

Edna Walling.

by Sue Burston, 21st October 2017.

Edna Walling came with her family to Australia via New Zealand. Her sister Doris married my grandfather, so whilst it was quite a tenuous relationship, I was fortunate to spend quite a lot of time with her.

My mother and her brother used to stay with Edna at Sonning and spoke of the fun they had there. At that time Edna owned a horse and a sled which she used to move stones around to build walls and paths.

When I was about 12 Edna invited me to stay with her at The Barn. I slept upstairs and the birds were quite deafening in the morning and I loved that room. Is the current owner of The Barn here? Did you find the "stick in" garden? I had no idea that she was so well known. To me she was a happy, cheerful Aunt (we called lots of people Aunts in those days!) with a great sense of humour and lots of fun.

She taught me about plants and their botanical names, birds, took fabulous photos (don't smile or look at the camera!) and had her own darkroom and developed the photos she took. She also had a dog and a cat. I had my first sherry there — albeit about half an egg cup with added water! She loved classical music which was usually playing in the background. She was friendly with Dame Nellie Melba and designed her garden.

The local council had started to do roadside plantings and Edna was most unhappy that they were not using indigenous plants - in particular she loathed *Pinus Radiata* because of damage it did to the soil. So in the dead of night — probably only about 8 or 9pm, she would load a couple of trays of indigenous plants into the back of her Holden panel van and off we would go and "adjust" the council's plantings. Can you imagine how exciting that was for me as a 12 year old?

Edna had many visitors and they often brought cuttings for Edna, but she did not want to plant them in her garden nor did she want to offend people, so she had what she called a "stick in garden" down the back. Of course they thrived!

I recall happy visits to Edna's great friend Lorna Fielden at Lynton Lee — the house Edna built for her. Lorna not only typed and edited Edna's manuscripts, but she attempted to put some order into Edna's busy life. Whilst Edna was busy designing and overseeing the completion many beautiful gardens, she was rather slow at sending out invoices to her clients, so she never seemed to have much money.

Edna also invited me to stay with her in her shack on Big Hill near Lorne. Edna and a friend built this rather basic construction, which clung to the side of the hill. There was a perilous entrance from the Great Ocean Road and a steep climb up a narrow, unmade road. I recall

doing the washing up in an enamel bowl on the terrace — built by Edna of local stone. I am not sure if it survived the bushfires.

As she got older Edna did not like the cold weather and felt that Mooroolbark was becoming built out, so she decided to move north to Buderim and found a quaint cottage where she retired to. My cousin and I went to see it after she died. We both commented how it was the perfect place for Edna.

Lorna Fielden, had been a teacher at MLC and was also a published writer, followed Edna to Buderim. Lorna died 4 years after Edna and now she and Edna are buried side by side under two magnificent trees.

The sheer volume of books and articles by Edna Walling seems to prove that she was not just a successful author but above all else a wonderful Landscape Designer.

My favourite quote of hers is: “I am not a writer I merely record the work I have done.”

Edna was fervent about conservation long before it became accepted by the wider community. She certainly left a great body of work and I believe history will view her kindly.

Post script: My cousin, John Barnes, and I have given the copyright for Edna’s photos to the State Library of Victoria.