *Sun* published a cartoon of Molly and John Warwick, who shared top billing in the advertising, as the “love interest” in the play.

“I hear,” wrote “Mabs” to the *Land*, “Molly was very recently married to John Warwick, the leading man, so their love-making does not call for very great histrionic effort!”<sup>55</sup>

Molly and John’s marriage was in fact registered in North Sydney the following year.

Cartoon from the *Sun* 19 May 1929



Who was she? the *Sunday Times* interviewed her,

**MISS MOLLY RAYNOR**

***First Played Part of a Frog***

“MY first appearance on a real stage,” says Molly Raynor, whose exquisite performance of Mary Kent is one of the features of “The Alarm Clock,” at the Savoy Theatre, “was in my early days in New Zealand. My dancing teacher staged ‘Alice in Wonderland’ at Her Majesty’s, and I played the part of a frog. The next morning the ‘Auckland Herald’ gave me my first notice, and my father, Fred Raynor, the well-known black and white artist, cut it out and carried it about with him for months. It died from sheer hard wear about twelve months ago, but I still remember it, word for word.” Molly Raynor belongs to a clever family of girls, some of whom are interested in the Theatre of Youth. They are a versatile group, with plenty of initiative and a natural gift for the stage. Critics regard Molly Raynor’s performance in “The Alarm Clock” as an exceptional piece of work, and predict a great future for her. Besides having an appealing stage appearance, she has the gift of infusing into her lines a certain “something” that puts her into immediate touch with her audience.<sup>56</sup>

The *Sydney Morning Herald* gave a brief biography,

**IN “THE ALARM CLOCK.”**

Miss Molly Raynor, whose individuality in the role of Mary Kent, contributes so materially to the success of “The Alarm Clock,” at the Savoy Theatre, is a young artist hailing from Dunedin, New Zealand, and gained her first experience on the stage in amateur societies in Sydney. She was one of the Cheer-Oh Girls, that talented organisation noted for so many years for its attractive entertainments in North Sydney and other suburbs, and for its success in raising funds for charity. Miss Raynor

appeared with the Sydney Players' Club in various productions, including Harold Chapin's "Art and Opportunity," in which she played the role of the designing widow, and Israel Zangwill's "Melting Pot," in which she talked in broken English, as Baroness Revendal. A little more than two years ago, Miss Raynor joined the cast of the Melbourne production of "Gumtree Gully," and was in that piece for its run of 17 weeks in that city, at the Athenaeum Theatre. She next appeared in "The Alarm Clock" in Melbourne, and travelled in this comedy to Brisbane, Adelaide, and Newcastle. The piece ran successfully in all these cities, but as there was no theatre available at that time in Sydney, the company disbanded. Miss Raynor was thereupon engaged for a tour of the Philip Lytton Company, and travelled over an extensive territory of 3000 miles, playing leading roles, and enjoying immensely, the opportunity of seeing a great deal of the country. On her return to Sydney, she was selected for the role of Louise in the No. 2 company of "The Family Upstairs," and, with the opening of the Savoy Theatre, was secured for the part of Mary Kent in which she is so conspicuously successful in "The Alarm Clock." Miss Raynor, though spelling her stage name with an "o," is a sister of Misses Joan and Betty Rayner, the clever directors of the Theatre of Youth.<sup>57</sup>

Molly Raynor... has made a tremendous hit. She has a quaint charm about her that raises her miles above the average artist, and she has that very rare thing, a lovely speaking voice, which she can use with true artistry. When she says something droll on a deep note, the whole house roars with laughter. But she can just as quickly bring tears to their eyes, too. Molly is a New Zealander, daughter of Fred Raynor, the artist. She has two clever sisters, who are at present engaged on an experiment of their own, running the Theatre of Youth or the T.O.Y.

Theatre, where a new kind of mime is featured—stories particularly interesting to children and done in as simple a form as possible. They are having great success in Sydney.<sup>58</sup>

*Smith's Weekly* published a cartoon (next page).

She was leading lady in the Savoy's next play, *Outward Bound* and it was a very different role from the ingenue; the *Truth* thought,

Nothing could be more pathetic than the Ann of Molly Raynor, who made her a sad little figure clutching at her precarious happiness, tender and strong to the one with



whom she has committed suicide, Henry, played by John Warwick, with feeling and restraint.<sup>59</sup>

Next at the Savoy was *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*; “Molly Raynor, as a fair period lady, was outstanding,” said the *Daily Telegraph*,<sup>60</sup> but the show closed after a week and *Outward Bound* was revived.

The *Truth* 14 July 1929.



"Imaginary dialogue from 'The Alarm Clock,' featuring Molly Raynor and John Warwick" (*Smith's Weekly* 1 June 1929)

In August she and John Warwick were in Brisbane with the American Comedy Company's *The Baby Cyclone*, *The Family Upstairs* and *New Brooms*—of which the *Sunday Mail* had this to say,

Miss Molly Raynor wears a smart sports frock of figured and plain crepe de Chine in the second act. The pleated skirt, is of gold and lemon patterning bordered with black, and the white juniper top features diagonal tucking, and is finished with a gipsy scarf bordered with gold and lemon. Another dainty frock worn by Miss Raynor is fashioned of green organdie; it featured a close-fitting sleeveless bodice, with a deep berthe collar, and the peacock trained skirt is set at the side with a lavender velvet water lily. Her hat of green crinoline is finished across the front with a lavender velvet bow.<sup>61</sup>

*Six Cylinder Love* followed at Brisbane's Empire Theatre, then *White Collars*, ("Miss Raynor's acting is particularly inspired, especially in the scene where she protests against being a typist, and no more, for the rest of her humdrum existence.")<sup>62</sup>

Molly Raynor, as the Kid Sister, also scores once more. Cheeky, artificial, and temperamental, she was a model flapper in what flappers should not be, just living to take the surface of the things of life. But suddenly, when trouble lowers the family courage, the woman in her peeps out.<sup>63</sup>

Next at the Empire was *Whispering Friends* and finally *Saturday's Children*. The company was off to Perth, to stage *The Family Upstairs* at the Theatre Royal in October. *New Brooms* followed, then *White Collars*,

Miss Molly Raynor gave an excellent performance as Helen, the younger daughter, and her handling of the emotional passage where Helen's feelings ran away with

her and her reserve breaks down, won well-earned applause.<sup>64</sup>

*The Baby Cyclone* followed, then *Love Me, Love My Dog*,

Miss Molly Raynor is a very chic little maid, her frivolous apron square edged with very deep cream lace, and run through with narrow black ribbon, and her cap very smartly set. Her black frock also flares smartly.<sup>65</sup>

The company played *Whispering Friends* and Perth's *Truth* considered its readers should know more—

### MISS MOLLY RAYNOR

As a "kid" in the plays put before the Perth public, at the Theatre Royal by the American Comedy Company, during the past few weeks, Miss Molly Raynor has been responsible for many a laugh, for her own laugh at the world is irresistible, and when asked what she had to say for herself, she showed that the joy of living was expressed by laughs.

Only 2½ years old in stage life, one sees that she is a precocious child, for she has already made her name in juvenile parts, in such a way that a brilliant future is foretold for her, by the far-seeing in the theatrical world.

A New Zealander by birth, Miss Raynor hopes to grow cosmopolitan as she is anxious to go everywhere and see everything, and already she has accomplished much. First experience was gained in the "Alarm Clock," put on at the Melbourne Athenaeum, next, Miss Raynor appeared in Sydney at the Savoy New Theatre. But, although negotiations to go to India and to come to Western Australia came to naught, an opportunity opened with the present company, with which Miss

Raynor started in Brisbane, and “I was thrilled when I knew I was coming to Perth” said the young artist, “and I am delighted with it all, for I had no idea the city was so beautiful. A trip to the hills enchanted me, the Weir is wonderful and people are charming to me.”

Miss Raynor has two sisters, who had enough initiative to start on a theatrical career of their own. They started in Sydney a Theatre of Youth, known as the “T.O.Y.” and where youth at any age is welcomed—meaning that the “young in heart” are never too old to take part in the varied programmes presented. Drama, folk lore, singing, dancing and any artistry, traditional or modern are all given in some form or other at this “T.O.Y.” where there are three performances a week; and the first programme had a run of 17 weeks.

Miss Raynor, who is probably “sweet sixteen” (in appearance at least) has all the optimism of youth and regards the world as her play ground, and merry and bright as she is, it will always be a “T.O.Y.” for her.<sup>66</sup>

### **Interesting Personalities**

Among the stage personalities delighting Perth theatre-goers at the moment are two or three whose work will be made perhaps even more interesting by a glance at their careers. Miss Mollie Raynor, who did very good work here in “White Collars” and “New Brooms,” and also in the opening play, “The Family Upstairs” is a clever comedy maid in other pieces, is a sister of the two girls in Sydney, who have opened the Theatre of Youth, better known through its initials as the “Toy Theatre.” The Raynor sisters have established their own especial forms of art—classic, folk song and dance, etc., and have now planned a caravan tour after the style of the troubadours of old. They are going along the northern coast of New South Wales, sleeping in the caravan and in tents, and playing in the local halls, chaperoned by Mrs. Raynor,

perhaps the most enthusiastic member of the company. The sister who is in Perth, Miss Mollie Raynor, does not find this work of sufficient attraction to absorb her attention, and so is here. She prefers this also to musical comedy. Miss Raynor, who surprised the house by her work toward the close of "White Collars," has done other serious playing. She was "Ann" in "Outward Bound" in the Eastern States, with considerable success, but still prefers the lighter side for general work. Tennis and surfing claim her attention out of doors, and indoors her recreation seems to be needlework, since she makes most of her own frocks, as well as underwear. At the moment Miss Raynor was busy on a pair of pyjamas which she was fashioning from mauve crepe de chine, banded with figured silk. She was making the top with pintucks as a finish, and the trousers were very loose and baggy, and set into a fitting ankle band, striking an Eastern note.<sup>67</sup>

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1 *Everyones* 2 March 1927.

2 *Herald* 5 March 1927.

3 *Argus* 7 March 1927.

4 *Age* 25 April 1927.

5 *Argus* 10 May 1927.

6 *News* 21 July 1927.

7 *Advertiser* 25 July 1927.

8 *Register* 27 July 1927.

9 *Register* 29 Jul 1927.

10 *Sydney Mail* 9 November 1927

11 *Register* 29 November 1927.

12 *Argus* 24 December 1927.

13 *Age* 27 December 1927.

14 *Table Talk* 29 Dec 1927.

15 *Herald* 31 December 1927.

16 *Bulletin* 29 December 1927.

17 *Daily News* 8 Feb 1928.

18 *Daily Standard* 25 February 1928.

19 *Table Talk* 5 January 1928.

20 *Sydney Mail* 11 January 1928.



- 21 *Age* 11 January 1928.
- 22 *Bulletin* 12 January 1928.
- 23 *News* 23 January 1928.
- 24 *Age* 4 February 1928.
- 25 *Bulletin* 25 January 1928.
- 26 *News* 6 February 1928.
- 27 *News* 6 February 1928.
- 28 *News* 15 February 1928.
- 29 *Daily Standard* 27 February 1928.
- 30 *Brisbane Courier* 27 February 1928.
- 31 *Telegraph* 29 February 1928.
- 32 *Daily Standard* 5 March 1928.
- 33 *Sunday Mail* 4 March 1928.
- 34 *Telegraph* 5 March 1928.
- 35 *Brisbane Courier* 5 March 1928.
- 36 *Cairns Post* 14 March 1928.
- 37 *Sunday Mail* 18 March 1928.
- 38 *Daily Standard* 19 March 1928.
- 39 *Brisbane Courier* 19 March 1928.
- 40 *Newcastle Sun* 29 March 1928.
- 41 *Sun* 22 July 1928.
- 42 *Sydney Morning Herald* 3 September 1928.
- 43 *Truth* 9 September 1928.
- 44 *Everyones* 24 October 1928.
- 45 *Everyones* 7 November 1928.
- 46 *Newcastle Sun* 22 December 1928.
- 47 *Daily Telegraph* 16 February 1929.
- 48 *Sydney Morning Herald* 27 April 1929.
- 49 *Sunday Times* 5 May 1929.
- 50 *Sunday Times* 12 May 1929.
- 51 *Truth* 12 May 1929.
- 52 *Evening News* 13 May 1929.
- 53 *Sydney Mail* 15 May 1929.
- 54 *Sun* 19 May 1929.
- 55 *Land* 24 May 1929.
- 56 *Sunday Times* 26 May 1929.
- 57 *Sydney Morning Herald* 1 June 1929.
- 58 *Auckland Star* 22 June 1929.
- 59 *Truth* 23 Jun 1929.
- 60 *Daily Telegraph* 8 July 1929.
- 61 *Sunday Mail* 25 Aug 1929.

- 62 *Truth* 8 September 1929.
- 63 *Brisbane Courier* 9 Sep 1929.
- 64 *Daily News* 21 Oct 1929.
- 65 *Daily News* 28 Oct 1929.
- 66 *Truth* 3 Nov 1929.
- 67 *Daily News* 4 Nov 1929.

## Chapter 5: shipwrecked on the New Zealand coast!

The company played its repertoire at the Majestic Theatre in Adelaide in November and December. Six months earlier the Brisbane *Telegraph* had noted,

Molly Raynor, who was one of the principal discoveries of the company which was formed recently to present plays at the Savoy Theatre, Sydney, is mentioned as a probable member of the Doyle-Hogarth Co. on the New Zealand tour.<sup>1</sup>

Molly and John embarked for New Zealand with the American and English Comedy Company in late 1929 on the *Manuka*. On 16 December she struck rocks at night in fog off Long Point in the Catlins on her way north to Port Chalmers. All passengers were saved after an ordeal in lifeboats, a heavy swell and disembarkation in rocks and kelp; a special train eventually took them on to Dunedin from Owaka.

Mr. Reginald Roberts, of Melbourne, stage manager for an American comedy company, said:—“I was one of the fortunate passengers. I was dressed when the ship struck. We were lucky that there was no gale or nobody would have reached the shore. I was told by a settler that this was the first night for 18 years that conditions at Long Point had been calm enough to permit the landing of boats. Usually the seas dash in with tremendous force.”<sup>2</sup>

The *Manuka* wreck was the biggest event the New Zealand Shipwreck Relief Society had ever handled.

Immediately the news reached Dunedin the executive of the society responded to the urgent call issued by the chairman and, assisted by many willing workers, made arrangements in the first instance to have all possible service rendered at Owaka to the passengers and crew.

Upon arrival either at Dunedin railway station by the relief train or at Port Chalmers by steamer, the unfortunate people were met, welcomed, and fed, and then conducted and, in most instances, driven in taxis to the quarters arranged for them by the Union Steam Ship Company.<sup>3</sup>



The theatre company had lost all its stage equipment and scenery but not to be hindered by so trivial an eventuality, it opened with *The Family Upstairs* at Dunedin's Princess Theatre on Boxing Day to a rave review in the *Evening Star*.<sup>4</sup>

#### **‘THE FAMILY UPSTAIRS’**

##### **EXCELLENT HOLIDAY FARE AT PRINCESS THEATRE**

Better holiday entertainment could hardly be provided than that given in “The Family Upstairs,” a bright and breezy comedy, staged for the first time in Dunedin yesterday afternoon and evening at the Princess Theatre before large attendances. To audiences in holiday mood the play made an instant appeal. Written by Harry Delf,

“The Family Upstairs” was recognised as an interesting one when it was produced on the screen several years ago, but the Haller family, whose story it tells, was too human to get full justice in inarticulate portraiture. The author has gone into a rich field of appealing humour bordering very closely on the pathetic, and an audience anywhere must find in it much intimate interest. It is a study of domestic life so true to plain humanity that when one is not laughing outright at it one is smiling at the reminiscences it inspires. “The Family Upstairs” is not a spectacular play and has few brilliant lines, though it makes no pretensions in these directions; it is a happy, clean, and really entertaining little comedy that can be summed up in the one word “human.” As a laughter-raiser “The Family Upstairs” would be difficult to excel, but at the same time there is scarce an audible sob here and there to remind that there are shadows where the sun shines.

#### THE CAST.

Annabelle (the young sister)	Molly Raynor
Emma Heller (the mother)	Mary Curtain
Willie Heller (the brother)	Leonard Doyle
Joe Heller (the father),	Wyrley Birch
Louise Heller (the elder sister)	Leona Hogarth
Charles Grant	John Warwick
Nellie Callahan	Lucille Lisle
Mrs Grant	Eve Dawnay.

Joe Heller is a hard-working tramguard; his wife a well-meaning helpmate intent upon having her daughter married and settled; and this daughter a winsome, sane, and industrious young woman. To complete the family group there is a son in a stage of indolent adolescence and a girl who has arrived at the “five-finger exercise” period of her advance in ladylike accomplishment. When

**AMUSEMENTS.**

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**IT CAN BE DONE!**

THE SHIPWRECKED  
THE SHIPWRECKED  
COMEDY COMPANY  
COMEDY COMPANY

Will Present on  
**THURSDAY (BOXING DAY),  
THURSDAY (BOXING DAY),**  
At 2.30 and 8 p.m.,

**"THE FAMILY UPSTAIRS,"  
FULLERS'**

**PRINCESS THEATRE**  
Proprietors: John Fuller and Co., Ltd.

**THE GREATEST THEATRICAL  
EVENT IN THE HISTORY OF THE  
DUNEDIN STAGE.**

**DO YOU ENJOY GREAT OCCASIONS?  
DO YOU WANT SOMETHING TO  
BOAST ABOUT?**

**IF SO, BOOK YOUR SEATS  
For the**

**SHIPWRECKED COMPANY**

Who Will Appear  
**THURSDAY (BOXING DAY).**

In the Delightful Domestic Comedy,  
**"THE FAMILY UPSTAIRS,"  
"THE FAMILY UPSTAIRS,"**

One of the World's Most Successful and  
Most Popular Domestic Comedy Dramas,  
Simple and Sweet, and Alive with En-  
dearing Human Qualities. It Appeals  
Alike to the Young and the Old.

— **THE FAMILY UPSTAIRS,** —

The Company, which was Specially  
selected, regardless of Expense,  
Is Headed by the Famous New York  
Actress,

**MISS LEONA HOGARTH.**

A Brilliant Cast Includes  
**WYRLEY BIRCH,**  
A Noted American Character Actor.  
**LEONARD DOYLE,**  
A Brilliant Young New York Artist.

**JOHN WARWICK, COMPTON COUTTS,  
LUCILE LISLE—NORMAN WISTER,  
MARY CURTAIN—EVA DAWNEY,  
MOLLY RAYNOR — REGINALD  
ROBERTS.**

Plays Produced by **WYRLEY BIRCH,**

Note Our Wonderful Prices:  
3s. 2s. 1s (1s extra for Booking).  
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Box Plans at **THE BRISTOL.**

the anxiety occasioned by the lack of suitors for Miss Louise's hand has reached its height, Charles Grant, a bank teller, arrives upon the scene, bashfully, but with positive matrimonial intentions. The cream of the comedy then appears when the mother, in her eagerness to secure him as a husband for Louise, conveys such a terrifying, idea of the grandeur of her family that the youth is frightened off. Of course, the drama ends happily, but the audience is kept in intimate touch with the family until the fall of the curtain. Though the cast of "The Family Upstairs" is not an extensive one every character is of a type that required more than ordinary art and perception for its proper representation. Miss Leona Hogarth, who is sure to become a favourite with New Zealand audiences, took the part of the heroine with, dignity and daintiness. Mr John Warwick as her suitor met successfully a demand to present artistically and naturally a somewhat artless character. The burden of the

light comedy, however, falls upon the four other members of the Heller family, Miss Mary Curtain gives a consistent and really excellent portraiture of the mother, so obsessed with love of her children that no extreme absurdity seems to her to be out of place. Mr Wyrley Birch, as the retired tramguard, furnished another clever character study in portraying the father, attempting to establish rational rule in his family, and in the end becoming as grotesquely anxious as his wife. The junior members of the family are humorously represented by Mr Leonard Doyle as a youth fully deserving the fate of being “picked at,” and his father’s summary classification as a “hard-boiled egg”; and by Miss Molly Raynor as the younger sister. Less prominent personalities in the comedy are represented by Miss Lucille Lisle, a dressmaker, and Miss Eve Dawnay, as the mother of Charles Grant. Both ladies, in their brief acquaintance with the audience, exhibited talent which it is hoped will be fully revealed in future productions.

To put it briefly, “The Family Upstairs” is a happy and really entertaining little comedy, with particularly clean and wholesome lines, that cannot fail to make a successful appeal because it is so intensely human. The company is a good one, and it is difficult to give the honours to any particular individual. Each role called for character acting, and each member of the cast gave exactly what was required in a satisfying way.

The players were passengers from Australia by the ill-fated steamer Manuka, and lost all their scenery and stage setting, which had to be improvised in New Zealand. The performances yesterday showed that this part of the production had been very successfully attended to, and a word of praise is also due for the excellent lighting effects used at the Princess Theatre.<sup>5</sup>

Melbourne’s *Labor Call* noted,

The American and English Comedy Company of Sir Benjamin and John Fuller's, that left Melbourne on that ill-fated boat the *Manuka*, opened at the Princess Theatre, Dunedin, on Boxing Night (the 26th ult) to an overflow house in the comedy, "The Family Upstairs," clearly showing that the experience of shipwreck on a foggy night had not interfered with their mirth and merriment. The audience was loud in its applause, and many comedy incidents of the wreck the artists humorously put across. The company is headed with Miss Leona Hogarth, of New York, Wyrley Birch, and Leonard Doyle in the juvenile lead, assisted by John Warwick Compton Coutts. Lucille Lisle, Norman Wister, Mary Curtain, Eva Downey, Molly Raynor, and Reginald Roberts. These artists played such a lovable part with their shipwrecked passengers, which has rung clearly through the Dominion, and success must follow them.<sup>6</sup>

The *Otago Daily Times* waxed effusive about John but was faint in Molly's praise,

Mr John Warwick is another juvenile lead who exhibited a consummate ease that should carry him far.... There is about his acting a self-possession and savoir faire which make all his work convincing. Miss Molly Raynor in short frocks and with an eternal slice of bread and something which she gnaws continually adds farce to the comedy. Her queer little face and funny legs compel attention, and never fail to raise a laugh.<sup>7</sup>

The company played its repertoire in Dunedin, however, and the critics were soon won over. Before they left Dunedin the actors wrote to the NZ Shipwreck Relief Society,

Princess Theatre, Dunedin, January 20, 1930. The secretary, New Zealand Shipwreck Relief Society.— We, the undersigned members of the English and



American Comedy Company, are shortly leaving Dunedin, and we would like you to know that we have the deepest appreciation of the kindness and very real material help that you gave us the day following the wreck. In meeting our individual needs you showed a breadth of vision and a kindness of thought that was charming. Your kindness towards us will be like a stone flung into a pond—the ripples will go far afield, and each ripple will be a kindly thought towards the New Zealand Shipwreck Society.—(Signed) Eve Dawnay, Norman Wister, John Warwick, Compton Coutts, Reginald Roberts, Molly Raynor, Wyrley Birch, Lucille Lisle, Mary Curtain.<sup>8</sup>

The players revived *New Brooms* on 21 February 1930, their last night at His Majesty's in Dunedin,

The popularity of the company has never waned since it first appeared on the stage here, and the return season has brought with it many new admirers of the players in this band of clever entertainers. The class of entertainment has been kept at a high standard, the plays have been of exceptional merit, and the manner in which they have been presented cannot fail to have impressed those who have seen the company.<sup>9</sup>

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1 *Telegraph* 27 July 1929.

2 *Argus* 19 December 1929.

3 *Evening Star* 21 March 1930.

4 *Evening Star* 26 December 1929.

5 *Evening Star* 27 December 1929.

6 *Labor Call* 9 January 1930.

7 *Otago Daily Times* 27 December 1929.

8 *Otago Daily Times* 21 March 1930.

9 *Evening Star* 21 February 1930.

## Chapter 6: Molly & John's Little Theatre in Bathurst.

Back in Sydney in April 1930 it was announced that John and Molly had joined the George Sorlie Company which would present *The Imposter*, *The Irish Cinderella*, *The Prodigal* and *A Sporting Gentleman* at Bathurst.

Miss Molly Raynor will be seen to advantage in the leading roles, likewise the young handsome Australian, Mr. John Warwick.<sup>1</sup>

The company toured from late April to midseptember 1930: Bathurst, Dubbo, Gilgandra, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville, Bowen, Wagga Wagga, Parkes, Grenfell, Forbes.

They must have enjoyed Bathurst, for Molly and John set up their own "Little Theatre" there. In March 1931, in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*,

### ***Restless Caravan***

THE Raynor sisters apparently all have the itch for adventure. Having made history with their T.O.Y. Theatre venture, Joan and Betty set out with their motor caravan to spread the gospel of dramatic art through the country. Now Molly Raynor is off with her husband, John Warwick, to launch a Repertory Theatre at Bathurst. Those who saw "Outward Bound" will remember the pair as the young honeymooners in the Savoy Theatre production. After that they linked their fortunes in real life as well as on the stage.<sup>2</sup>



*Daily Telegraph* 17 March 1931

They called it “The Everyman’s Theatre” and Bathurst’s *National Advocate* was delighted,

### **THEY ARE REAL**

What a change to have flesh and blood actors and actresses before us once again and it really looks as if the stage is coming into its own again—judging by the crowded houses at every performance in Melbourne and Sydney. Talkies are fine, but one does miss the personal touch—the good old stage door crowd waiting on tip toe to get that intimate peep as the artists bustle from the

theatre. A real show to be staged in Bathurst during Show Week is “White Collars,” a very human and thoroughly amusing comedy. John Warwick and Molly Raynor who are producing the play will be seen in their original roles which they played for six months with the American Comedy Company in this country and New Zealand. The cast also includes Barbara Holmes, Molly Grey, Connie Cook, J. Palmer, H. Meyer, J. Larkey, E. Lindsay. Special scenery will be used for both productions. Box plan now open at Cahill’s Music Mecca (stalls) and Brooks’ Melody Shop (circle).<sup>3</sup>

### LUCKY BATHURST

Bathurst should consider itself very fortunate in that Mr. John Warwick, and his very gifted wife, who was, and still is, as far as the stage is concerned, Miss Molly Raynor, decided to establish a repertory club in this city. They might have gone to Orange. They were influenced by the report they received of the high intellectual capacity of the citizens of the former. That Bathurstians should be able to witness “Outward Bound,” as staged by the Warwicks, without the expense or trouble of a trip to some other centre, is very lucky. This play, which had a long run in Sydney, and in which Mr. and Mrs. Warwick had leading parts is quite out of the ordinary. It gives one something to think of even after being present at a rehearsal; quite in the early stages, one returned to home pondering on what is to be, when each of us step forth into the unknown. The characters in “Outward Bound” are persons who are passing into the next life, and without the knowledge even that they are dead. It would be unfair to describe any further the story, or to describe the characters, beyond saying that the “Half Ways” are particularly interesting. The Warwicks being finished artists themselves, give wonderful assistance to those acting with them; and in the selection of the exponents for each character they have shown great discernment. Each one seems to fit into his or her part as if born in it.<sup>4</sup>

... from the opening scene to the thrilling, eerie climax it completely enthralled the large audience, who throughout the performance frequently expressed their appreciation of the splendid work of the artists.<sup>5</sup>

They continued, with *White Collars*,

Before a crowded audience at the Masonic Hall last night “White Collars,” a delightful comedy in three acts was

presented with complete success. Under the direction of Miss Molly Raynor and Mr. John Warwick, it was a most finished production.<sup>6</sup>

Then *Eliza Comes to Stay*,

... the members of the cast acquitted themselves excellently.<sup>7</sup>

Miss Molly Raynor, as the “legacy” and Mr. John Warwick, are both so high in their profession as to make it almost unnecessary to announce that so perfect an interpretation of any part has seldom been experienced on a Bathurst stage. Miss Raynor was always delightfully naive, and her presence on the stage was always welcomed. Mr. Warwick, too, made an ideal Sandy, and together with Miss Raynor, must prove of the greatest benefit to the amateur talent in Bathurst and district.<sup>8</sup>

Bigger things were ahead for Molly and John,

Mr. John Warwick and Miss Molly Raynor have been successful in a test talkie picture in Sydney “On Our Selection,” which will be produced on July 31. These artists will again visit Bathurst about July 23 and on this occasion will present “The Family Upstairs.”<sup>9</sup>

They brought actor and comedian Victor Gouriet from Sydney for the play and,

Another visitor to Bathurst is Mrs. Warwick’s brother, Garth Raynor, who is here on a holiday and has been persuaded to play an excellent comedy part in the forthcoming production. Although he is only an amateur actor it will be interesting to compare him with his professional sisters—Molly Raynor and also Joan and Betty Raynor founders of the already famous “Theatre

of Youth” which so many Bathurstians have visited while in Sydney.<sup>10</sup>

*The Family Upstairs* was a complete success,

Mr. Garth Raynor made a clever characterisation of the part of William Hiller, a lazy young son, always tired, and with an abhorrence of work and an ambition for politics. Mr. Raynor’s performance stamped him as an old hand at the game, and his delineation of the part would indeed be hard to beat.

Miss Molly Raynor, as daughter Louise, was right up to her high standard. As the daughter, so misunderstood, and the desire for refinement in a house of muddle and make believe, Miss Raynor achieved her usual success. Her charm, and her acting always had her audience captivated....

Mr. John Warwick, as Charles Grant, the bashful lover on “40 a week,” added another to the successes he has already achieved since his advent in Bathurst. Mr. Warwick is always par excellent, and his versatility stamps him as one of the State’s best artists.<sup>11</sup>

In September radio station 2BL broadcast an A.B.C. Players presentation, a short comedy by Cherry Vooght: *A Seat in the Park*, with John Warwick and Molly Raynor.

1 *National Advocate* 29 April 1930.

2 *Daily Telegraph* 17 March 1931.

3 *National Advocate* 2 April 1931.

4 *National Advate* 8 April 1931.

5 *National Advocate* 17 April 1931.

6 *National Advocate* 15 April 1931.

7 *National Advocate* 29 May 1931.

8 *ibid.*

9 *National Advocate* 24 June 1931.

10 *National Advocate* 11 July 1931.

11 *National Advocate* 24 July 1931.

## Chapter 7: John McIntosh Beattie, aka John Warwick.



The man Molly Raynor married was John McIntosh Beattie. During the time he knew Molly he used the stage names Jack Beattie, Jack Beatty, Warwick Beattie, Warrick Beattie and finally John Warwick. He was born in Bellingen, south of Coff's Harbour, near

the Queensland border with New South Wales in 1905 to 41 year old Elizabeth Jane (Richerson) Beattie and 48 year old Archibald Beattie. He had two brothers and five sisters. His father died in 1914 when he was nine.

He took the stage surname Warwick from his school, Warwick State High and Technical College. His mother was by then living in Warwick, Queensland.

He married Dorothy Georgina Jones in Queensland on 4 February 1924 when he was nineteen. His mother died in Warwick two months later on 14 April 1924. John Beattie filed for divorce in 1927 on the grounds that Dorothy Georgina

Beattie had deserted him for three years and a decree absolute was granted in 1929.

Jack Beattie's name appeared with Molly Rayner's in the Adelaide cast of *Gum Tree Gully* on 29 July 1927 towards the end of its run<sup>1</sup> and Radio 2BL's 8–11.30 p.m. programme in November 1927 included "a humorous sketch (Miss Molly Rayner and Jack Beattie)".<sup>2</sup> From then on they very often appeared together in plays and films in Australia and New Zealand.

Molly and John were married in North Sydney (her parents were living there) in 1930—she was 27 and he 25. In the 1931 electoral roll they were in King, East Sydney; 1932 in Lismore, Queensland; 1933 in Darlinghurst; 1934 Woollahra.

Warwick is said to have brought his friend Errol Flynn to a casting session when *In the Wake of the Bounty* (released in 1933) was being planned. Warwick played Midshipman Young; Flynn played Fletcher Christian and was so taken with the role he would later claim to be descended from a *Bounty* mutineer.

The Adelaide *Mail* announced in 1934,

JOHN Warwick, who has played many important roles in Australian productions, and most recently in "The Silence of Dean Maitland," has been appointed assistant director of Cinesound films, under Ken Hall. Apart from being a good actor. Warwick has excellent organising ability.<sup>3</sup>

In the late 1930s he acted in British cinema. He was an RAF squadron leader in Burma during WWII, returning to Australia with Molly in 1947 before their New Zealand tour.

John returned to Britain to cinema and TV roles in the 1950s. In about 1967 he and Molly came back to Australia and he ended his career in television drama and cinema there.



He died in Sydney on 10 January 1972, on the set of *Skippy the bush kangaroo*.

*Warwick Daily News* 1947:

30 July ►

and 9 August ►►



Biography of  
John Warwick ►►

Filmography ►►



John, Ingrid, Molly in Venice c. 1950? photo presumably by Garth. Family collection.

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1 *Register* 29 Jul 1927.

2 *Sydney Mail* 9 November 1927

3 *Mail* 7 July 1934.

## Chapter 8: Molly stars in the talkies.

In August 1931 the *West Australian* announced,

### AUSTRALIAN TALKIES

Production was to commence this week on “The Sentimental Bloke” and “On Our Selection,” two of the most valuable pieces of talkie property in Australia, in Melbourne and Sydney....

“On Our Selection” will be made by Union Theatres Ltd., and Bert Bailey. Interiors will be shot at Bondi, New South Wales, the company will go on location at Mulgoa and the final scenes will be taken at Lake Macquarie. The cast will be Bert Bailey (Dad), Fred McDonald (Dave), Richard Fair (Sandy), Molly Raynor (Kate), Len Baldrick (Old Carey), John Warwick (Young Jim Carey), Alfreda Bevan (Mum), Liliad Adeson (Lil), Jack McGowan (Maloney), Fred Keery (Cranky Jack), Ossie Wenbon (Joe Rudd), Willy Driscoll (Uncle).<sup>1</sup>

By December they had almost finished filming,

### Hey, Here Come Dad and Mum!

#### IN THE TALKIES

NOW

#### Story Of The Land Told By Film

HERE they are, the original Dad, Mum and Dave of all the jokes ever illustrated about the Australian bush. The lovable, generous characters of which the world knows little now tell a human story of the Land for all the world to understand.

THOSE great heroic figures of the great outback, immortalised in the works of Steele Rudd, find expression in sound, and in “On Our Selection,” an Australasian Films production, they come forward with

a modernised version of the great old tale and play. All the participants in the original stage success have assembled for some months past at the Bondi Junction studios, and more recently on location at picturesque Castlereagh, near Penrith, adding their vast experience to the wide knowledge of the talkie experts—the efforts of the combination resulting in what will probably be the greatest tale of the outback yet attempted.

*Bert Bailey has appeared as Dad with his own company. Bailey and Grant, for so long that he is Dad. Powerful, bearded, sentimental and determined to wrest wealth from his selection. Dad Rudd is the dominating figure of the romantic tale.*

Players here cast in the roles they created on the stage are Fred Macdonald as the irrepressible Dave, Alfreda Bevan as Mum Rudd, Willie Driscoll in the part of Uncle Rudd, and Lilius Adeson as Lily White, Daves girl.

Romantic interest is supplied by two newcomers to the Australian screen, Mollie Raynor and Dick Fair, whose charming love story is enacted against a background of drought, mortgages, country “hops,” struggle, sacrifice and delightful comedy.

Dick Fair, who has done extensive stage work in this country, has a likeable screen appearance, and as Sandy is responsible for some delightful work.

Director Ken Hall who has been working on the film since its commencement some time ago, and is now engaged on the final assembling and editing of the film, announces that the show will be released at an early date.<sup>2</sup>

The *Daily Telegraph* of 16 November 1931 covered the making of the film. ►





“DICK FAIR and MOLLIE RAYNOR in ‘On Our Selection’.”  
*Truth* 6 December 1931.

Four days later a breathless *Brisbane Courier* could announce, “‘On Our Selection’ has just been completed, and is now ready for early release in Brisbane.... Molly Raynor, who played in Brisbane several years ago, does fine work”.<sup>3</sup>

Melbourne’s *Table Talk* headlined its piece “The TALKIES and THEIR STARS” and published a still from a scene in the film.



“Sandy (Dick Fair), Kate (Molly Raynor), Old Caney (Len Budnick), and Dad (Bert Bailey) in a scene from the Australian talkie, ‘On Our Selection’.”

*Table Talk* 17 December 1931.

Adelaide’s *Mail* interviewed the “Australian girl” Molly Raynor,

### ***Studio Gossip-Theatre News***

#### ***Australian Girl Beneath the Camera’s Eye***

THE Australian talkie industry is in its infancy—but it is proving a robust child. And, appearing under “mike” and camera is a thrilling experience, according to Molly Raynor—sister of Joan and Betty Rayner, who were

recently in Adelaide with their Theatre of Youth company.

Miss Raynor is one of the lucky ones who are taking part in the first all Australian talkie "On Our Selection," which is now nearly completed by Australasian Films, and will soon be seen in Adelaide.



"MOLLY RAYNOR, who makes her first film appearance in 'On Our Selection.'"  
*The Mail* 19 December 1931.

She spells her name differently from her sisters for stage purposes.

There is no sweeping up in luxurious limousines to perfectly equipped studios for the actors and actresses in this Australian drama. That may perhaps come later when the industry is flourishing. At present things are simple but thorough.

The sun was one of the most important members of the cast in "On Our Selection." There were anxious waits when a stray cloud drifted up as Miss Raynor shows in a graphic description.

“Twenty pale yellow faces turn towards the sky,” she said.\* “There is a great dinginess far and wide. A voice mutters ‘Hopeless,’ there is a long sigh, and the yellow faces drift apart, downcast and troubled. Suddenly there is a cry. ‘It’s coming!’—and again the yellow faces turn upwards, but now they are smiling. There is a rush of feet, a murmuring of voices, and then one raised in command, saying ‘Quiet!’ Silence remains, and once more bathed in light our little colony turns its attention to the camera.”

Miss Raynor declares that one can have no illusions about this talkie business when taking an active part in it. It is easy to imagine that one has looked rather ravishing during the scene—and then find, when initial screening takes place, that it is really rather dreadful.

“And you see funny little mannerisms that even your best friends won’t tell you about,” she adds. “Again and again you find yourself saying, ‘Why on earth did I do that?’ Sometimes you are lucky, and a retake is demanded, which gives you another chance to take something out, and put better stuff into the scene just condemned.”

It is blinding work, too, according to Miss Raynor, who found the mirrors and reflectors almost too much to bear at first.

“But you must learn to like it,” she said, “for a shot with diminished light is dead, and the subject looks old and haggard. So though at first you say, ‘I can’t stand it,’ yet, after seeing the shot screened you will not only stand it, but you will ask for it—light, more light, because it gives life and youth on the silver screen.”

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\* There was a widespread belief that with blue-sensitive film under bright lighting a suitable complexion could be only be produced by using yellow greasepaint.

Her part in “On Our Selection” is the first straight part Miss Raynor has taken, as well as being her initial experience with talkies.<sup>4</sup>



◀ “Mollie Raynor, appearing in ‘On Our Selection,’ wears this very pretty Sunday night frock, of peach broderie Anglaise, with tiny frillings, and large rag rose at girdle.” *Truth* 20 December 1931.





▲ ▼ Molly as Kate in *On our selection* 1932 (Screenshot ▲).



Molly talked to the *Sun* about her experience,

**NO ILLUSIONS IN TALKIES  
WHEN YOU SEE YOURSELF**

“INTENSELY interesting work, this talkie business, but very disconcerting,” says Mollie Rayner, who plays a leading-role in “On Our Selection.”

“There are no illusions here. A scene is shot. One comes away feeling that all is well, and a little later that shot is screened, and one looks at it and doesn’t feel quite so well! Then you see all those little mannerisms that even your best friends won’t tell you about, and you find yourself saying: “Why, oh why, did I do that?”

Molly, whose stage appearances include “Outward Bound,” “Eliza Comes to Stay,” “The Family Upstairs” and “Six Cylinder Love,” is a sister of Joan and Betty Rayner, of Theatre of Youth fame.

Joan and Betty are in New Zealand, doing splendidly as a “two man” show, and are planning a second trip to America.<sup>5</sup>



The *Sun*'s reporter attended the premiere in Sydney,

### **BUSH ITSELF**

#### **“ON OUR SELECTION” AN INSTANT SUCCESS**

Mr. Bert Bailey and Mr. Ken. Hall, who directed “On Our Selection,” have made a noteworthy contribution to the talkies. They have accomplished more than this, for they have produced in their first effort a picture of which all Australians may be proud.

Mr. Steele Rudd gave them a sound foundation in the play which has been so phenomenal a success, and they took the simplicity and the beauty, as well as the fun, of the Australian countryside and, with the aid of Mr. Walter Sully's almost uncanny skill with a camera, they brought these out of the heart of the bush for everyone to see.

#### **BEAUTY OF SETTINGS**

Last night when the picture was screened by the invitation of British Empire Films, Ltd., at the State Theatre, the audience responded as never before. When Mr. Bailey and Mr. Hall came on to the stage, cooees were intermingled with cheers.

Every member of the company does well, and the effect of the acting is enhanced a hundredfold by the beauty of the settings, the loveliness of the bird calls, and the homely touches which come from true farm life.

“On Our Selection,” a Cinesound Production, was entirely made in Australia. The cameras and the actual film on which the picture is inscribed were the only importations.

Bert Bailey as Dad, Alfreda Bevan as Mum, Fred. McDonald (Dave), Ossie Wenban (Joe), Lily Adeson (Lily), Jack McGowan (Maloney), and Willie Driscoll



(Uncle), were responsible for almost incessant laughter, but Dick Fair, Molly Raynor, Dorothy Dunkley, Bobbie Beaumont, Len Budrick, Fred. Kerry, Arthur Dodds, John Warwick, Fred. Brown and Carlton Stewart are all deserving of praise.<sup>6</sup>

Molly's niece Sue Taffel told me the film was a real family affair: Garth had a bit part, as did grandfather

Freddie—whose scene was so funny they had to cut it lest he steal the show!

Molly Raynor and Dick Fair in "On Our Selection".  
*Northern Star* 6 August 1932.

British critics were not so kind, as the *West Australian* ruefully reported,

### **English Trade Paper Views.**

Generally speaking the critics of the English trade papers were not greatly impressed with the Cinesound production, "On Our Selection," which is being distributed in England by Universal under the title, "Down on the Farm." Universal, which has paid a deposit of £1,000 on the picture, considers it will be more attractive to provincial than to city audiences. In Australia it was one of the four biggest "box-office" pictures of 1932.

The "Era" says:—"Down on the Farm" is Australia's initial contribution to the super laughter-making class and it should pass with unsophisticated audiences. The humour is very rustic at times. Australia's idea of what constitutes good comedy, an obvious caricature of a typical bush homestead, is only likely to please an unsophisticated audience over here. Bert Bailey is certainly a sound character actor and has a good sense of pawky humour. Some of the knock-about fun is amusing. Some of it painfully unfunny. Considerably shortened, it should satisfy those who like obvious comedy, although others might think that Australian pioneers and agricultural workers are a race of imbeciles.

The "Cinema" regards it as an appealing novelty for patrons of popular theatres.<sup>7</sup>

Molly Raynor and Dick Farr are unusually good as the sweethearts whose story forms the background for the varied incidents of a simple, humorous tale.<sup>8</sup>

The Brisbane *Telegraph* was not so sure: "the weakest part (was) the romance between the juveniles—Dick Fare as Sandy and Molly Raynor as Kate Rudd."<sup>9</sup> The Brisbane *Courier*

thought otherwise: “The love story of ‘Kate’ (Molly Raynor) runs through the play delightfully.”<sup>10</sup>

Molly made celebrity appearances,

Into David Jones’ ballroom they poured, and among them “Dad” himself—Bert Bailey, and the leading lady of “On Our Selection” film, Molly Raynor.<sup>11</sup>

In the *Daily Telegraph’s* “Life of Sydney” page, an account of a society cocktail party named Molly and John among “the interesting people who were invited”.<sup>12</sup>

On 10 September 1932 Lismore’s *Northern Star* published a piece on film making,

MAKING A TALKIE  
NOTHING ROMANTIC BUT JUST HARD WORK

**“On Our Selection” will be seen at the Star Court Theatre, Lismore, on September 12, and it is practically certain that this palatial house of amusement will be packed every night of its run. It is a joint undertaking of Bert Bailey—in the role of Dad—and Cinesound Productions Ltd. Our representative in the following gives his impressions of the production of the picture.**

The immediate impression that one gets when entering the second stages of a motion picture studio for the first time is one of lights, lights and more lights. Lights and strange looking people. At Bondi, Sydney, is a completely equipped studio, pioneering the way for Australian made pictures, and an Australian industry.

The sound stage is like a tremendous cell. The padding shuts out all sounds from the outside world, which the sensitive microphones would otherwise pick up and record. Little trapdoors occur at intervals in the high

walls, and these are opened during the lulls in “shooting” to allow fresh air to enter. With these closed and the lights on, the heat is intense, sometimes reaching 150 degrees. Everywhere there are lights—strong arc lights, shining down from all corners on to the stage; lights focussed on players; “babies” (small but powerful spot lights); 500,000 candle power incandescent lights, bright and glaring.

### HUGE GENERATORS

The microphone is connected to the sound engineers’ room far up in one corner of the stage, where the sound recording machine synchronises the speech with the actions. Below are huge generators producing the electric power.

When the barn scene flashes on to the scene, few will know that in reality it is a scantily constructed three sided room which is roofless. Only sufficient of the structure is built to give the illusion of a big barn and just that space comes within the camera’s range. Behind the decorations a microphone is skilfully concealed. At other times it hangs on a movable beam above the speakers’ heads.

### OFFSTAGE

Off stage there is constant chattering; musicians in an unseen quarter tune their instruments; and all is ready for the entry of the principals.

Then Dad and Mum (Bert Bailey and Alfreda Bevan) move within the camera’s range. They approach a corner where a table set with synthetic food invites them to eat. In this corner are the two lovers (Molly Raynor and Dick Pair) in early conversation.

This short scene when projected on to the screen will occupy about half a minute. When taken it was rehearsed seven or eight times, and it was almost an hour before shooting was commenced.

## OVER AND OVER AGAIN

All the illusions of the joys of motion picture production are soon dispelled by a visit to the studio. It is a long repetition of the same thing over and over again. Each scene is rehearsed constantly until the recording engineer, camera men, and producer are satisfied that it is ready to “take.”

Quite an unexpected number of people figure in the production, producer and engineers, cameramen, sound engineers, electricians, prop boys, dressers, and the script girl. The latter keeps a check of scenes and details of the production.<sup>13</sup>

Curator of “Australian Screen”, Paul Byrnes, wrote, “it’s an absolutely astonishing feat in the history of Australian film.... Indeed, it is fair to say that *On Our Selection* was the key film in restarting the Australian industry in the sound era.”<sup>14</sup>



Molly Raynor,  
*The West Australian*  
19 August 1932.





“One of the dozens of beautiful scenes from the new Australian talkie, with Richard Fair and Molly Rayner. The scene is on the Nepean River at Castlereagh, in the Penrith district.” *Sydney Mail* 17 Aug 1932.

Molly and John's Everyman's Theatre produced *Eliza Comes to Stay* and *White Collars* at Lismore in March 1932, before they returned to Sydney "to take prominent roles in an (other) Australian talkie".<sup>15</sup>

**FEDERAL HALL. FEDERAL HALL.**

**WEDNESDAY. 30th MARCH; THURSDAY. 31st MARCH; SATURDAY,  
2nd APRIL.**

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THE BRILLIANT COMEDY,

**"ELIZA COMES TO STAY"**

WITH

**MOLLY RAYNOR and JOHN WARWICK,**

late of J. C. Williamson's, in their original roles of Eliza and Sandy. Supported by a brilliant cast, including :

NELLE BUTLER, first appearance in Lismore.  
MARY McDERMOTT, first appearance in Lismore.  
GARTH RAYNOR, first appearance in Lismore.  
CURLY HARRISON, ESTELLE DE BOSHER, FRED J. MORGAN, TED HAMPTON.

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**IN AID OF THE MEMORIAL BATHS.**

PRICES 3/-, 2/- and 1/-. BOX PLAN PALING'S. BOOK EARLY.

In May they took *Eliza* to Coraki and *White Collars* to Bangalow. In November the *Sun* announced that the Criterion Theatre would reopen with the local play *Whose Child*. "Molly Raynor and John Warwick will have leading roles."<sup>16</sup>

**CRITERION THEATRE—SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26,  
SIX NIGHTS ONLY.**

COMMENCING AT THE MATINEE.

A TENSE THROBBING DRAMA OF REAL LIFE. OF HEART INTEREST TO WOMEN.

**“WHOSE CHILD?” BY MILLICENT PRESTON STANLEY.**

The FIRST NIGHT will be under the distinguished Patronage of their Excellencies, Sir Philip and Lady Game; the Prime Minister, the Hon. J. A. Lyons, the Premier, the Hon. B. B. Stevens; the Lord Mayor, the Hon. S. Walder, M.L.C., and others.

**A MAGNIFICENT CAST OF 44 METROPOLITAN ARTISTS.**

Includes Australia's favourite, Nancy Stewart, Mayne Lynton, John Warwick, *Molly Raynor*, and others.

Box Plans now open at Paling's and Feminist Club, 77 King-street.

Prices: 6/, 5/, 4/, 3/, plus tax. Early Door Gallery, 2/. Late door 1/.

*“WHOSE CHILD?”—Miss Preston Stanley will tell why she wrote this play, at the Business Girls' Luncheon tomorrow. Miss Molly Raynor and Mrs. Meta Bennett White, leading members of the cast, will also be present. Charge 1/- each for Luncheon.<sup>17</sup>*

The *Sun* was underwhelmed,

**“WHOSE CHILD?” AT CRITERION  
PROPAGANDA PLAY'S FIRST NIGHT**

*An ingenious climax with considerable emotional appeal was an effective ending to Miss Preston Stanley's “Whose Child?” play at the Criterion theatre last night.*

FOR the most part, however, the piece was feminist propaganda based on the famous Emilie Polini case.

The rights of a mother to her child were argued in the drawing-room, in a barrister's chambers, by the servants and by the politicians.

In parts the dialogue was smart, and male prejudices were hit hard and often. Miss Stanley, in fact, was more effective as a propagandist than a playwright.

She appeared herself on the stage as a member of Parliament, a role she has played in real life.

### Local Appeal

The political flavor was added to by the presence in the audience of the Premier (Mr. Stevens), the Speaker (Sir Daniel Levy), and other Ministers and members of the Legislature.

The well-remembered case on which it is based gave the play a local appeal, but the arguments suffered by their familiarity.

**Earnestness in propaganda often means dullness and “Whose Child?” suffered accordingly.**

The play was well produced and capably acted. Miss Nancye Stewart playing the role of the wronged mother. Meta Bennett-White and Molly Raynor were responsible for excellent comedy work as the servants who were strong for women’s rights.

Leal Douglas acted with restraint and competence as Mrs. Charteris.<sup>18</sup>

The *Herald* was more sympathetic,

Miss Preston Stanley’s play “Whose Child?” is not propagandist only in a broad and general way like some of the dramas of Mr Bernard Shaw or a medieval morality play. Its propaganda has a precise object—the amendment of the Infant Guardianship Act—and it provides its audience with a detailed knowledge of the arguments in support of the amendment, its exact wording, the relevant statistics, and the fact that legislation similar to that demanded by Miss Preston Stanley has existed in Britain since 1839....

Mrs. Windsor’s friends and relations—14 of them—discuss the case in all its aspects in speeches punctuated with terse feminist war-cries that were warmly and unflinchingly applauded by a large part of the audience. A brief well-written passage in which Mrs. Windsor’s

housemaids and her cook state their views was amusingly acted, particularly by Molly Raynor, as Alice, the charwoman....<sup>19</sup>



Molly. *The Sun* 23 July 1933.

Molly was busy on radio, in *The Naughty Wife*, Dickens's *The Cricket on the Hearth* and *Captain Swift* broadcast in December,<sup>20</sup> *Mrs Dane's Defence*, the opera *The Count of Luxembourg* in January 1933,<sup>21</sup> *Tea for Three* ("... a little wife, delightfully played with an infectious chuckle—you could have eaten her—by Molly Raynor was perfect in helping the brilliant high comedy of the exquisite little lady" said the *Sun*),<sup>22</sup> *The First Mrs Fraser* in March, *Bird in Hand* in August,<sup>23</sup> *The Twelve Pound Look* in October.<sup>24</sup>

Also in October she appeared at the Mossman Town Hall in a Cheer-Ohs' Revue ("Miss Mollie Raynor and Mr. John Warwick presented two sketches in which they exhibited good powers of characterisation").<sup>25</sup>

The *Sun* announced in July,

#### IN TWO FILMS

FORTUNE has smiled on clever Mollie Raynor, who looks forward to being exceedingly busy in the next few months. First she was chosen to play a comedy role in

“The Silence of Dean Maitland,” soon to go into production under Mr. Ken Hall at Cinesound Studios, Bondi Junction. Then Mr. Beaumont Smith selected her for another comedy part in “The Hayseeds,” beginning at Cinesound No. 2, Rushcutters Bay, within the next day or two.<sup>26</sup>

*The Hayseeds* was completed in November 1933.



“Mollie Raynor and Tal Ordell: bush lovers of ‘The Hayseeds.’”  
*The Sun* 3 December 1933.

## “HAYSEEDS”

### Australian Film Success

Seldom has any film had a better reception than that accorded to "The Hayseeds" when it was screened at the King's Cross Theatre last night for "The Sun" Toy Fund. Mr. Beaumont Smith proves that he is a director who has sympathy with the home life of Australia, a keen appreciation of the native humor, and a capacity for getting the best in entertainment out of his material. As Dad, Cecil Kellaway gave a beautiful performance, kindly and experienced, very funny in the city, and very much at home in the country. Katie Towers, Molly Raynor, Kenneth Bramton, Shirley Dale and John Moore also contributed to the success, in which the Richard White Girls' ballets were a feature.

There are novel features in "The Hayseeds," the direction is quick and sure, and the continuity better than that of any Australian picture to date.

The film opened at the Civic Theatre to-day, and, judging by last night's enthusiasm it is in for a long run. There is absolute beauty in the settings, and a tenderness in camera treatment that is admirable.<sup>27</sup>

"Here's a movie that's likely to keep the box office pleasantly occupied, so mark it on your must be seen list," spoke the *Truth*;<sup>28</sup> "Molly Raynor displays a vein of comedy that should bring her fame both here and abroad," glowed the *Sun*;<sup>29</sup> "Of the young people, Molly Raynor is the most successful," signalled the *Telegraph*;<sup>30</sup> "The best acting in 'The Hayseeds' is done by Molly Raynor. Her portrait of Pansy Ragen is finely resourceful and alive in its vein of broad farce," trumpeted the *Herald*.<sup>31</sup>

Looking cool and summery in a white ensemble with a finishing scarf of red and white, Molly Rayner lunched in the Wintergarden of the Hotel Australia, yesterday. Molly was naturally pleased at the eulogistic notices she

had received on her performance in “The Hayseeds” last Saturday. Molly is a sister of the T.O.Y. Theatre girls who are still enjoying life in their caravan abroad.<sup>32</sup>



Molly as Pansy Ragen in “The Hayseeds”, 1933 (Screenshot).

Curator of *Australian Screen*, Phil Byrnes, wrote,

Typical Beau Smith direction—there’s absolutely no explanation of what a line of dancing girls is doing on the edge of Dad Hayseed’s land, no establishing shots to give us a sense of the farm, no physical or even aural connection between the Hayseeds on their porch and the dancing line of girls (who are accompanied by a band). The film was a JC Williamson production and Williamsons had a chorus line for their stage shows—



which is presumably why they ended up in the scene. Still, audiences at the time were still enjoying the novelty of sound on film, and they probably enjoyed the incongruity of these scenes just as we do now.<sup>33</sup>



The film was popular and profitable despite rather mixed reviews.

Molly's radio performances continued, *The Show*, *Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure*, *Alias Jimmy Valentine*.

In January 1934 work began on *The Silence of Dean Maitland*, when Molly and John were to join "The greatest Australian cast ever assembled in one film".<sup>34</sup> John Warwick did star in the film, but Molly's name is not in the cast—possibly because in late January,

Molly Raynor, the well-known comedienne who supplies so many of the laughs in the Australian talkie "The Hayseeds," is at present a patient in the War Memorial Hospital. She is recovering from a recent appendicitis operation, and soon hopes to be able to receive her friends in her flower-filled room.<sup>35</sup>

She recovered at Sutton Forest and accompanied the director and the other stars to the Film Club ball in July,

Miss Jocelyn Howarth, Miss Molly Raynor, and Messrs John Longdon, John Warwick, and Ken G. Hall will be among Australia's film celebrities to be present at the fifth anniversary ball of the Imperial Film Club, at the Dungowan, Martin Place, tomorrow.<sup>36</sup>



In June and July 1934 a new Ken Hall film, *Strike Me Lucky* was shot at Cinesound, with Molly in a small part as “Bates”; Roy Rene starred as a stereotypical Jew “Mo McIsaac”. The film premiered in October but was not a success.

**GROTESQUE BUT NOT FUNNY**  
**“STRIKE ME LUCKY”**

ALL over the world the film studios are demanding comedians. Australia has in Roy Rene (“Mo”) an actor of infinite experience, excellent pantomime, and a man who has a vast public ready to laugh as soon as he appears. With this material Cinesound has made “Strike Me Lucky,” which is at the Capitol Theatre, and which comes as a shock after the technical advance in recent Australian productions.

“Strike Me Lucky” is grotesque, it is ridiculous, but it is not funny. The situations are beyond the possibility of the latitude allowed for farce, and the story suggests that someone thought it out while the company waited to make each scene. All the old devices of Hollywood—many of them long discarded—are here. Even the ballet, graceful and charming as it is, loses effect because the photography is a thing of yesterday.

A capable artist such as Yvonne Banyard is presented as an imitation Mae West, saying “Come up and see me sometime”; there are Sydney gangsters; and there is a trick staircase in what is supposed to be a home of luxury and refinement. These are but a few of the incongruities of a film which in its settings by Fred Finley provides spacious interiors for preposterous characters. Among the players directed by Mr. Ken Hall are Lorraine Smith, who should be seen again, John D’Arcy, Eric Masters, Dan Agar, Molly Raynor, and an attractive child, Pamela Bevan.<sup>37</sup>

In October 1934 shooting began for *Gran'dad Rudd*, with Molly as Amelia Banks.<sup>38</sup>

The *Australian Women's Weekly* interviewed her in December,

**PREFERS COMEDY to DRAMA  
MOLLY RAYNOR**

*How many gifted comedians we hear of who confess to a hankering to play Hamlet! But Molly Raynor, who will be seen shortly in "Grandad Rudd," with Bert Bailey, rejoices in her broad comedy roles. She does not want to play in serious drama or take highly emotional parts. Nor does she care about interpreting delicate fantasies.*



"A HEAD of Miss Raynor, made up as Amelia, which has the look of a female Harold Lloyd." *Australian Women's Weekly* 29 December 1934.

**Her natural inclination is to broad comedy, and she does not mind how grotesque she has to make herself. With her big goggles she has earned the sobriquet of “Miss Harold Lloyd,” at the Cinesound studio, where she has recently been working.**

ONE of three gifted sisters, Molly Raynor might now be touring the world with Betty and Joan in their Theatre of Youth caravan, but for the fact that she laughed too easily. The family name is Rayner, but Molly, for her own stage purpose, spells hers with an “O.” Molly was associated with Joan in “T.O.Y.” activities, but found it too serious.

“I couldn’t concentrate on that kind of thing,” she confesses. “There were too many things I wanted to laugh at. So Joan took our younger sister, Betty in hand. She filled my place.

“As you know, the two have made a splendid success of the thing. They have had an amazingly successful tour. I last heard of them from Sweden. I expect them back in Australia next June.” Molly Raynor plays the broad comedy role of “Amelia” in the Cinesound motion picture, “Grandad Rudd,” soon to be released. It is a part after her own heart, and she admits that she has thoroughly enjoyed her work in this production.

### **A “Straight” Part**

HER first picture was a “straight” part in “On Our Selection,” something similar to Elaine Hamill’s “Betty” in “Grandad Rudd.” She was pressed into service against her will, she says, and was thoroughly miserable in the part. Later she played “Pansy” in “Hayseeds.”

“I had a part in ‘Strike Me Lucky,’” says this lively little lady, “but by the time the gentleman with the scissors was finished with the picture, it could hardly be called a part. My friends find me rather a disappointment in it, but they can’t blame me.

“It wasn’t I that said the things to which the censor objected. In fact, they were said to me, and I had to go out of the scenes with the others. Rather adding insult to injury, I think.

“But my ‘Amelia’ in ‘Grandad’ is great fun. ‘On Our Selection’ was funny, but this picture is fifty per cent funnier, in my opinion. I like broad comedy. It is suited to such talent as I possess.

“I prefer to help people to laugh rather than to make them cry, or speed up their heart-beats. And naturally I enjoy doing the work that suits me better than doing work that I feel doesn’t suit me.”

Miss Raynor, off stage, looks anything but a “broad comedy” artist. She would have little trouble in inducing “heart-beats” if she were romantically inclined, in a stage sense.

But comediennes of real talent are rare, and it is a good thing for entertainment that there are artists ready, and even eager, to sink their individualities and efface their personal attractiveness “just for the fun of the thing.”

The Raynors are New Zealand girls. Molly made a trip home about four years ago with the American Comedy Company, but was involved in a wreck. She hasn’t risked it since.<sup>39</sup>



Molly as Amelia Banks in *Grandad Rudd*, 1935 (Screenshot).

Meanwhile *Grandad Rudd* was well reviewed,

**MADE OF BEAUTY AND FARCE**  
**“Grandad Rudd”**

UNDER all the broad humor, the antics of Dan, the absurdities of Joe, the excellent portrait that Fred MacDonald has chiselled into the never-to-be-forgotten Dave, is the serene beauty, the wide-sweeping splendor that is Australia. Captain Frank Hurley has caught some grand aspects of the country-side, and one could have wished that “Grandad Rudd” at the State Theatre had more of these.

As it is, “Grandad Rudd” is a show of easy laughter. The old man of Bert Bailey—cunning, kindly, hard, not over scrupulous, impatient of his bucolic family, but really responsible for their nervous stupidity—is a

superb performance. He has deepened the character. He still roars, but he gives more of that quiet touch which marks the actor who has mastered his craft. Years of study have gone into a character which has become part of the life of Australia itself.

“Grandad Rudd” is not another “On Our Selection” as far as entertainment goes. The same people do rather the same things, and therefore, there is a lack of freshness, but it has some gloriously funny scenes, some of which develop into screaming farce that rocks the State. Of these the tractor scene is the most successful, whereas the old idea of persuading cows to give milk to music is decidedly flat.

Cinesound made “Grandad Rudd,” Mr. Ken Hall being responsible for the direction and Mr. Bailey himself for the production, and the film will probably, in its travels through the countryside, net a large amount of money. That it will cause amusement is certain.

Members of the cast include John D’Arcy, who has to play a conventional villain; John Cameron, showing considerable promise; George Lloyd, whose comedy with Molly Raynor is effective; William McGowan, the new Joe; Les Warton; Lillias Adeson, an old friend, who grows dearer in “Grandad Rudd”; Elaine Hamill, a pretty girl of the elocutionary school; Peggy Yeoman, playing Mum for the first time, and bringing to the part considerable charm, and Margaret Adele.<sup>40</sup>

Lumbering, awkward Dave (Fred Macdonald), the designing bumpkin, Dan (George Lloyd), the domineering Grandad (Bert Bailey), and sweet, bespectacled Amelia, a Band of Hope crusader (Molly Raynor), are the backbone of this picture, and keep the farce moving rapidly.<sup>41</sup>





"MOLLY RAYNOR, as Amelia, in a comic courtship scene from the forthcoming production of 'Grandad Rudd.'" *Australian Women's Weekly* 29 December 1934.



Poster for *Grandad Rudd*



On the set, Molly second from left

- 
- 1 *West Australian* 28 August 1931.
  - 2 *Truth* 6 December 1931.
  - 3 *Brisbane Courier* 10 December 1931.
  - 4 *Mail* 19 December 1931.
  - 5 *Sun* 29 November 1931.
  - 6 *Sun* 20 June 1932.
  - 7 *West Australian* 19 January 1933.
  - 8 *Truth* 3 July 1932.
  - 9 *Telegraph* 23 July 1932.
  - 10 *Brisbane Courier* 23 July 1932.
  - 11 *Daily Telegraph* 5 August 1932.
  - 12 *Daily Telegraph* 16 Aug 1932.
  - 13 *Northern Star* 10 Sep 1932.
  - 14 Paul Byrnes. On Our Selection. Curator's notes.  
<https://aso.gov.au/titles/features/our-selection-1932/notes/> accessed  
 16 January 2019.
  - 15 *Northern Star* Mon 4 April 1932.
  - 16 *Sun* 13 November 1932.

- 17 *Sun* 23 November 1932.
- 18 *Sun* 27 November 1932.
- 19 *Sydney Morning Herald* 28 November 1932.
- 20 *Sun* 18 & 23 December 1932.
- 21 *Sydney Morning Herald* 6 January 1933.
- 22 *Sun* 1 February 1933.
- 23 *Sun* 8 August 1933.
- 24 *Sun* 9 October 1933.
- 25 *Sydney Morning Herald* 16 Oct 1933.
- 26 *Sun* 23 July 1933.
- 27 *Sun* 9 December 1933.
- 28 *Truth* 10 December 1933.
- 29 *Sun* 10 December 1933.
- 30 *Daily Telegraph* 11 December 1933.
- 31 *Sydney Morning Herald* 11 December 1933.
- 32 *Daily Telegraph* 12 December 1933.
- 33 <https://aso.gov.au/titles/features/hayseeds/clip1/> accessed 22 January 2019.
- 34 *Daily Standard* 22 January 1934.
- 35 *Daily Telegraph* 26 January 1934.
- 36 *Daily Telegraph* 10 July 1934.
- 37 *Sun* 18 November 1934.
- 38 *Sydney Morning Herald* 18 October 1934.
- 39 *Australian Women's Weekly* 29 December 1934.
- 40 *Sun* 24 February 1935. Elaine Hamill was elsewhere described as "the beautiful New Zealander".
- 41 *Table Talk* 9 May 1935.

## Chapter 9: Molly & John tackle England

On 30 December 1934 the *Sun* announced, “John Warwick, producer for the Cinema Academy Players, and his wife, Molly Raynor, plan a sudden trip to England, leaving in a few days”.<sup>1</sup> *Everyones* ran the story on 9 January 1935 under the head “John Warwick to tackle England”.

The *Telegraph* expanded,

Mrs. John Warwick (formerly Miss Molly Raynor), who, with her husband, will leave for a trip abroad by the *Largs Bay* to-day, was entertained at a delightful farewell party by the Cheer-Oh Club at David Jones’s yesterday. Mrs. Warwick will be in London for a month before her sisters, Joan and Betty, leave for Australia. While abroad Mr. and Mrs. Warwick will visit the film studios in London and America to further their knowledge in film production.<sup>2</sup>

The *Daily News* interviewed them when the *Larg’s Bay* called at Melbourne: “... both (Warwick) and Mrs Warwick intend undertaking film work in London”.<sup>3</sup> In Fremantle, “They will both seek engagements with film producers in Great Britain”.<sup>4</sup>

The *West Australian* interviewed John,

### AUSTRALIAN FILMS. IMPROVEMENT IN TECHNIQUE. Mr. John Warwick’s Trip Abroad.

On their way to Great Britain, Mr. and Mrs. John Warwick, both of whom have been associated with the production of films in Australia for some time, reached Fremantle from the Eastern States yesterday on the liner *Largs Bay*. They will spend several months abroad gaining experience in British studios. They also intend to visit studios in Germany.

With several years of stage experience behind him, Mr. Warwick entered Australian film production when it was in its infancy. He played one of the leading parts in 'On Our Selection,' and he has since been a leading player in 'The Squatter's Daughter,' 'Strike Me Lucky,' 'The Silence of Dean Maitland,' and 'Grandad Rudd.' In addition, he was assistant director, of the last four films, all of which were directed by Mr. Kenneth Hall. He appeared in Perth several years ago with the American Comedy Company. Regarding his activities abroad, he said that he proposed to spend a year away from Australia. He would endeavour to obtain parts in British films and, as a reference, he had with him about 1,000 feet of film depicting various scenes from Australian pictures in which he had appeared. He would then go to Germany to study the technical side of film production and would probably return to Sydney by way of America.

Mrs. Warwick, who is known professionally as Molly Raynor, is a sister of Misses Joan and Betty Raynor, the dancers. She played the leading comedy role in the film 'Grandad Rudd.' She will endeavour to obtain parts in British films and she will also go to the Continent and America.

Mr. Warwick is enthusiastic regarding the future of Australian films. He said that 'The Silence of Dean Maitland' was highly praised in England and attracted large audiences in the London theatres at which it was shown. There had been a marked improvement in technique in Australian films, this being particularly noticeable in the last two films completed. He thought that 'Grandad Rudd,' which was only recently completed, was the best Australian film yet made. 'We have a lot of talent in Australia,' he added. 'In recent months three Australians have won recognition abroad.

Miss Mona Barlee (who is known now as Mona Barry) is a star; Mr. John Woods has been given a five-year contract by the R.K.O. Radio Company; and Mr. Errol Flynn was placed under contract by Warner Brothers after appearing in a small part, in an English film.<sup>5</sup>

In England they decided not to try for immediate success in the studios, but to take a course of intensive training through joining stock companies in the provinces. They went to the fashionable Yorkshire Dales spa town of Harrogate, whose Grand Opera House hosted the “White Rose Players” under the direction of James Mills. During this period Warwick had parts in 50 plays and eight films.<sup>6</sup> Molly too was busy.

She was cast in *The Distaff Side* in July;<sup>7</sup> *Cat’s Cradle* in November (“Molly Raynor appears to good advantage, and John Warwick... deal capably with the remaining parts”);<sup>8</sup> *Villa for Sale* in December (“has a fragmentary plot in which James Mills, the producer, Sonia Dresdel, Marjorie Bennett, Molly Raynor, and Doris Pallett give performances worthy of better material”);<sup>9</sup> in February 1936 *Charmeuse* (“Molly Raynor brings character to the role of the maid”)<sup>10</sup> and *Candida* (“Molly Raynor and Seymour Green added just the right touches in the minor roles”);<sup>11</sup> in March *The Camel’s Back* (“The honours of the evening undoubtedly went to Molly Raynor, who contributed a delightful character sketch in the minor role of the cook”);<sup>12</sup> in April *No Exit* (“John Warwick gives a clever study of a really human and likeable detective, and John Nicholson and Molly Raynor are other members of the competent cast”).<sup>13</sup> In May she triumphed,

An excursion into pure comedy was made by the White Rose Players at Harrogate Grand Opera House last night. “The Bachelor Father” is largely a frolic, though it has its more serious moments. It is a comedy written on very American lines, but it is pleasantly leavened with what we might call “Anglo-Saxon” sentiment.

The outstanding success of a rather large cast was Miss Molly Raynor, who delighted an enthusiastic audience as an American girl of the period. She was both amusing and pathetic, and she very cleverly wrung the changes on a variety of emotion. It is no exaggeration to say that Miss Raynor dominated the stage.... a really entertaining evening.<sup>14</sup>

Later in May Molly played in *Alice-sit-by-the-fire*;<sup>15</sup> in June *Barnett's Folly* (“... the dry humour of the play was allowed to flow smoothly because of the capability of... Molly Raynor”)<sup>16</sup> and *Escape Me Never* (“Excellent work” by Molly);<sup>17</sup> in July *Pigs* (Molly “boisterously attacked”<sup>18</sup> her part) and *After October* (“John Warwick, Molly Raynor... assisted in the



effective and noteworthy entertainment”);<sup>19</sup> in August *Fumed Oak* (“Competent support”<sup>20</sup> by Molly).

In June 1936,

News comes by air mail of the young Australian actors, John Warwick and Molly Rayner. They hope to be returning to London this month from Harrogate, where they have been playing at the Grand Opera House.<sup>21</sup>

“OLD WARWICK BOY NOW IN BRITISH FILMS” boasted the *Warwick Daily News* of 14 December 1936 and the *Sun* reported,

... Mr. John Warwick and his wife, Miss Molly Rayner, celebrated the signing of a film contract for Mr. Warwick to play the juvenile lead in a Fox production, “Double Alibi,” by attending a big ball at the Grosvenor Hotel, in London, where they were thrilled to see Gracie Fields, Sophie Tucker, and many other celebrities. Success has come quickly to this young Australian actor. Since Mr. and Mrs. Warwick arrived in England nearly two years ago they have both been engaged in theatrical work in the provinces. They decided to try their luck in London only a few weeks back, and are living at Hyde Park.<sup>22</sup>

No less than fifteen London shops were visited by Mrs. John Warwick, known in Sydney as the clever actress, Molly Rayner, before she acquired her flat furnishings of buff, nigger, rust, and green. The Warwick apartment is in the heart of London, and both Molly and her husband, John, are delighted with their interior decoration scheme.<sup>23</sup>

In August 1937 Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* noted, “Australian Molly Raynor, and John Longden are working in a Fox British picture called ‘Jennifer Hale,’ being made just outside London”.<sup>24</sup>

DICK PARRY—Welsh by birth, Australian by adoption... returned to England some time ago and made good on the stage there.

A little while ago he learned that he had been chosen for his first film part in “Jennifer Hale,” a Fox British picture. He decided to share the news with John Warwick and his wife, Molly Rayner; left a message that if Fox phoned they were to be put through to the



Warwicks' flat, and set off to that abode....

MOLLY herself opened the flat door to Parry with the question, "What's all this about a Fox film?"<sup>24</sup> A phone call HAD come through.

Parry explained his part In "Jennifer Hale."

Molly extended a glad hand. "You must be playing opposite me," she said. "I've just heard I am to play the light comedy lead in 'Jennifer' myself."

Now, please DONT say, "Well, it's a small world, isn't it?"<sup>25</sup>

*Jennifer Hale* was a 66 minute black and white film made by Fox British at the Wembley studios and was very much a "B" movie (a "quota quickie").\* Ballard Berkeley (much later the Major of *Fawlty Towers*) starred with Rene Ray and John Longden. (*A London showgirl is wrongly accused of murdering her manager and goes on the run to try to prove her innocence. After establishing a new life as a taxi dancer in Birmingham, and falling in love with one of her clients, her past life comes back to haunt her*). Molly had a bit part as Constance Hall.

The following month the *Sun* announced John Warwick had been given the lead in the MGM production "John Halifax, Gentleman".<sup>26</sup> In October the *Telegraph* again: "AUSTRALIAN Molly Raynor is having a comedy film specially written for her by RKO. in England".<sup>27</sup> That seems unlikely.

In December 1937 Molly and John were second and third billing in a new play, *New Use for Old Husbands* at the Grafton Theatre in London. The *Stage* thought "Molly Raynor's character study of Webb, the maid, is... fully entertaining".<sup>28</sup> The *Times* critic thought she gave "some individuality... to the

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\* Quota quickies were mostly low cost, low quality, quickly accomplished films commissioned by American distributors active in the UK or by British cinema owners purely to satisfy the quota requirements.

household slut”.<sup>29</sup> The *Era* critic didn’t think much of the play but loved Molly,

THE only new thing about John E. Lewis’s comedy is its title. The idea of a clever woman trying to extract vast sums of money from her ex-husbands, with the aid of her superficial charm and physical desirability, has little claim on originality.

The shallow wiles with which she sought to dupe her three husbands were only made bearable for me by the too infrequent appearances of Molly Raynor as an untidy, adenoidal maid, vaguely serving coffee, answering doorbells, and putting her superiors in their places with her perky remarks and nimble wit.

Enid Stamp-Taylor gave a convincing impression of the film star, and her three ex-husbands were admirably portrayed by Ben Graham Soutten, John Mortimer, and Nicholas Tannar.

But it was certainly the maids night out.<sup>30</sup>

In October 1938 Molly played a minor part in *See Naples and Die* at London’s “Q” Theatre,<sup>31</sup> and in January 1939 *I Done a Murder* at the Richmond.<sup>32</sup> The *Stage* liked Molly’s work: “Honours must also be awarded to Molly Raynor for a clever interpretation as the all-too-merry widow, Florence Moddling. Her appearance in the final act affords an enjoyable moment”.<sup>33</sup>



“A photograph of MISS MOLLY RAYNOR (Mrs. John Warwick), received by air mail from London. Miss Raynor’s ability in comedy roles has been recognised by well-known critics, and she is at present working in British films.” *Sydney Morning Herald* 9 November 1937.

Perhaps her most important role was that of Nancy Blake in the Lyric Theatre stage production of *The Women* by Clare Boothe.<sup>†</sup> Molly was thrilled,

**SYDNEY GIRL IN WEST END PRODUCTION.**

**Plays Part of Nancy in “The Women.”**

INTERESTING news has been received by friends in Sydney from Miss Mollie Rayner who with her actor-husband Mr John Warwick has been in England for some years. Mr Warwick has been very successful in both film and stage productions but his wife has had to wait for what she regards as her big chance. She has been given the part of Nancy in the American comedy “The Women,” which had its premiere in London on April 18....

In her letter which was written on April 6, Miss Rayner says; “I am at last to get my chance with a great company in the West End in the part of Nancy in Clare Boothe’s play, ‘The Women,’ which is being produced under the Gilbert Miller management. It is practically an all-American cast and 300 actresses read the parts before the final choice was made. I have never enjoyed rehearsals so much in my life. I lunch every day with Bessie Love of ‘Broadway Melody’ fame, who is a member of the cast, and I can scarcely believe that my idol of ten years ago is beside me in the flesh. She is a perfect darling, with a great sense of humour.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> Clare Boothe Luce, American author, politician, U.S. Ambassador and public conservative figure, wife of Henry Luce, publisher of *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune*. She used her maiden name for professional writing.

## SYDNEY GIRL SUCCEEDS

### Part in "The Women."

"BY air mail comes news of the success of Molly Raynor, formerly of Sydney, with her part in Clare Boothe's play, "The Women," which had its first London presentation at the beginning of April in the West End Lyric Theatre.

The play annoyed the majority of London critics, and, although they admitted the excellence of the acting, they gave few bouquets to the cast members. Molly Raynor, however, for her "superb" work in the part of Nancy the Journalist, was always among the three or four singled out for special notice. As the part which was played in Sydney by Miss Doris Packer is not a major one, her success is all the more distinguished.

In spite of the critics' hostility, however, the first night was a spectacular occasion, and the reception given the players was so overwhelming that the Americans were astonished. It is predicted that the controversial nature of the play will give it a long London run.<sup>35</sup>

Molly Raynor (the Australian) plays the novelist, and gives a beautifully clear-cut performance.<sup>36</sup>

Molly Rayner has electrified the critics with the excellence of her performance in "The Women."<sup>37</sup>

The *Stage* reviewed it brilliantly and at length,

Forty crude female specimens are here pickled by Clare Boothe in unpalatable unfeminine juice. The society women who form the chief dramatis personae of her play are all alike in having too much time and too much money on their hands; they all copy one another in their speech and their clothes, their conversation resembling a rapid game of well-timed pat-ball; men and money are their two sole interests, and their lives are composed of

monotonous visits to beauty parlours, slimming salons, and mannequin shows. The ambition of each woman is in each case the same—a rich man who can provide her with enough money for a luxurious bathroom and any number of exotic gowns. Each woman is the product of a mass mentality culture which turns them out with the same slick precision as Mr. Ford turns out motor-cars. Individuality has been carefully poured away. A smart veneer of paint, powder and scent serves only to emphasise the crude savage animal, lustful and predatory, which flourishes by the destruction of its rivals. Two smartly dressed women tearing out each other's hair in a Reno hotel room, two women quarrelling about the husband of one of them in the fitting room of a fashionable dressmaker's, a crowd of women stampeding the only comparatively unselfish one amongst them into a divorce which she does not want to make—such is this clever dramatist's scathing picture of the female jungle in New York where, as is well known, the play had a long and successful run.

According to Clare Boothe, "The Women" is a satirical play about a "numerically small group of ladies native to the Park Avenues of America." But it would surely be unfair to New York to grant it the monopoly of such raw jungly creatures as the women here depicted. For one can chance upon such coteries of society, if one wants it, in Paris, London, Berlin, or any other cosmopolitan city; and no doubt women, equally predatory and equally selfish, were to be found in Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, in Nero's Rome, or in mediaeval Florence. Nor is this type of woman entirely new to the stage. In "Man and Superman" Bernard Shaw gave us Ann Whitfield, the aggressive hunter of John Tanner; and Henrik Ibsen showed us Nora Helmer asserting herself as an individual instead of remaining a "mere item in a moral

pageant.” But it must be almost unprecedented to see depicted on the stage such undiluted concentration of purpose in pursuit of the quarry as in this satire on a section of New York society. Those who dislike women may be gratified by this raw close-up of the female sex: those who remember that Joan of Arc, Santa Teresa, and Grace Darling were also women will be sorry for so one sided travesty, which strips them of every decent quality and robs them even of the pretence of loyalty. “Everything they say and do is in deplorable taste,” writes Clare Boothe in the preface, “because everything I have ever heard such women say and do is in deplorable taste.” The play moves at a smart pace. The crisp dialogue fits together with the precision of clockwork, and the whole piece, if not remarkable for subtlety, is clear, competent, and uncompromising. The first-night audience evidently found the acid back-chat very much to its liking, for they received with roars of laughter such conversational remarks as: “He said she was a natural blonde.” “That ought to narrow down the field.”

The plot is purposely commonplace. Mary Haines—a less predatory type of female than her friends and acquaintances, all of whom move in an entirely useless and very expensive society—learns from a manicurist that her husband is having an affair with Crystal Allen, “a girl of that sort.” Her friends aggravate her feelings by rather malicious suggestions and innuendos; finally, despite her mother’s advice to the contrary, she is rushed into a divorce. Hoping to the last that there may be a hitch in the proceedings and that Stephen, her husband, will return to her, she learns from him over the telephone that so soon as the divorce was made absolute he married the detestable Crystal. Unlike her friends, Mary Haines refuses to console herself with a successor to Stephen, and lives in a nun-like condition for two years. One

evening, little Mary, her daughter, while having her back tickled by her forlorn mama, refers to some words that she overheard Crystal utter over the telephone to her man friend. Mary Haines at once jumps out of bed, dons her best pink evening dress, goes off to a smart party at the Casino, and there, herself adopting ruthless jungle methods, routs the detestable Crystal, in the midst of the applause of her friends, and so wins back erring Stephen.

Karen Peterson gives a competent monochromic performance as the first Mrs. Haines, and copes in straightforward fashion with the various situations as they arise. As Sylvia, Mary Alice Collins contributes a sound study of a gossiping society woman, driving home acid remarks with neat thrusts; and Emily Ross draws a life-like amusing picture of another well padded scandalmonger, whose artful tittle-tattle causes a confusing web of mischief about the path of the most innocent baby. Claire Carleton's Crystal Allen is repellent from her blonde hair to her insolent voice; and Catharine Doucet makes a bibulous Countess de Lage whose many matrimonial experiences lead her to coin the aphorism: "Every time I marry, I learn something." As Mary Haines's mother Deirdre Doyle adds a human touch to the rather mechanical performance, enlivening worldly advice with touches of caustic wit. Joan Greenwood plays little Mary as suitably as the part deserves. The acting of the all-female cast is competent and thorough.

The play is produced in slick, well-varnished style by Gilbert Miller.<sup>38</sup>

The exacting London critics did admire Molly's performance: "Superb variation of tough modernity" said the *Daily Herald*.<sup>39</sup>





Mary Alice Collins, Rita Davies, Molly Raynor and Emily Ross playing cards in *The Women*.

**LYRIC  
THEATRE**

GILBERT MILLER

and

JACK BUCHANAN

present

**"THE WOMEN"**

by

CLARE BOOTHE

PROGRAMME

4<sup>d</sup>

# LYRIC THEATRE

Licensed by the Lord Chamberlain to  
LONDON:

THOMAS H. BOSTOCK  
S. J. & L., Ltd.

**EVENINGS at 8.30**

**Matinees: WEDNESDAY and THURSDAY at 2.30**

**GILBERT MILLER and JACK BUCHANAN**

present

## “THE WOMEN”

by

**CLARE BOOTHE**

*Characters in order of their appearance :*

Jane	...	...	...	...	...	DOREEN LANG
Sylvia (Mrs. Howard Fowler)	...					MARY ALICE COLLINS
Nancy Blake	...	...	...	...		MOLLY RAYNOR
Peggy (Mrs. John Day)	...	...	...	...		RITA DAVIES
Edith (Mrs. Phelps Potter)	...		...	...		EMILY ROSS
Mary (Mrs. Stephen Haines)	...		...	...		KAREN PETERSON

[continued overleaf



Molly's photograph from "THE SPOTLIGHT" casting directory,  
Autumn 1939.

The *Tatler* reported that Clare Boothe had arrived in London and seen her own play,

The very talented authoress of that amusing play all about various kinds of “cats,” is now with us in London, and living at Claridge’s. She has said for publication that she detests all the people in her play, but has added that the men are just as bad as the women. *The Women*, however, continues to make all London laugh and fill the Lyric Theatre to capacity.<sup>40</sup>

The play had opened on 18 April 1939. Britain entered the War on 3 September.

The War changed everything.

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1 *Sun* 30 December 1934.

2 *Daily Telegraph* 15 January 1935.

3 *Herald* 23 January 1935.

4 *Daily News* 29 January 1935.

5 *West Australian* 30 January 1935.

6 *Sun* 23 September 1937.

7 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 09 July 1935.

8 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 19 November 1935.

9 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 4 December 1935.

10 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 12 February 1936.

11 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 18 February 1936.

12 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 31 March 1936.

13 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 21 April 1936.

14 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 12 May 1936.

15 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 26 May 1936.

16 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 16 June 1936.

17 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 30 June 1936.

18 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 7 July 1936.

19 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 28 July 1936.

20 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 4 August 1936.

21 *Daily Telegraph* 20 June 1936.

22 *Sun* 6 December 1936.

23 *Daily Telegraph* 23 Jan 1937.

- 24 *Daily Telegraph* 6 August 1937.
- 25 *Daily Telegraph* 7 July 1937.
- 26 *Sun* 23 September 1937.
- 27 *Daily Telegraph* 29 October 1937.
- 28 *Stage* 9 December 1937.
- <sup>29</sup> *Times* 7 December 1937.
- 30 *Era* 9 December 1937.
- 31 *West London Observer* 21 October 1938.
- 32 *Stage* 26 January 1939.
- 33 *Stage* 2 February 1939.
- 34 *Sydney Morning Herald* 20 Apr 1939.
- 35 *Sydney Morning Herald* 11 May 1939.
- 36 *Table Talk* 18 May 1939.
- 37 *Sun* 6 July 1939.
- 38 *Stage* 27 April 1939.
- 39 *Daily Herald* 21 April 1939.
- 40 *Tatler* 14 June 1939.

## Chapter X: what Molly did in the war.

The *Sun*'s "Sue Sees Sydney" columnist wrote,

LAST heard of Molly Raynor was that she was making quite a hit in London in "The Women." The war, however, changed all that—the company disbanded, the Americans raced home, and now Molly is touring with her husband, John Warwick, who, for the first time in his long stage association with his wife, is playing a romantic role instead of the villain of the piece.

But what interested me most in her latest letter is that she is meeting the black-out situation by wearing luminous buttons on her clothes and has pinned luminous carnations in the lapels of her husband's coats.<sup>1</sup>

Molly and John were indeed touring. In October 1939 they had parts in *A Star Comes Home* at the Wimbledon Theatre ("Molly Raynor is seen to advantage in an amusing role")<sup>2</sup> and the King's Theatre in Portsmouth ("Molly Raynor, a brilliant comic actress");<sup>3</sup> in November at the Pavilion, Torquay ("Molly Rayner, as the servant, is going to gain a lot of laurels. She plays the part delightfully with an ingenuous sense of humour that is irresistible");<sup>4</sup> in December at the Theatre Royal, Huddersfield ("Molly Raynor, as Rose, the maid, is outstanding")<sup>5</sup> and the Garrick in Southport.<sup>6</sup>

In 1940 Molly had a small speaking part in the film *Gaslight*, a melodrama of murder, manipulation, madness and jewel theft.



Molly Raynor in *Gaslight*, 1940.

Back in London the blitz had begun,

“Talking about bombs, we simply ignore them now. There is something so utterly English about snubbing a bomb,” writes Molly Rayner in London to a friend in Sydney. Later on, in the same letter, Molly remarks: “If I appear to stray a little from the point occasionally, blame it on to the bombs, which are dropping all around as I write. We still manage a cinema and theatre occasionally and lunches in town,” she adds, “but to invitations to go out at night every one says. ‘Oh, no, dear, you come here.’ So no one goes out at all.”<sup>7</sup>



“ONCE you get used to these things, fire-watching can be good, clean fun.” This delightful information proffered in London to Molly Rayner (Mrs John Warwick) by the local warden, was contained in a letter received from her this week. Molly has been doing her share of fire-watching in between appearing in a revival of “Dear Octopus” at Kew.<sup>8</sup>

In August 1941 Molly and John played in *All in Favour* at the Manchester Hippodrome<sup>9</sup> and *Kick in* at Edinburgh’s Lyceum.<sup>10</sup>

In 1942,

### **MORE SLACKS?**

#### **New Zealander Comments On Clothes Rationing**

New Zealander Mollie Raynor, a member of the clever Rayner family—Mollie spells her name with an “o” and sisters Joan and Betty with an “e”—continues to write blithely from London where, with her husband, John Warwick, she has lived in a Chelsea flat throughout the blitz, alternating between stage and war work. In addition to canteen work at the New Zealand Forces Club, Mollie does her bit of firespotting in the wee sma’ hours. Just before war broke out she was playing the part of Nancy in “The Women,” in which her acting was described by London critics as “superb.” Since then she has played in various other productions as the theatre revived in London.

Discussing clothes’ rationing Mollie writes: “I think the answer will be slacks and more slacks—for the winter, any way. At the moment I am smartly turned out in two table cloths and a tray cloth and I’m not getting ahead of my rations as I bought these expressly for this purpose three weeks before the order came into force—the reason being I couldn’t get any smart cotton materials (all our snappiest cottons having been exported this

year). As I already have similar table cloths in use in the flat I am liable to be spread with knives and forks at any moment. We have an awful lot of laughs in London these days; the cockney sense of humour seems to blossom forth in the thickest gloom, bigger and brighter than ever. Sitting behind a little cockney in the bus last week John heard him say to his mate:

“ ’Ad a kipper for me breakfast this mornin’ —blimey, it must have fought its way through the blockade, all skin and bone it was, all skin and bone.”

### **Expensive Onions**

“I might add,” Mollie continues, “that I haven’t ’ad a kipper to me tea for months and would certainly like to know where he got his from. I bought the smallest, skinniest bunch of spring onions for sixpence the other day, and when I complained about the size, the girl said: ‘But you use the green part as well.’ ‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ I replied, ‘I’ll even use the soil off the roots.’

“John, using an Australian recipe for rabbit casserole, whipped up a most succulent meal the other night. We get quite a lot of rabbits now and they certainly eke out the meat ration wonderfully. I’ll bet the English rabbits are forming a Home Guard and blacking out the little white tail lights in a hurry these days.”<sup>11</sup>

She would recall a story of her Chelsea milkman, told when she was asked how British people would stand up to the economic crisis:

One day last March when the temperature was below freezing my husband and I were sitting huddled in our flat, all heating cut off, watching the milkman approaching carefully on the ice-covered footpath, icy milk bottles in his frozen hands. We wondered if the British worker would be able to stand much more——

and then he passed our window, whistling cheerfully.  
The tune was “Land of Hope and Glory”.<sup>12</sup>

Molly wrote from London during the blitz about meeting the great  
New Zealand War cartoonist and was reported in the *Auckland Star* of 5 March 1942,

Mollie and John recently met David Low who recalled that Frederick Rayner, Mollie’s father, gave him one of his first jobs in Christchurch, and described Mr. Rayner as one of the finest natural caricaturists he had ever met. Mr. Rayner was then running a little paper called *The Sketcher*, and when Low’s father showed him some of David’s drawings, he immediately commissioned the youth artist, then a shy lad of 14, for a series of sketches. Low gave Mollie a copy of his latest book of caricatures, gracefully inscribed to her father with a sketch of Mr. Rayner in a straw boater, and Mr. Rayner received it in Sydney the other day. (*Rayner was 84 in 1942*).

Rayner thanked Low,

July 7<sup>th</sup>. 43.

*Dear Dave*

*Many thanks for kind remarks in your priceless books and articles.... All my girls Joan, Molly & Betty are entertaining the troops in Britain & my two boys, one a soldier & the other helping.... Do you intend shaking hands with Adolf when peace comes or kicking him in the pants? I treasure anything of yours. Good luck from*

*FRED RAYNER.*<sup>13</sup>

In August 1942 Molly was back in London, playing in *We are the people* at the “Q” Theatre— “Miss Molly Raynor, as the mother of a child killed by a casual bomb, keeps the situation free from the less impressive flourishes of melodrama,” wrote the *Times* critic.<sup>14</sup> In October 1942 she was playing in *Spring*

*Harvest at the "Q"* ("With Geoffrey Wardwell, Mary Jones, Molly Raynor and Guy le Feuvre in the cast, one is assured of some first-rate acting")<sup>15</sup> and *Too Many Cooks*.<sup>16</sup>

She played the small part of Mrs Summers in *We'll Meet Again*, with Vera Lynn, released in January 1943 (*A young dancer trying to make it in London during World War II discovers that people enjoy her singing voice. Although she's at first reluctant to sing, she finally does and becomes a star*).<sup>17</sup>



Molly Raynor as Mrs Summers in *We'll meet again*.

In 1939 ENSA, the Entertainment National Services Association, had been formed, "to send the nation's best singers, dancers, musicians and comedians, from Noel Coward to Gracie Fields, to entertain the troops, however far away".<sup>18</sup>

Molly joined in 1943 and in 1947 Warwick's *Daily News* reported,

While her husband was on overseas service, she was with ENSA, touring the Orkneys, and then visiting Northern Ireland and the Middle East. It was while with ENSA that she blossomed as an actress-writer. Her latest play is "She Went to the Cupboard," which she hopes will have its premiere in New Zealand.<sup>19</sup>

Scapa Flow was a strategically critically important harbour in the north Atlantic theatre of the War. Celebrity and ENSA shows were staged at the RN Recreation Centre at Hoy in Orkney; it seated 900 and was fully equipped with modern sound, lighting, projection equipment, backstage dressing rooms—even motorised curtains.<sup>20</sup>

In 1944 nearly 3000 troops and gunners, along with 130 ENSA people, including Molly Raynor, boarded the *Marnix van St Aldegonde*, a Dutch liner converted for use as a troop carrier, at Liverpool.<sup>21</sup> She was struck by an aerial torpedo in the Mediterranean. In 2005 one of the ENSA entertainers wrote an account of the incident for the BBC,

On the evening of November 6th 1943 we were in our cabin getting ready for dinner, when suddenly the sirens went. There was an almighty bang and the ship keeled right over, all the lights went out, and luckily for all of us the ship righted itself. The emergency lights went on and you could hear planes and gun fire and I have since learnt that the plane that hit us was a Heinkel and it was shot down.

Apparently aerial torpedoes are not as lethal as submarine ones, and in fact our ship did not sink for 24 hours. Someone knocked on our door to tell us to put our lifejackets on and go to the lifeboat stations.

We waited about an hour to get into the lifeboats, there was about eighty of us including a stretcher case who had been operated on for appendicitis a few days before and the doctor who had attended him passed by with his instruments on his back, and some wag called out “got your accordion mate”.



The Dutch liner *Marnix van Sint Aldegonde*

Once we were in the lifeboat, we were lowered and one of the davits got stuck and we were nearly all tipped out, but I was in such a daze by then that it didn't really register.

There was a terrific swell on the sea and for the first and last time in my life, I was seasick and every time I leant over, the Filipino sailor said “sickee missie”?

We were nearly five hours in the boat, but every time we approached a troopship it was full up. Eventually we reached a destroyer in the Hunter Class, HMS Croome, and we were taken on board. They dried us off and gave us a cup of tea laced with rum, and a couple of blankets and we were literally rocked on the cradle of the deep for the rest of the night.

After breakfast next morning we were given a tour of the destroyer as we were not being taken ashore till the

evening and we were shown their radar which was quite secret at that time.

By now we'd learnt that we'd been wrecked off the coast of North Africa and were landed at a place called Philippeville. It was dark, cold, and very wet, and there was a fuss as not everyone had their passports. Eventually we were herded into 3 tonners and taken to a large building, given blankets and slept on the floor. There was no food!<sup>22</sup>

Molly was in a lifeboat whose passengers were picked up by an American destroyer and landed at Phillipville, now Skikda in Algeria. In 1947 Molly would write the one-act play *Strange Refuge* based on her first night in Phillipville.

They performed in Algeria in used Army uniforms for three weeks, then set off in a tanker that was attacked by dive-bombers, before arriving in Port Said. On the overland journey to Cairo the engine of their train was derailed and they spent half the night stuck in sand.

In Cairo Molly played *On Approval* at the Garrison Theatre and there met New Zealand officers, Air Marshall Sir Keith Park and Brigadier WG Gentry, along with visiting Deputy Premier Hon. Dan Sullivan. Gentry's photograph album is in the Turnbull Library.

Gentry's note in the album reads, "31.1.45 Air Marshall Sir Keith Park, A.G.C.-in-C. Middle East, took a party to the opening night of the new ENSA show 'On Approval' at the Garrison Theatre, and afterwards went back stage to congratulate the cast on a fine performance. Sir Keith had two fellow New Zealanders in his party, the Honourable Mr Dan Sullivan, Deputy Prime Minister, and Brigadier W.G. Gentry of the New Zealand Army. The party had a long conversation with Molly Raynor, who plays 'Maria Wisluck'. She is also a New Zealander."



“PICTURE SHOWS:— NEW ZEALANDERS ALL:— Molly Raynor, Brigadier W.G. Gentry, Honourable Mr Dan Sullivan and in background Sir Keith Park.”<sup>23</sup>



Petite Molly (second from left), looking chic in uniform, with ENSA colleagues.



**"ON APPROVAL"**  
by  
**FREDERICK LONSDALE**

**Characters in order of their appearance**

Maria Wilcock	MOLLY RAYNOR
Helen Hayls	SALLY SIMPSON
George, Duke of Bristol	RICHARD LITTLEDALE <small>(to last mentioned at LAUDICI)</small>
Richard Hallett	RICHARD WARNER

**Synopsis of Scenes**

ACT I : Helen's House in Weylief, London — August.

ACT II : Maria's House in Weylief — September.

ACT III : The same — *Two hours later.*

The Play Produced by NOEL HOWLETT

**At the Piano**  
Clara Widdie and KATHLEEN POWERS

Overture : Leslie, Stuart Memorial

Between Acts I & II : In Movement from "Concerto No. 2"  
Liszt.

2nd Hungarian Rhapsody

Between Acts II & III : Coquette  
Flower Fairies  
"Blue-Parrot's Waltz"

Resident Stage Manager : Harold Orsault

Performers kindly lent by the Music Department B. Bennett, & G. Higgins


Scenery designed by William Aron and executed by the  
E.N.S.A. workshops under the direction of T. J. Hudson.



MOLLY RAYNOR



SALLY SIMPSON



RICHARD LITTLEDALE



RICHARD WARNER

Centrefold of the Cairo theatre programme



Molly in Cairo, 1943. From a family album.

Molly spent eighteen months in the Middle East, where she appeared in Cairo, Baghdad, Palestine, the Western Desert, and, as she described it, “up and down the Suez Canal until I knew every wrinkle of it.”<sup>24</sup>

She returned to England just in time for the VE Day (8 May 1945) celebrations in London with John—back from India—and Joan and Betty who had also been entertaining with ENSA.

Soldiers and refugees from all over Europe were part of the crowd. At intervals the old-fashioned “pork-pie” hats of the New Zealand soldiers poked above the heads of the crowd and then the girls would call “tena koe!”—a Maori greeting—and watch the boys’ faces light up to hear a word from home.<sup>25</sup>

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1 *Sun* 16 November 1939.

2 *Stage* 26 October 1939.

- 3 *Portsmouth Evening News* 31 October 1939.
- 4 *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo* 28 November 1939.
- 5 *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* 5 December 1939.
- 6 *Liverpool Echo* 12 December 1939.
- 7 *Daily Advertiser* 14 Dec 1940.
- 8 *Sydney Morning Herald* Thu 22 May 1941.
- 9 *Manchester Evening News* 5 August 1941.
- 10 *Scotsman* 12 August 1941.
- 11 *Auckland Star* 5 March 1942.
- 12 *Daily Telegraph* 14 August 1947.
- 13 David Low papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University
- 14 *Times* 27 August 1942.
- 15 *West London Observer* 9 October 1942.
- 16 *Stage* 5 November 1942.
- 17 [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0035538/plotsummary?ref=tt\\_ov\\_pl](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0035538/plotsummary?ref=tt_ov_pl) accessed 16 February 2019.
- 18 Andy Merriman 2013. *Greasepaint and Cordite: the story of ENSA and Concert Party entertainment during the Second World War*. Aurum History, London. P.173–4.
- 19 *Warwick Daily News* 9 Aug 1947. I can find no trace of “She went to the cupboard”.
- 20 <https://hoyorkney.com/attractions/hoy-history/wartime-heritage/then-and-now-hoy-at-war-a-photographic-journey/> accessed 12 February 2019.
- 21 Merriman 2013.
- 22 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/00/a6984200.shtml> accessed 23 January 2019.
- 23 Gentry, William George (Sir): Photograph Album 2. ATL PA1-q-1139.
- 24 *Otago Daily Times* 6 April 1948.
- 25 Mavis Thorpe Clark 1972. *Strolling players*. Lansdowne, Melbourne, p121

## Chapter 11: return to New Zealand.

After the War, in August 1945, Molly was back at the “Q” Theatre in London, playing in *Your brother George*<sup>1</sup> and in May 1946 playing in *London Wall*,<sup>2</sup> *Old Acquaintance* and in December *The Cat and the Canary*,<sup>3</sup>

### STILL THRILLING

#### “Q” THEATRE: “The Cat and the Canary”

A happy piece of casting is stage and radio comedian Michael Howard. His fertile quips balance the tension of this famous 20-year old thriller of secret panels and lurking perils. Ernest Thesiger, Molly Raynor and Violet Loxley shine in an excellent revival which went over with a bang.<sup>4</sup>

Another excellent study in a strong comedy vein is that presented by Molly Rayner as the loquacious Susan Gillsby. Her efforts are much admired.<sup>5</sup>

In 1947 Molly (as “Sylvia’s friend”) and John had bit parts in the film *Woman to Woman*; *(a British officer is parachuted behind German lines and has a fling with a French ballet dancer. After the War he finds her with their son. His wife will not let him go so the dancer keeps dancing, knowing her heart disease will kill her).*

CK BAR IN LOUNGE

GREAT VARIETY OF SANDWICHES  
COLD COLLATION  
DELICATESSEN  
ADS, SHELL FISH, etc.

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## OLD ACQUAINTANCE

By JOHN VAN DRUTEN

Characters in order of appearance :

Katherine Markham	LILIAN CHRISTINE
Rudd Kendall ... ..	JOHN STUART
Deidre Drake ... ..	SHEILA SIM
Theresa ... ..	CATHERINE SALKELD
Mildred Watson Drake	MOLLY RAYNOR
Susan ... ..	EVELYN DYSART
Preston Drake ... ..	DEREK BIRCH

Produced by GEOFFREY WARDWELL

**SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**

ACT I Katherine Markham's apartment in New York. November. Early morning

ACT II An apartment on Park Avenue. A month later. Afternoon

ACT III Same as Act I. The next afternoon.

Scenery designed and painted by Elizabeth Agombar.

Furniture by The Old Times Furnishing Co.,  
Victoria Street, S.W.1

Have you seen  
"Q"'s 1942 SUCCESSFUL THRILLER ?  
Sell at the COMEDY THEATRE—200th Performance  
**MURDER WITHOUT CRIME**  
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AN ORIGINAL  
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Postwar "Q" Theatre programme

Molly had a small part (as “a wife”) in the television movie, *The Pleasure Garden* later in 1947. In July,

### **An Australian made good in films**

Australian actor John Warwick and his New Zealand-born wife, Molly Raynor, are returning to Sydney by flying-boat at the end of this month, after 12 years in London.

They are heading a stage company to tour New Zealand, under the management of a New Zealand theatre, to play London and Broadway successes including *The Guinea* and *The Light Heart*.

Warwick, whose last Australian film was Cinesound’s *The Silence of Dean Maitland*, served with the RAF in India during the war. Since he was demobilised 12 months ago, he has made the films *Teheran*, *Dancing with Crime*, and is at present making *While I Live*, for 20th Century Fox.

*While I Live* co-stars Patricia Burke, daughter of Marie Burke.

Molly Raynor played before thousands of Australian troops when she toured the Middle East with ENSA during the war.

Now she has just had a one act play, *Strange Refuge*, published.<sup>6</sup>

London’s *Tatler* detailed the purpose of their visit,

Having finished filming with Sonia Dresdel in *While I Live* at Elstree, John Warwick and his wife Mollie Raynor are flying, via America, to Australia on the way to New Zealand where, thanks to the enterprise of Robert Kerridge, a multiple cinema owner, he is to inaugurate the revival of the living theatre in the Dominion where it has been practically non-existent for many years.

They begin at Auckland in the middle of September with a repertory including such successes as *The Guinea*

*Pig, The Winslow Boy* and *Born Yesterday*. After six months they will move on to Dunedin, their place being filled at Auckland by another company from England. Later on, on the same plan, they will open theatres at Christchurch, Wellington and possibly other cities.

It sounds very interesting and Warwick, Australian born, and his wife who is a New Zealander, are enthusiastic about it. Warwick told me how keen they were "down under" on plays, though for many years New Zealanders have had to satisfy their liking mostly by means of an extensive amateur movement. Warwick began acting in Australia and came to England in 1935 devoting most of his time to films. He served throughout the war in the R.A.F. in India and Burma.<sup>7</sup>

The *Sydney Morning Herald* photographed the couple after they arrived at the Kingsford Smith Aerodrome on 6 August by Pan American Clipper from the United States and headlined their homecoming,

#### **LONDON STAGE ARTISTS FOR AUCKLAND**

**The leading roles in six plays to be presented in Auckland are waiting for Mr. John Warwick and his wife, Australian actress Molly Rayner, who arrived in Sydney by Pan-American Clipper yesterday en route to New Zealand.**

During 12 years abroad, Mrs. Warwick has been torpedoed while travelling to the Middle East to entertain troops with E.N.S.A., has appeared before more than a million troops in various theatres of war, has written and had produced a play, "Strange Refuge," and since the war has played the leading roles in several London stage successes.

Leaving London last Tuesday, Mr. and Mrs. Warwick flew to New York to see Mrs. Warwick's sisters, Misses Joan and Betty Rayner, who were well known

throughout Australia as the “Travelling Troubadours.”

Travelling through the United States in their own caravan, the sisters are now giving children’s plays exclusively, and usually play to audiences of more than 2,000 children.

Petite and vivacious, Mrs. Warwick wears her dark hair piled on top of her head. When she arrived she was wearing low-heeled suede shoes with a brown check tweed suit made on French lines.

Among the five evening frocks in her luggage is a Molyneux model of flowered shot taffeta, made with an unusual “fish-tail” effect at the back of the skirt.

Her play, “Strange Refuge,” which is based on her experiences when her ship was torpedoed, was purchased by the English Theatre Guild, and has been produced several times at the Chanticleer Theatre.\*

During the war, Mr. Warwick served with the R.A.F., firstly, as an intelligence officer, and, later, produced 22,000 individual films of British troops in India, under the “Calling Blighty” scheme, by which the films were sent home to parents and friends.

Mrs. Warwick, who has not seen her father. Mr. Fred Rayner, or her brother, Mr. Garth Rayner, since she left Australia, will stay at the Australia Hotel for a fortnight before flying to Auckland.

Last night Mr. and Mrs. Warwick attended a party given at her flat by Miss Dorothy Dunckley, who had played with them in their first Australian film, “On Our Selection.”<sup>8</sup>

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\* A 130 seat Club Theatre in Clareville Street during WWII.





"STAGE PERSONALITIES. John Warwick and his wife, Molly Raynor, who recently returned to Australia from England, attend a party given by Dorothy Dunckley at her Potts Point flat."

*Australian Women's Weekly* 23 August 1947.

Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* interviewed Molly on the important matter of dress,

Utility suits at £5 equal to  
twenty guinea models

WHEN actress Molly Raynor (Mrs. John Warwick) left England last week shops were showing in their autumn collections three distinct lengths for evening gowns—short, to the ankles, and ground length.

“A real effort is being made by manufacturers to give the women of England a little bit of sartorial encouragement after the dreary years since '39,” said Miss Raynor.

“For the first time utility suits and frocks of good style and good quality are available in large quantity.

“During the war most of the utility suits and skirts had only a minimum of material, but now there are pleats and flares and longer hems and longer jackets, until you can't tell a £5 utility garment from one of the 20-guinea models.

“Seamless nylons are now available for about 6/ a pair, and we can add a bit of dash to an old outfit with a new pair of gloves and a long-stemmed French umbrella.

“But essential basics, such as two-way stretches and brassieres, are as scarce as asparagus. I've got a long list of requests for foundation garments to take back from Australia and New Zealand,” she said.

Miss Raynor leaves with her husband, John Warwick, next Friday for six months' tour of New Zealand. She hopes to appear on the Australian stage before returning to England.

This is their first visit to Sydney since they left 12 years ago for England.<sup>9</sup>

The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 18 September 1947 published a piece of frippery headlined “Who Do Women Dress To Please?” featuring Molly and John. Molly Raynor was becoming a fashion icon.

Betty and Joan had complained in a letter to their father that a peach cost eight shillings in London and Fred, who wanted them to come home, telegraphed, “Come quickly: peaches thirty for sixpence” and later,

Don't you long for the taste of our luscious fruit,

And the feel of the sun through your bathing-suit?<sup>10</sup>

Molly and John hammed up a similar sentiment for a photograph in the *Herald*.



“THIS photograph of MR. and MRS. JOHN WARWICK was taken on their arrival in Sydney from England where they had seen little fruit for years so no wonder he tried to get a bite of her apple. Mrs Warwick, who is better known under her stage name of Molly Raynor, is wearing a tailored, lime-green lightweight woollen frock.” *Sydney Morning Herald* 18 September 1947.

By then they were in Auckland,

THE NEW ZEALAND THEATRE  
**PLAYHOUSE**  
 (Formerly Prince Edward Theatre)  
 KARANGAHAPE RD. Phone 48-252.  
 True to tradition...the New Zealand  
 Theatre takes up the age-old Clarion Call  
**THE SHOW MUST GO ON.**  
 The Curtain Rises

**TONIGHT**                      **TONIGHT**  
**TONIGHT**                      **TONIGHT**

At 8 p.m.

KENNETH HORNE'S Brilliant Comedy  
**"FOOLS RUSH IN"**  
**"FOOLS RUSH IN"**

Direct from the Fortune Theatre, Drury Lane,  
 London. Produced by Ronald Fortt.  
 Its Distinguished Cast includes

JOHN WARWICK    HELEN FRANKLYN  
 MOLLY RAYNOR    HUGH MOXEY  
 HENRY HEPWORTH

The play directed by Gabriel Byrne.

Evenings: 6/, 5/, 3/, 2/ (Plus Tax).  
 Matinees: 4/, 3/, 2/.

All 2/ seats, unreserved, available at Box  
 Office.

Sponsors and Direction: Kerridge-Odeon.

The company staged a gala opening at the renamed New Zealand Theatre Playhouse in Karangahape road on 13 September with *Fools Rush In* and changed every couple of weeks—*The Light of Heart*, *Gaslight*, *The Man From The*

*Ministry, No Medals, French Without Tears, The Shop at Sly Corner, Heart of the City.*

The *Herald* critic wrote, of *Gaslight*,

Molly Raynor acts with imagination and almost painful fidelity. This portrait of a distraught woman caught up in a terrible trap confirms her status as an accomplished actress.<sup>11</sup>

In March London's *The Stage* noted their departure from Auckland,

Gabriel Toyne's company have just completed five successful months at the Auckland Playhouse.... A project to stage Peter Pan had to be cancelled owing to an epidemic of infantile paralysis, causing the health authorities to prohibit admission to theatres of all children under the age of 16.<sup>12</sup>

The 1948–49 polio epidemic was the most persistent outbreak New Zealand had experienced. Over 1000 people contracted the disease, about 70 died, schools and other facilities were closed. Children were kept at home, schooled by correspondence. People were frightened to go into a crowd.

The West End Players left Auckland in late February, to be succeeded at the Playhouse by the "Pasadena Players" *Accent of Youth* on 28 February.

The N.Z. Theatre Company have pleasure in announcing that they will commence their tour of Christchurch on March 6 after an all-time record-breaking season at the Playhouse, Auckland. They wish to assure all their loyal patrons that they will return to present further outstanding successes later in the season.<sup>13</sup>

They presented only two plays in ten days in Christchurch: *No Medals* produced by John and starring Molly and *French Without Tears*; they opened in Dunedin on 17 March.

The *Otago Daily Times* welcomed the troupe to Dunedin,

**ENGLISH  
COMPANY  
Opera House  
Season**

An English theatrical company which has just completed a continuous season of seven months in one Auckland theatre, will

present "No Medals" in the Opera House on March 24, and "French Without Tears" on March 25. Theatregoers will welcome this opportunity to see a talented cast in "flesh and blood" shows. Many West End and London players of repute are included in the cast.

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**OPERA HOUSE**

WEDNESDAY NEXT At 8 P.M.  
Direct from the Playhouse, Auckland,  
**AFTER A RECORD-BREAKING SEASON  
OF SEVEN MONTHS,  
224 PERFORMANCES,**  
R. J. Kerridge and Ronald Fortt  
Proudly Present  
**THE FAMOUS WEST END PLAYERS**

In  
ESTHER McCracken's  
**"NO MEDALS"**  
**"NO MEDALS"**  
(Author of "Quiet Week-end" fame)

In  
A RONALD FORTT PRODUCTION  
A Tribute to Housewives in War-time.  
You are invited to meet—  
MOLLY RAYNOR: A Mother, Lovable,  
with infinite patience.  
GABRIEL TOYNE: Naughtical and  
Natural.  
DIANA BEAUMONT: "You won't forget  
the Insurance, Darling?"  
HELEN FRANKLYN: "Aye Aye, Sir!"  
HENRY HEPWORTH: "The Navy on the  
Look-out."  
PERA JACKSON: "Yes, My Darling  
Daughter."  
NORMAN ETTLINGER: "I Love You,  
Damn You, I Love You."  
BARBARA FEE: "The Woman Next  
Door."  
MIRIAM PRITCHETT: Mrs Gaye with an  
E!

A COMEDY WITH THAT HUMAN  
TOUCH THAT ENTRALLED LONDON  
FOR 760 PERFORMANCES!  
Follow your Stars in their next Production,  
The Famous Comedy by Terence Rattigan:  
**"FRENCH WITHOUT TEARS"**

ON THURSDAY NEXT, AT 8 P.M.  
Box Plans now open at the Bristol.  
ADMISSION: 2s, 4s, 5s, 7s, plus tax. 7s  
and 5s reservable. 4s and 2s available  
on day of performance.

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"No Medals," a comedy with a human touch which captured London for 760 performances, was written by the author of "Quiet Week-end," Esther McCracken, and is a tribute to housewives in wartime. A Ronald Fortt production, such celebrities as Molly Raynor, Gabriel Tonne, Ronald Fortt, Diana Beaumont, Helen Franklyn, Henry Hapworth, Pera Jackson, Norman Ettliger, Narnara Fea and Miriam Pritchett are featured. The Terrence Rattigan comedy, "French Without Tears" needs no introduction to Oamaru audiences. Box plans for both nights will open at the Bristola next Thursday, and prices are advertised in to-day's issue.<sup>14</sup>

Molly Raynor completely dominated the stage as Martha Dacre, the widow who valiantly "carried on" with her ordinary duties of the house while successfully coping with a host of other problems. Miss Raynor instilled both comedy and pathos into an accomplished portrayal.<sup>15</sup>

The *ODT* interviewed Molly,

**Vivacious Molly Raynor Recalls Wreck of Manuka**  
**NOTES FOR WOMEN**

"I shall always remember the kindness of the people in the Owaka district when the American Comedy Company arrived there after the wreck of the Manuka," Miss Molly Raynor—in private life Mrs John Warwick—said in an interview with the Daily Times. "They were waiting on wayside stations with clothes, and all sorts of useful things, which were more than welcome, as we had lost everything, and literally had only what we stood up in, our night attire.

"I have since experienced another shipwreck, again losing everything, Miss Raynor said, "when a Dutch ship, the Marnix, was torpedoed off North Africa during the war. My previous shipwreck stood me in good stead, as I was able to assure the passengers that the ship would

remain afloat all night, I fervently hoped, with its decks at an almost vertical angle. It did. One good thing came of this wreck. I wrote a one-act play around it. This play, which was called 'Strange Refuge,' was produced at the Chanticleer Theatre in London, and I have been thrilled to find that it is selling rather well."

Miss Raynor, who is slight, dark, and vivacious, looks more suited to the youthful role she played in the "Family Upstairs," with the American Comedy Company than to the more mature characterisations she now favours as the leading lady of the London West End Company. She comes of a talented family, as the troubadours, Joan and Betty Raynor, are her sisters. A brief reunion in New York before she came to New Zealand was the occasion of a solid 16-hour talk, in addition to which Joan and Betty attempted to show New York to their sister. A more leisurely "get-together" has been planned for later this year, when Australia, where Miss Raynor's father lives, will be the meeting-place.

The three sisters were in London during the war, when all were entertaining the troops, but were parted when Molly toured the Middle East, where she appeared in Cairo, Bagdad, Palestine, the Western Desert, and, as she described it, "up and down the Suez Canal until I knew every wrinkle of it." When her husband, who was serving with the R.A.F. in India, was posted home in 1945, she relinquished her role in "On Approval," then playing in Cairo, and hurried back to London.

Since coming to New Zealand Miss Raynor has been delighted to have had the opportunity of meeting some of the men who saw her in the Middle East, and hopes to meet many more before her departure from New Zealand.<sup>16</sup>



Molly's father, Fred Rayner, the Sketcher, by now a widower, would be 90 in Sydney in June 1948. He wrote to his friend David Low in England on 28 April, "Joan & Betty & Molly are coming from U.S.A. & N.Z. to insure I behave myself on the great occasion".<sup>17</sup>

Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* reported on 27 May, "Molly and John Warwick (are) back from a six-month tour of New Zealand. Departure date for England indefinite".

Joan and Betty wrote to the Lows after Fred's 90th, ending their letter with,

*It has been the greatest joy to be with family again. Molly and her husband flew over from New Zealand just before we arrived so the whole bunch of us were together for Dad's ninetieth birthday.*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Times* 6 August 1945.

<sup>2</sup> *West London Observer* 17 May 1946.

<sup>3</sup> *Stage* 12 December 1946

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Herald* 18 December 1946.

<sup>5</sup> *Stage* 19 December 1946.

<sup>6</sup> *Sun* 20 Jul 1947.

<sup>7</sup> *Tatler* 30 July 1947.

<sup>8</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald* 7 Aug 1947.

<sup>9</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 10 Aug 1947.

<sup>10</sup> Mavis Thorpe Clark 1972. *Joan & Betty Rayner: strolling players*. Lansdowne, Melbourne. p.23.

<sup>11</sup> *NZ Herald* 27 October 1947.

<sup>12</sup> *Stage* 11 March 1948.

<sup>13</sup> *NZ Herald* 28 February 1948.

<sup>14</sup> *Otago Daily Times* 13 March 1948.

<sup>15</sup> *Otago Daily Times* 27 March 1948.

<sup>16</sup> *Otago Daily Times* 6 April 1948.

<sup>17</sup> Low papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

## Chapter 12: in London once more.

In November 1948 London's *Truth* told its readers,

John Warwick and Molly Raynor are back in their charming home at Chelsea, after their tour of Australia and New Zealand. John is thinking of accepting a film offer, and Molly will tour the provinces soon with a theatrical company.<sup>1</sup>

In May 1949, however, Molly was back at the "Q" in *Distinguished Gathering*, produced by their old friend from Harrogate, James Mills.<sup>2</sup> In October she appeared in the first episode of the second season of *Music-Hall*, as herself, singing with Jack Daly and The Plantation Four;<sup>3</sup> she took a minor role in *Old Hickory* at the Whitehall;<sup>4</sup> in November she and John were in *Rosetti* at Chepstow;<sup>5</sup> she "hammered out the caricature" in *Fresh Fields* at the "Q" in December;<sup>6</sup> *Queen Elizabeth Slept Here* at the "Q" in August 1950;<sup>7</sup> and in December,

"Poor Old Gaston," a translation by J. A. Munro of the comedy *L'Amour Truqué*," by Paul Nivoix, will be staged at the New Lindsey on Tuesday next, the same night that the play has its Paris premiere. In London the cast of four consists of Godfrey and Mary Kenton, John Warwick and Molly Raynor. Reginald Dyson produces.<sup>8</sup>

"Miss Molly Raynor chirps and trills away with a delightful sense of fun," said the *Times*.<sup>9</sup>

**IN LONDON LAST NIGHT**  
*It's such fun, Paris-style*  
**NEW LINDSEY:**  
**"Poor Old Gaston"**

WHAT have we? A large divan bed, cast of four—two ladies and two gentlemen, and their charmingly argued

amours which have everything except fidelity.

It's in Paris, of course, where the affairs of men and their mistresses are such fun, and not in Walthamstow where they would be too sordid for words.

Shrewdly translated from a play by Paul Nivoix, it has many hilarious moments and a splendid quartet of players—two men and their real wives. Mary Kenton. John Warwick, Godfrey Kenton and Molly Raynor, indeed, could hardly be bettered on vivacity and the finer comedy points.<sup>10</sup>

Of the quartet at the New Lindsey, Molly Raynor, as the sparkling, chattering Colette, captures best the spirit of the play and gives the most consistently satisfying performance.<sup>11</sup>

Molly was in *Frou-Frou* at the New Lindsey in January 1951<sup>12</sup> (Miss Molly Raynor gives a good account of the woman of the world," thought the *Times*<sup>13</sup>). She played an episode in the BBC *Sunday Night Theatre* TV series, *Dinner at Eight* in March (*affluent Millicent and Oliver Jordan throw a dinner for a handful of wealthy and/or well-born acquaintances, each of whom has much to reveal*). "Molly Raynor as a *passé* actress could not have been more delicious".<sup>14</sup>

She was in the 1952 television movie *Theatre Royal*. She was back at the "Q" in February 1953 in *A Guardsman's Cup of Tea* ("A small cast acquit themselves with some skill and charm in circumstances that are not always particularly rewarding. But there is some good work from Molly Raynor, Beryl Baxter and Derek Blomfield").<sup>15</sup>

She appeared in the short 1953 British horror film *Mr Beamish Goes South*, directed by John Wall and Oscar Burn, with John Laurie and Hector Ross, from the Collingwood studios—in which *amateur detective Mr Potter pursues a seaside serial killer who disposes of his woman victims in an acid bath*.<sup>16</sup>

*The Scarlet Web* (1954) is a film about an insurance company investigator who is framed for murder but proves his innocence with the help of his boss. Molly, now 51, played Miss Riggs with Griffith Jones, Hazel Court, Zena Marshall and Robert Perceval.



Molly Raynor as Miss Riggs in *The Scarlet Web*, 1954 (Screenshot).

She played Mrs Cannon in the 1954 *Child's Play* (a science-fiction film about children who manage to split the atom and thereby create a new form of popcorn), but after that Molly and John's names appeared only rarely in the newspapers as they aged, their celebrity status diminished, television arrived and they forsook the stage.

In 1964 she played Mrs. Jordan in episode 93 of the TV series *Armchair Theatre* called *The Last Word on Julie*. In 1966 John acted in an episode of *Dixon of Dock Green*.

At some time Molly took a break from membership of the actors' guild Equity under its Honourable Withdrawal scheme, whereby an actor could still protect her professional name. In 2005 Equity published a list of thousands of actors whom it was unable to contact. Molly Raynor's name was among them: her stage name then became available to another actor.



Molly Raynor (left) as Mrs Jordan in *The Last Word on Julie*, 1964  
(Screenshot).

They returned to Sydney in about 1967: in 1968 John began appearing in several Australian TV series—*Hunter*, *Contrabandits*, *Riptide*, *The Link Men*—until the 1970 film *Adam's Woman* with John Mills—then *Skippy (the bush kangaroo)* and other TV series. He died at 66 on 10 January 1972 on the set of *Skippy*; he was seen posthumously in the 1975 release *That Lady from Peking*.

In 1968 the *Australian Women's Weekly* carried the story of Gina Hinds, a talented blind girl who sought a career in radio. She was referred to Molly by...

... Ken Bruce, a marvellous man, blind himself and constantly fighting battles for other blind people who have great ambition but few opportunities.

In turn he referred her to Molly Warwick, wife of stage-veteran John Warwick, who is an actress and teacher in her own right.

"I knew Georgina had something as soon as I listened to her tape," said Molly Warwick, who was to prove an invaluable ally to the young girl. "It showed extraordinary imagination and initiative, and most of all her beautiful voice.

"First we had to overcome a big obstacle—Gina's silence. She couldn't communicate with people; she would listen, then answer in monosyllables, which would ruin her chances of getting a job on the air."

Molly Warwick drove this point home over and over again. You must, she would tell her, *give* something. It cannot be one-sided. It's your fight, too!

"It wasn't that she was lacking tenacity," Mrs. Warwick explained. "She would have a bash at anything but didn't know how to go about it. It was just a matter of bringing her out of her shell."

Gina made an all-out effort. She made conversation, she answered questions in full, laughed at Molly Warwick when she asked if she'd seen the morning paper— "I'd frequently forget the child was blind"—and accepted chastisement if she slipped back to one-word answers.

And when she felt Gina was ready, Molly Warwick contacted Richard Parry, and played the tape to him, and Gina's radio career began.<sup>17</sup>

Richard Parry was a producer of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's children's programmes.

In her 60s in the 'sixties Molly caused some consternation by wearing the suddenly and surprisingly fashionable "hot pants". She picked up the odd role—in episode 32 of the 1972 Australian TV series *Number 96 (Chad Farrell and Gordon argue over Sonia. Mark receives a lead in his search for Helen in the form of an anonymous letter, but it will cost him \$50. An old lady [Molly Raynor] denies knowing Helen)*.<sup>18</sup>

In 1976 at age 73 she played Mrs O'Rourke in the TV movie (it is said to have been a failed pilot for a TV series) *McManus MPB. (The daughter of the Russian Consul vanishes; Sergeant McManus of the Missing Persons Bureau is sent to find her)*.

Her niece Ingrid Haydon said, "She was vibrant and entertaining to the end, even in the nursing home." She died that year. Her death is registered in the name Mollie Beattie. The symmetry and balance of the words mattered to her: Molly Raynor :: Mollie Beattie.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 14 March 1976 was brief,

## ACTRESS DIES

Molly Rayner, an actress for more than 50 years on the Australian stage, screen and TV, died on Friday, aged 72.

She played the juvenile lead in Australia's first talkie film, *On Our Selection*, and appeared on stage before that.

Her husband, John Warwick, played the "villain" in the same film. He died four years ago while playing the role of a murderer in an episode of the television series, *Boney*.

Molly Rayner's career began in 1923.

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- 1 *Truth* 21 Nov 1948.
  - 2 *West London Observer* 6 May 1949.
  - 3 [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4476478/?ref=ttfc\\_fc\\_tt](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4476478/?ref=ttfc_fc_tt) accessed 18 February 2019.
  - 4 *Stage* 20 October 1949.
  - 5 *Stage* 27 October 1949.
  - 6 *West London Observer* 23 December 1949.
  - 7 *West London Observer* 11 August 1950.
  - 8 *Stage* 7 December 1950.
  - <sup>9</sup> *Times* 13 December 1950.
  - 10 *Daily Herald* 13 December 1950.
  - 11 *Stage* 14 December 1950.
  - 12 *Stage* 11 January 1951.
  - <sup>13</sup> *Times* 9 January 1951.
  - 14 *Sketch* 28 March 1951.
  - 15 *West London Observer* 27 February 1953.
  - 16 [https://www.eofftv.com/index.php?title=Mr.\\_Beamish\\_Goes\\_South\\_\(1953\)](https://www.eofftv.com/index.php?title=Mr._Beamish_Goes_South_(1953)) accessed 24 January 2019.
  - 17 *Australian Women's Weekly* 3 July 1968.
  - 18 <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~lindsay96/info/1972.html> accessed 16 February 2019.



### Chapter 13: the plays Molly wrote.

In March 1947,

AUSTRALIAN actress Molly Raynor has had a play, "Strange Refuge," accepted for publication by the English Theatre Guild. Miss Raynor, in private life Mrs. John Warwick, is now living in London, and told the good news to her brother, Mr. G. Rayner, of Neutral Bay, in a recent letter.

The story is written from Mrs. Warwick's experiences during the war when the ship in which she travelled through the Mediterranean, on her way to Africa with ENSA, was torpedoed.<sup>1</sup>

Garth was perhaps acting as her Australian publicity agent. In May 1947,

THERE is a scarcity of men players round London repertory companies. Therefore, Australian Molly (Rayner) Warwick's play, "Strange Refuge" is just what producers want. Soon to be produced in London repertory, it deals with the experience of nine women at a Phillipville, North Africa, Hotel, after they are torpedoed. Its base is Molly's own experience when torpedoed at the same spot in 1944. She says she is so engrossed in her own play that she will not now appear in "Cry of Wolf."<sup>2</sup>

London's small Chanticleer theatre first played *Strange Refuge*. Later it was presented by Colyton amateur players at a four days' drama festival of the Devon Federation of Women's Institutes in Exeter in May 1848;<sup>3</sup> by the Derby Group of Townswomen's Guilds in October,<sup>4</sup> and by the Stonehaven Dramatic Club in Dundee in February 1949.<sup>5</sup> In March the Marazion British Legion Group won the Cambourne section in

the County Drama Festival at St Ives with *Strange Refuge*.<sup>6</sup> Doveridge played it at the drama festival of Derbyshire Federation of Women's Institutes at the Railway Institute, Derby, in May 1949.<sup>7</sup>

## DRAMA FESTIVAL WINNERS

### Bridstow W.I.

Competing against other teams in the Herefordshire Drama Festival, the Bridstow (Ross-on-Wye) Women's team won the shield for Women's Institutes and the Herefordshire County Cup in the open class, and thus qualify to represent Herefordshire in the divisional competition at Wolverhampton. The play staged by Bridstow was "Strange Refuge" by Molly Raynor. Mrs. Sidney Marshall, Ross, was the producer.<sup>8</sup>

*Strange Refuge* was presented by Gayton at the Northamptonshire Women's Institute Drama Festival in November 1950.<sup>9</sup> *Nine very different women are in a ship torpedoed in the Mediterranean and are taken ashore at Phillipville, where they are accommodated on mattresses on the floor of a disused hotel, without food or water. In the morning the floor is awash.*

In August 1947 the *Warwick Daily News* wrote, "Her latest play is 'She Went to the Cupboard,' which she hopes will have its premiere in New Zealand."<sup>10</sup> I can find no trace of it.

Her second published play was *Surprise Party*, another "play for nine women". *Old friends are brought together in a country cottage to investigate the supposed infidelity of the husband of another but it's all a case of mistaken identity.*

Molly's third play *The Claw* (five women) was published by the English Theatre Guild in 1951. It was played in Brechin at the Scottish Community Drama Association's festival in January 1953.<sup>11</sup> *Relative poverty is forcing the sale of a beloved*

*country cottage until potential buyers reveal a secret passage, opened by a carved claw on the mantel and leading to treasure.*

The Durrington and the Salvingtons Townswomen's Guild Drama Society produced Molly's 1953 play, *Something in the Attic* (five women— "a mystery with a touch of comedy") at Worthing in December 1953.<sup>12</sup> The *Worthing Herald* described it as "a comedy thriller set in the lounge hall of an old house in Cornwall".<sup>13</sup> It was produced at several drama festivals.

*Women visiting a boarding house in Cornwall are disturbed by strange whining wind noises and thumps upstairs.*

On 12 July 1954 the *Birmingham Daily Post* carried an advertisement,

**WEDNESBURY HIPPODROME**

H.J. Barlow's Repertory Co. in

"DAD WAS THE YOUNGEST"

The New Comedy by Molly Raynor.

Nightly at 7.15. Sat. 6 & 8.30.

The next day's review,

For its last play of the season, Wednesbury Repertory Company has a new comedy by Molly Raynor, *Dad Was the Youngest*. What must surely be one of the craziest, most happy-go-lucky families experiences a bewildering series of mishaps but always emerges safely. Aubrey Richins gives a fine performance as an apoplectic and highly puzzled father of four children. As a first-class riot of constant laughs this play will suit the most exacting tastes.<sup>14</sup>

*Family Comedy at Wednesbury*

Play by Molly Raynor. Presented at the Hippodrome, Wednesbury, on July 12. Settings by Frank Whyatt.

Tim

John Sherlock

Barbara	Sonya Davenport
Moirá	Valerie Gaunt
Jean	Sonia Simpson
Dad	Aubrey Richins
Mum	Carmen Silvera
Cedric Pooley	Richard Pescud
Mrs. Todpil	Barbara Atkinson
Arthur Evershed	Luigi Vanelli
Directed by Martin Landau.*	

“DAD WAS THE YOUNGEST,” presented at the Hippodrome at Wednesbury last Monday, is an airy trifle by Molly Raynor concerning a happy-go-lucky family who encounter many mishaps which are all finally overcome. How this is accomplished forms the theme and provides the fun.

Although the dialogue is not remarkably witty, there are amusing lines arising from the humorous incidents. These are exploited to the full by a very efficient cast. Dad and Mum are effectively portrayed by Aubrey Richins and Carmen Silvera. Dad is a cartoonist on a magazine, but owing to his satirical drawings of the most prominent citizen, his services are dispensed with. How to help with the family income brings along the youngsters, with Valerie Gaunt as a stage aspirant and Sonia Simpson as a staid, businesslike personality. Sonya Davenport is also notable in a production in which atmosphere and characterisation are well sustained.<sup>15</sup>

HJ Barlow was a wealthy Wednesbury hardware manufacturer who loved theatre and had London connections.

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\* Landau, who would perhaps most famously star in *Mission Impossible*, was a cartoonist too. He produced several plays for HJ Barlow at Wednesbury.

I cannot find the script for *Dad was the youngest*, which was probably not published. Molly's father Fred was the eldest in his family, though at times must have seemed the *enfant terrible* often enacted by princeling youngest children. Clearly there are autobiographical elements (*"Dad is a cartoonist on a magazine, but owing to his satirical drawings of the most prominent citizen, his services are dispensed with. How to help with the family income brings along the youngsters"*). Perhaps only after Fred's death was she willing to present some of the inevitably painful incidents in her young life in a "happy-go-lucky family" play—her father had died in 1950.

The children in the play (Tim, Barbara, Moira and Jean) may be Trevor, Betty, Molly and Joan. Garth is missing—is he "Arthur Evershed"? Moira is a stage aspirant and Jean staid and businesslike.

The script of this, her only full length play, would be a key document in understanding Molly if it still exists. The Wednesbury Hippodrome was demolished in the early 1960s and enquiries in the Wednesbury museums and other theatre collections have been unsuccessful.

In 1954 the English Theatre Guild published two more of Molly's one act plays. In *All of a Sudden*, for eight women, *volunteer women are receiving, sorting and despatching used clothing. A stylish dress is mistakenly brought in and mysteriously disappears, only to reappear.*

The second 1954 play was for seven women: *The Christmas Tree*, presented at Christmas 1956 in Lewes, Sussex.<sup>16</sup> *Guests fail to arrive at a planned society Christmas party in the country, so the servants and locals share the spoils.*

The Taunton Deane Townswomen's Guild Drama Group produced Molly's 1955 play for six women in one act, *The Second Thought*, in 1958.<sup>17</sup> *Five women involved in a bus accident find shelter in a derelict house. One young woman has*

*hysterical paralysis after having been jilted at the altar; another has just escaped her own wedding and is still wearing her wedding dress....*

Her 1956 *Cuckoo in the Hedge* (“a rural romp: a play in one act” for seven women) was presented by the Woodchurch Women’s Institute at the Neston Festival of One Act Plays in March 1965.<sup>18</sup> *The peace of a house in the country is disturbed by the noise of a fair in an adjacent field, to the extent the owner wants to sell. But all is not quite as it seems....*

The Bilton Women’s Institute produced her 1958 play (for six women) in one act, *My Mother Said*, in the Leamington Music Festival novices’ dramatic scene section in June 1959<sup>19</sup>—and it was produced during several other events. *An outwardly successful but vulnerable daughter returns home to help an old friend and her mother.*

Her last one act play was *Christmas Present* (for six women) in 1963. *In a city office a shy sad girl acquires beauty and confidence from the friendship of working women and the goodwill of Christmas.*

John Warwick also turned his mind to writing. His play *The Final Factor* was performed in Canberra in July 1966 and his *The Decision* in Canberra in September 1966.

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1 *Sun* 30 March 1947.

2 *Mail* 3 May 1947.

3 *Western Times* 14 May 1948.

4 *Derby Daily Telegraph* 14 October 1948.

5 *Dundee Courier* 3 February 1949.

6 *Cornishman* 10 March 1949.

7 *Derby Daily Telegraph* 30 May 1949.

- 8 *Gloucester Citizen* 9 March 1950.
- 9 *Northampton Chronicle and Echo* 9 November 1950.
- 10 *Warwick Daily News* 9 August 1947. I can find no trace of "She went to the cupboard".
- 11 *Brechin Advertiser* 20 January 1953.
- 12 *Worthing Gazette* 16 December 1953.
- 13 *Worthing Herald* 18 December 1953.
- 14 *Birmingham Daily Post* 13 July 1954.
- 15 *Stage* 15 July 1954.
- 16 *Sussex Agricultural Express* 28 December 1956.
- 17 *Taunton Courier, and Western Advertiser* 08 March 1958.
- 18 *Cheshire Observer* 5 March 1965.
- 19 *Coventry Evening Telegraph* 16 June 1959.

## Chapter 14: the movies & plays Molly acted in

### Molly (Mollie) Raynor (Rayner)

#### Film<sup>1</sup>

#### Actor

**1932 *On Our Selection*** Kate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1SjeWCuyDk>

**1933 *The Hayseeds*** Pansy Ragen

<https://aso.gov.au/titles/features/hayseeds/clip1/>

**1934 *Strike me Lucky*** Bates

<https://aso.gov.au/titles/features/strike-me-lucky/clip3>

**1935 *Grandad Rudd*** Amelia Banks

**1937 *Jennifer Hale*** Constance Hall

**1940 *Gaslight*** Uncredited cast member

**1943 *We'll Meet Again*** Mrs Summers

**1947 *Woman to Woman*** Sylvia's friend

**1947 *The Pleasure Garden*** (TV movie) A wife

**1951 BBC Sunday-Night Theatre** (TV series)—

*Dinner at Eight*

Carlotta Vance

**1952 *Theatre Royal*** (TV movie) Kitty Lemoyne

Dean

**1953 *Mr Beamish Goes South*** (short) Cast member

**1954 *The Scarlet Web*** Miss Riggs



**1954** *Child's Play* Mrs Cannon

**1964** *Armchair Theatre* (TV series)—*The Last Word on Julie*

Mrs. Jordan

**1972** *Number 96* (TV series)—*Year 1 Episode 32*

**1976** *McManus MPB* (Australian TV movie) Mrs. O'Rourke

### As herself

**1949** *Music-Hall* (TV series)*Episode #2.1*

### Archive footage

**1997** *40,000 Years of Dreaming* (TV doc. on Australian film)

### Radio and stage (the year she first performed in these plays)

#### AUSTRALIA

**1921–7** The Cheer-Oh Girls' Patriotic Revue Company

**1924** Greenleaf Theatre  
*The Melting Pot*

**1925** *The Point of View*  
*Art and Opportunity*

**1926** Radio: *Miss Molly Raynor, comedienne*

**1927** *Gum Tree Gully*  
*'Possum Paddock*  
*The Alarm Clock*

**1928** *The Sport of Kings*  
*Eliza Comes to Stay*

*The Unfair Sex*  
*Outward Bound*  
*The Last Warning*

*When London Sleeps*  
*The Face at the Window*  
*Robbery Under Arms*  
*Sonia of the Circus*  
*The Rosary*

1929 *The Forbidden Woman*  
*Whom God Hath Joined*  
*A Mad Marriage*

*The Family Upstairs*  
*Sweeney Todd*

*The Baby Cyclone*  
*New Brooms*  
*Six Cylinder Love*  
*White Collars*  
*Whispering Friends*  
*Saturday's Children*

*Love Me, Love My Dog*

1930 *Bathurst: The Imposter*  
*The Irish Cinderella*  
*The Prodigal*  
*A Sporting Gentleman*

1932 *Whose Child?*

1932–3 Radio: *The Naughty Wife, The Cricket on the Hearth, Captain Swift, Mrs Dane's Defence, The Count of Luxembourg, Tea for Three, The First Mrs Fraser, Bird in Hand, The Twelve Pound Look, The Show,*

*Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure, Alias  
Jimmy Valentine.*

**ENGLAND**

- 1935–6** Harrogate: *The Distaff Side, Cat's Cradle, Villa for Sale, Charmeuse, Candida, The Camel's Back, No Exit, The Bachelor Father, Alice-sit-by-the-fire, Barnett's Folly, Escape Me Never, Figs, After October, Fumed Oak.*
- 1937** London: *New Use for Old Husbands, See Naples and Die, I Done a Murder.*
- 1939** *The women  
A Star Comes Home*
- 1941** *Dear Octopus  
All in Favour  
Kick in*
- 1942** *Spring Harvest  
Too Many Cooks*
- 1943** ENSA, Cairo: *On Approval*
- 1946** *London Wall  
Old Acquaintance  
The Cat and the Canary*
- 1947** NEW ZEALAND: *Fools Rush In, The Light of Heart, Gaslight, The Man from the Ministry, No Medals, French Without Tears, The Shop at Sly Corner, The Heart of a City.*
- 1949** LONDON: *Distinguished Gathering  
Old Hickory  
Rosetti  
Fresh Fields*

- 1950 *Queen Elizabeth Slept Here*  
*Poor Old Gaston*
- 1951 *Frou-Frou*  
*Dinner at Eight*  
*A Guardsman's Cup of Tea*

### Plays by Molly Raynor

#### Published by the English Theatre Guild

- 1947 *Strange Refuge*: a comedy-drama for nine women in one act. 22p.
- 1950 *Surprise Party*: a play for nine women. 32p.
- 1951 *The Claw*: a comedy thriller. 27p.
- 1953 *Something in the attic*: a comedy-thriller in one act. 27p.
- 1954 *All of a Sudden*: a play in one act. 31p.
- 1954 *The Christmas Tree*: a play in one act.
- 1955 *The Second Thought*: a play for six women in one act. 23p..
- 1956 *Cuckoo in the Hedge*: a rural romp, a play in one act. 24p.
- 1958 *My Mother Said*: a play in one act. 23p.
- 1963 *Christmas Present*: a play for six women in one act. 26p.

#### Other

- 1947? (intended for the NZ tour) *She went to the Cupboard*: either name changed or unpublished.

**1954 *Dad was the youngest***: unpublished, perhaps partly autobiographical MS, played at Wednesbury Hippodrome.




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1 From IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0713518/#actress> and BFI: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2baa33eb41> both accessed 23 December 2018.

## Chapter 15: was she a star?

Rhoda Rayner thought her talented daughter Molly would do better in Sydney than in Auckland—to finish off her education in music and elocution. So naturally she slipped onto the Australian stage, at first as an amateur but soon as a professional. Thence it was a natural step to the talkies and Molly Raynor took significant parts in four important first Australian talkies between 1933 and 1935.

Was she a star? on stage she was often the leading lady but in film always the “soubrette”, the “comedienne”, the “ingénue”. Her stage talents were aptly admired but the critics called her “the dainty Australian actress”, “cute”, a “chic little maid”, “cheeky Miss Molly Raytnor”, “clever little Molly Raynor”, “little Molly Raynor”, “Molly Raynor in another ‘kid sister’ part”. “A vivacious young miss who hails from Maoriland.” A Perth reporter reduced her to “sweet sixteen” in 1929!

Her niece Ingrid Haydon told me, “You would never describe her as being beautiful, but she was always poised, alive and attractive.” She was not seen as a femme fatale—not glamorous, smouldering, seductive Molly Raynor, not “noted for her beauty and Venus-like proportions”, no aura of mysterious allure.

She told the *Australian Women’s Weekly* that this was her choice,

Molly Raynor... rejoices in her broad comedy roles. She does not want to play in serious drama or take highly emotional parts. Nor does she care about interpreting delicate fantasies.... “I prefer to help people to laugh rather than to make them cry, or speed up their heart-beats....”

Miss Raynor, off stage, looks anything but a “broad

comedy” artist. She would have little trouble in inducing “heart-beats” if she were romantically inclined, in a stage sense.

But comediennes of real talent are rare, and it is a good thing for entertainment that there are artists ready, and even eager, to sink their individualities and efface their personal attractiveness “just for the fun of the thing.”

Molly Raynor was a highly talented and successful stage actor in Australasia and in Britain. She was a successful actor in early Australian talkies but later settled for minor roles in TV and B movies. She wrote perhaps twelve minor plays.

Her pioneering place in New Zealand stage and film history is important: it should be realised and she, I think, cherished and celebrated.



Molly Raynor: photograph from her niece Ingrid Haydon’s collection.