



**OPEN  
GARDENS**  
AUSTRALIA



**BICKLEIGH VALE VILLAGE:  
EDNA WALLINGS MASTERPIECE  
SUNDAY 5<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER**

Abbotsley	
Badgers Wood	
Devon Cottage	Crafts and plants
Mistover	Light meals and refreshments
Sonningfield	
The Barn	Light meals and refreshments, crafts
The Sheilan	
Wimbourne	

## **A Little on Edna Walling and Bickleigh Vale**

Edna Walling (1896 – 1973) emigrated to Australia in 1914 and completed her horticultural studies at Burnley College in 1917.

Edna Walling's childhood in the Devonshire countryside in England inspired her creation of the Bickleigh Vale village in Mooroolbark. Those Devonshire walks taught her to love 'low growing plants, mauves and soft greens, mossy boulders and gritty pathways, and closely nibbled turf' and simple stone cottages.

Sometime between 1919 and 1921 Walling purchased 3 acres of rolling cow paddocks at the foot of Mt. Dandenong., where she could build a cottage of 'charm and personality' using local stone, timbers and recycled materials. The result was her first house 'Sonning', named after an English village. She selected trees to give "an appearance of completion and restfulness. Meanwhile she worked as a gardener at Dame Nellie Melba's Coombe Cottage at Lilydale.

In the early 1920's she bought an 18 acre allotment next to 'Sonning', which she named Bickleigh Vale after a Devonshire village and drew up 1 and 2 acre allotments. Prospective owners had to agree to a cottage and garden of Edna's making.

She oversaw the construction of 16 cottages and gardens between the early 1920's and into the 1940's. By 1934, Mistover, Hurst, Downderry, The Barn, Lynton Lee, Corner Cottage and Sonning had been constructed. They were separated by simple farm fences with picket gates for neighbourly access. These are still used throughout the village.

In 1978 the Bickleigh Vale Village was recognised by The National Trust and declared a "Classified" Landscape. It is also recognised as "an area of special significance" by the Yarra Ranges Shire. In 1988 Devon Lane was renamed Edna Walling Lane in recognition of her creation of Bickleigh Vale Village and her contribution to Australian landscape design.

In 2005 Bickleigh Vale was included on the Victorian Heritage register as a historical landscape of horticultural and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

### **Walling's Philosophy**

The goal at Bickleigh Vale was to create an environment in which houses and gardens related harmoniously with each other as well as with the natural environment; and within which like-minded people could appreciate and preserve this village concept. The spirit of Edna Walling still exists within this community today as residents consciously aim to protect and maintain the common features of the area, which make this a place of such special significance to so many.

Walling had a number of design principles which she applied to her garden designs. These are very much in evidence at Bickleigh Vale. Walling felt one should create "rooms" or different areas within the garden. The simple bare bones of the design should be visible in winter. The most important colour is green, but one should be sensitive to foliage and texture. Trees should be planted in copses and groundcovers allowed take over. Gardens should be mulched and not overwatered. Gardens should be allowed to grow naturally; where possible they should be left alone, and where pruning is necessary, it should not be overdone.

Much of the philosophy she espoused has since been revived by others with the revival of the cottage garden. But her emphasis on foliage and the colour green remains unique.

## The Plantings

At Bickleigh Vale, Walling blended native and exotic plants and built cottages nestling into a landscape characterised by repeated plantings of a wide variety of her preferred groundcovers, shrubs and trees. When residents replant today, they do it with one eye on her writings so that the character is preserved.

Walling favourites common at Bickleigh Vale are:

Trees - Crab-apples, birches, hornbeams, hawthorns, plums, ti-tree, apricots, oaks and elms.

Shrubs – various viburnums, kolkwitzia, (the Beauty Bush), berberis, buddleia, (the Butterfly Bush), japonica, cotoneaster, forsythia, spirea, magnolia, mock-orange and mint bushes.

Groundcovers/flowers - Yarrow, brachyscome, erigeron, forget-me-not, periwinkle, thyme, veronica, bell-flowers, foxgloves, penstemon, snow-in-summer, Japanese windflowers, ajuga, aquilegia and herbs. In Spring – drifts of bulbs.

## The Future

The challenge today for owners as caretakers is to maintain the gardens in changing climatic conditions. Many ancient trees were stressed by the drought, dropping limbs and dying. Now others are struggling to hold their roots in the ground because of so much rain. Also there is the issue of “weeds versus heritage” as many of Edna Walling’s favourite plants are now on the Shire of Yarra Ranges weed list e.g. Agapanthus, Erigeron, Cotoneaster, Vinca Major and Hawthorn to name but a few. Residents are now thinking about succession planting to replace senescent trees.

Since Edna Walling left Bickleigh Vale in 1967, residents have worked together to maintain the roadside vegetation. In 2009 they became affiliated with the Victorian Environmental Friends Network to become “Friends of Edna Walling”. They also received a grant from Heritage Victoria and have worked with the Shire to rejuvenate the roadside vegetation. This year residents have planted over 500 trees, shrubs and ground cover plants and bulbs

The residents’ aim is to preserve the environmental vision of Edna Walling and her Heritage Village – which is the only one of its kind - for future generations.

They are currently working to raise funds to set up an interactive “Edna Walling Walk” for visitors.

## Further Reading

<http://www.bickleighvale.com.au/>

<http://www.abc.net.au/walling/designer/>

[The Vision of Edna Walling](#) - Tricia Dixon & Jennie Churchill

[Letters to Garden Lovers](#) - Edna Walling

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## The Gardens

### Abbotsley

Until subdivided in May 1953, Abbotsley & Sarn were part of Sonning and the piece of bush mentioned by Edna Walling in [A Gardners Log](#): *"Having fortified myself with honey, I went forth today with a pick and a basketful of wattles and gums to that piece of bush were we one day plan to have all our favourite native plants massed and grouped. Acacia prominens, the glorious golden rain wattle that grows in such billowing masses of small-textured greyish-green verdure; Eucalyptus maculata, the spotted gum, which has a trunk so much like and even more spectacular than that of the plain tree, and Acacia baileyana, the cootamundra wattle, were in the basket."*

Edna Walling’s Sonning Garden Theatre which was used to entertain troops in wartime ran from Sarn through into what is now Abbotsley.

Time has taken its toll and all but one of the golden rain wattles have gone from Abbotsley but, at the far end of the pool, a thriving copse of spotted gums remains as a reminder of Edna's days. Chapter 2 began in 1979 when Abbotsley was subdivided from Sarn to create the block as it is today and by the mid 1980's Jeanne and Roos Marsden had built the house on the hill and established the dry stone walled garden structure.

In 1995, Jeanne wrote, "*In the next 11 years we have planted mainly natives having in mind the feeding and nesting requirements of native birds and animals. We've transformed an eroded and ugly drain into a rocky creek and fern gully as a haven for small birds. Tiny spotted pardalotes now nest in tunnels in the bank.*"

*"This small area of Bickleigh Vale is important to the Edna Walling tradition, providing a backdrop to the cottage garden and adding to the harmonious whole."*

Chapter three was a tough time for Abbotsley. After the Marsdens left Bickleigh Vale, there was a long period of time when the house and garden were left to fend for themselves. The harsh drought conditions also took their toll and many trees and shrubs died whilst weeds took hold. What had survived were many of Edna Wallings favourite Amelanchia trees with their beautiful soft white springtime blossom which wafts over the garden like snow.

In January 2010, chapter four began when Chris and Karyn Jones took over the responsibility for bringing Abbotsley back to its rightful place within the village.

The past three & a half years have been a story of repairs & maintenance of the house & garden & of weeding, mulching & replanting. It's also created the opportunity to rethink how the garden will be rebuilt to work in harmony with hotter & drier times and the ideas of the new custodians. The ferny creek has been restored & a newly planted flowering gum & wattles are starting to gain some height whilst thousands of shrubs & small plants are becoming established – many grown from cuttings from the gardens at Donderry, The Shielan & The Barn.

In the back garden, a cedar shed, vegie garden with espalier fruit trees have been established in open areas where native trees once grew creating two very different gardens. The front garden is a place to wander and the back garden a place to both relax and work.

## **Badgers Wood**

Badgers Wood was constructed in 1937 on a large allotment that was sub-divided in 1977 to allow construction of another house, now called The Spinney.

In 1980, the original cottage at Badgers Wood was substantially, but sympathetically, extended by the producer Simon Wincer (The Man from Snowy River, The Cup). At the western end of the house significant elements of the original cottage and Edna Walling's 'signature' features have been retained – a high-pitched roof, a stone chimney and low-set windows, allowing the garden to be brought 'inside'. These elements continue through into the extension with the new lower level rooms being nestled into the garden. The pool is also a new addition, having been built in 1983.

Throughout Badgers Wood local stone has been used extensively – for the front dry-stone wall, paths, steps, and the pool surrounds, often softened with violets (*Viola* sp.), forget-me-nots (*Myosotis*), and babies-tears (*Erigeron karvinskianus*).

The garden exemplifies Edna Walling's use of mass and void, with the creation of garden rooms. Significant trees include the well-established hawthorns (*Crataegus* sp.) at the front of the house, a large Golden Elm (*Ulmus glabra* 'Lutescens') in the lower half of the garden and tall eucalypts and a Weeping Elm at the western side of the house. Lower/middle storey plants include japonica (*Chaenomeles* sp.), azaleas, numerous hellebores, bulbs, camellias, roses, wintersweet (*Chimonanthus praecox*) and wisteria. As the seasons progress new 'surprises' are always appearing, giving an ever-changing view from inside.

Anna and Mike, the current custodians, have been at Badgers Wood for just over three years and, having seen the garden through its seasons, are only starting their journey to keep alive Edna Walling's vision for the integration of garden and home. Anna and Mike are working to bring out more of the garden's woodland cottage feel, and certainly have their work cut out for them. They hope their role in the continual renewal of Badgers Wood will be something that Edna Walling would be proud of.

### **Devon Cottage**

Devon Cottage was originally part of the adjacent property "Sonning", Edna Walling's first home in the village. Built in 1956 the rustic stuccoed English cottage hugs the ground as if growing out of the garden. Flagstone paving sweeps around the cottage from the outside through French doors into indoor areas. The sprawling woodland garden features an original stone birdbath made by Edna Walling, a bulb lawn and a huge *Parottia persica*, said to be one of the largest in a private garden.

Favourite Walling trees include oaks, hornbeams, hawthorns crabapples, aspens, Pin Oak and Silver Birch, which together provide a leafy canopy. Curving paths softened by ground covers of ivy, erigeron, campanula, plectranthus, and Vinca Minor lead to shady garden rooms enclosed by walls of greenery with moss lawns, another Walling signature. Garden beds include Japanese Anemones, hellebores, spireas, viburnums, berberis, japonica, forsythia, magnolia, kolkwitzia, ajuga, forget-me-nots, rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias. Jan and Allan have lived at Devon Cottage since 1993 and like the rest of the village it is always a work in progress.

### **Mistover**

The Heritage Listed Property and Gardens of Mistover were designed, created and built by Edna Walling. Mistover was one of the first cottages to be built in the Bickleigh Vale village with the first owner and occupier being Grace Mary Hughston who took up residence in 1934.

It would seem that Mistover was typical of many homes built in this area and sold as "weekend getaways", and were constructed with very simple and practical designs. A number of extensions have taken place over the years by previous owners, which have been in sympathy with the ideas and philosophies of Edna Walling. The present owners have occupied Mistover for two years and have further updated parts of the house and garden and are committed to continue the traditions and legacy of Edna Walling.

The garden consists of large Liquidambars on the northern side of the house, as well as a large Camphor Laurel and a number of camellias and rhododendrons are also featured. Unfortunately many Eucalypts have been lost over the last years due to the extreme conditions of a number of drought and wet seasons, however work is in progress to rectify this decline with new under-plantings of small shrubs.

We believe that the gardens of Mistover reflect the ideas of Edna Walling with her fondness for having shades of green on green. Ria and Richard thank you for your visit and we invite you to have a photograph taken at the Edna Walling mural.

### **Sonningfield Cottage**

As a small child I remember visiting Miss Walling and running around the paths and the borders of Sonning's garden with my friend and her mother in the 1960's. I presume they were discussing the progress of various plantings.

Many years later we bought a treasured half-acre subdivided from the woodland area of Edna Walling's original garden "Sonning"; we were then faced with the challenge of building a Heritage Victoria acceptable house within Bickleigh Vale Village. We finally realised our dream and moved into our new home four years after the planning process started.

Sonningfield is crafted in Castlemaine Rock and the timber shingles are Bloodwood. At all stages of construction, preserving the safety of tree canopies and root structures was given the highest

priority. We have many significant rare trees within our garden including a *Quercus stellata*, the biggest of only two known in Victoria. We are still playing around setting out the garden and have enjoyed with every new season discovering old plants coming to life again as well as re-establishing two Edna rockwork projects long since forgotten and covered in dirt and ivy. Our present challenge in our garden plan is the removal of the dreaded onion weed and establishing two lawn areas in the heavily shaded garden.

### **The Barn**

Established in 1928, The Barn was one of the earlier homes built in Bickleigh Vale and sat on two acres. It was designed for Blanche Scharp, a close friend and colleague of Edna Walling, to have a stable for her horse, garage for her car, workshop, storage and a man's room upstairs. Blanche named her home 'Good-a-Meavy' but all came to know it by its nickname 'The Barn'.

Located in the heart of Bickleigh Vale, Edna lived at The Barn from 1951 until 1967 when she left for Buderim, QLD. In that time she renovated The Barn and painted it the palest shade of pink. When she left she divided The Barn into smaller blocks and today it exists on just over an acre.

In Edna's time, the garden of The Barn was described as native grasses and trees, with an outdoor patio to the north. She reported mowing the lawns only twice a year! In the 1980s The Barn was greatly extended but the house continues to sit gently in its landscape and has been home to many happy families, giving children a wonderful freedom to explore and create.

Paul and Jen have lived at The Barn for four and a half years. It is a wonderful rambling home and garden of light and dark and green. With the loss of the 'fine old gum tree' to the north of the house, northern light has graced the lawn and lightened the home. To the west an enormous evergreen Holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) provides both shade and a little magic for the children to play. Many plants for replanting beds arise from cuttings from neighbours and the sharing of these is a delight of the village. As the garden lives though a natural state of change it continues to display the vitality of a large selection of Edna's favourite plantings and her signature use of stone.

### **The Sheilan**

Owners Peter And Lois Dolphin

As Edna Walling subdivided the land that she had purchased in the early 1920's, she sold lots to "like-minded people".

In the 1930's, such a person, Miss McGeoch, a single lady of Scottish ancestry and Nursing Sister at Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, purchased the land that is now at No.5 Bickleigh Vale Road. An agreement was negotiated with Edna Walling that allowed for the construction of a Scottish Crofter's Cottage. So "The Sheilan" (Scottish for "Resting Place") was built, with the small cottage at the front gate already being on the title. Edna Walling had the overarching say in the construction of the cottage and was involved in the building of the two stone chimneys and garden landscaping.

Nestled in an acre of mature gardens the property has a combination of mature exotic and indigenous trees, shrubs, perennials and ground cover plants. The small front garden is quite formal with plantings of azaleas, roses, Edna Walling Crab Apples, camellias, spirea, bamboo, liquidambar, Yellow Jasmine, weigela and Japanese Maples. In contrast, the extensive, predominantly green, shaded back garden consists of hidden steps and winding paths that lead from one garden room to the next. The back patio overlooks a natural swimming pool and waterfall, built in Edna Walling style.

### **Wimborne**

Our house was built in 1940 by the Ronald Taylors shortly after they were married. They asked Edna Walling to come up with a design and then modified certain aspects, such as the height of the ceilings. This was not so easy as Edna was very particular about her designs. Mrs. Taylor had worked with Edna for some time and bought the block in 1938 for £1,000. Because materials were hard to come by during the war, the bricks were recycled from a house that was being



# OPEN GARDENS AUSTRALIA

Open Gardens Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that opens private gardens and organises garden-themed events for public enjoyment around the country.

Our aim is to promote the enjoyment, knowledge, and benefits of gardens and gardening in the Australian community, and to build strong public support for the development of gardens across the nation.

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- **Open Gardens Guide**

The Open Gardens guide, contains all the information necessary for planning garden visits around Australia for the entire season through until June 2015. The guide is available from all good bookshops and newsagents, and it can be purchased from our website.

- **Open Gardens website**

Our website gives information about us, calendars of garden openings and special events. You can also purchase the guide, event tickets and merchandise using our secure online ordering facility. **Visit us at [www.opengarden.org.au](http://www.opengarden.org.au)**

- **ABC Radio**

The ABC is a key supporter of Open Gardens Australia. Details of garden openings are broadcast each week on ABC Radio's local network in both metropolitan and country areas.

## How does the community benefit?

To encourage the gardeners of the future, children under 18 are admitted free of charge.

Most of our income comes from the entry fee you pay to visit the gardens and part of this is dedicated to funding community garden projects.

Since 1987 over \$1,100,000 has been given to projects across Australia.

Our garden owners also raise funds for charities and \$5,000,000 has been given to worthwhile causes.

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