

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE0119

Walling, Edna Margaret

(1896 - 1973)

Born 4 December, 1896, York Yorkshire England

Died 8 August, 1973, Buderim Queensland Australia

Occupation Journalist, Landscape designer, Photographer, Writer

Summary

Edna Walling is best known for her contribution to Australian landscape architecture design. She was also a talented amateur photographer, and used the many photographs of gardens she took to illustrate the books and articles she wrote. Walling also created portrait photography.

Details

Edna Walling was born on 4 December 1896 in Yorkshire, England, and was the second daughter of William and Margaret Walling. Her father was a businessman, who had been keen on having a son; when Edna was born he was disappointed on having another daughter. He treated her as he would a son, involving her in exploring the countryside around Devonshire and woodworking.

In 1911, when Walling was 14 years old, the family moved to New Zealand. Shortly after this relocation her father travelled to Australia on his own, and in 1914 the whole family joined him there.

From 1916-1917 Walling trained at Burnley Horticultural College; following this she gained employment as a gardener, and eventually commenced a career as a landscape designer. She designed gardens for some of Melbourne's wealthiest families, such as those owned by Dame Nellie Melba, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, Mrs Harold Darling, Sir Clive and Lady Steele and Sir William and Lady Irvine, many of whom had large country properties in the Western District of Victoria and the Riverina in New South Wales. Her landscape designs followed the English tradition and were influenced by the work of Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson.

Walling photographed these gardens as a means of documenting her work, and she used these photographs in her illustrated books on gardens, and to complement the many articles she wrote. She also worked as a journalist, writing for a number of magazines, including *Australian Home Beautiful*, as well as for many newspapers on gardening and landscape design. She produced numerous illustrated books – *Gardens in Australia* (1943), *Cottage and Garden in Australia* (1947), *A Gardener's Log* (1948) and *The Australian Roadside* (1952).

These titles featured her drawings, garden plans and photographs.

She also designed and built her own house at Mooroolbark, east of Melbourne, which she called *Sonning*. The house was burned down during the 1936 fires, but she rebuilt it and purchased more land to create the Bickleigh Vale village on 18 acres. In 1948 she purchased a property near Lorne on the Great Ocean Road, on which she built a cottage. Walling wrote about this property in *The Happiest Days of My Life*.

During her lifetime Walling designed a number of villages but unfortunately few were built. In 1967 she moved to Queensland, settling in Bendles, at Buderim, where she designed an Italian inspired village (but was not able to build it due to her advancing age).

Walling died on 8 August 1973 in Queensland.

Technical

Edna Walling used a Rolleiflex camera with a twin lens and worked in black and white.

Collections

Content added for original entry in the Register, last modified 4 May 2009

The Walling family lived in the village of Bickleigh, Devon, before migrating to New Zealand, and then to Australia in 1914. In Bickleigh, Edna Walling's father William had trained his daughter in woodworking and honed her skills in perspective and scale. Father and daughter also enjoyed walking together through the English countryside. Walling's future garden designs were to reflect elements of this countryside, and of the various English gardens they visited.

After completing a course in horticulture at Burnley College in 1917, Walling commenced work as a jobbing gardener. In 1921 she purchased three acres of land at Mooroolbark and built her first home from local and second hand materials. This home was named *Sonning* after Gertrude Jekyll's Deanery Garden of the same name, which she had visited in England.

In 1922 Walling purchased a further 18 acres of land adjacent to *Sonning*. The houses she built became the village of Bickleigh Vale. Between the 1920s and 1960s Walling's commissions included designing the lily pond for Coombe Cottage, Dame Nellie Melba's residence in Coldstream, Vic.; Durrol for Mrs Stanley Allen, Mount Macedon, Vic.; and the Cruden Farm garden for Mrs Keith Murdoch (now Dame Elisabeth), Langwarrin, Vic. She also undertook commissions in Hobart, Tasmania, and designed villages at Port Pirie, South Australia (never completed) and Mount Kembla, New South Wales, for Broken Hill Associated Smelters Pty Ltd.

During this period Walling wrote four books: *Gardens in Australia* (1943), *Cottage and Garden in Australia* (1947), *A Gardener's Log* (1948) and *The Australian Roadside* (1952). She wrote articles for *The Australian Women's Mirror*, *The Australian Home Builder* and *The Australian Home Beautiful*. In a letter held by the State Library of Victoria's Edna Walling Collection (La Trobe Australian Manuscripts), Walling declines an invitation to join the Australian Society of Authors by saying:

'Actually, you know, I am not a writer. I merely made a record of the work I had done, which the Oxford University Press published. I also wrote *The Australian Roadside* as my contribution to conservation work of this country... The books were only achieved through the great help of my teacher friend, Miss Lorna Fielden, without whose assistance I doubt if they would ever have seen the light of day. And so, much as I appreciate the honour you have bestowed on me I don't really think I have any right to be counted amongst the illustrious names appearing in your Society'

Walling's ABC Radio talks include *On Making a Garden* (1941), *Improving the Farm and Curing Erosion* and *The Farmers' Friends* (1951). In 1967, Walling moved to a cottage – 'Bendles' – at Buderim, Queensland. She died there in 1973.

Events

1995 - 1995

Edna Walling's work featured in *Beyond the Picket Fence: Australian Women's Art in the National Library Collections*

1995 - 1995

Edna Walling's work featured in *The Living Sculptures of Edna Walling*

Published resources

Book

Gardens in Australia: their design and care, Walling, Edna, 1943

Cottage and garden in Australia, Walling, Edna, 1947

The Australian roadside, Walling, Edna, 1952

Country roads : the Australian roadside, Walling, Edna, 1985

Edna Walling's year, 1990

Letters to garden lovers, Walling, Edna, 2000

On the trail of Australian wildflowers, Walling, Edna, c1984

The vision of Edna Walling : garden plans 1920-1951, Dixon, Trisha and Churchill, Jennie, 1998

Gardens in Time : In the Footsteps of Edna Walling, Dixon, Trisha and Churchill, Jennie, 1988

Australian Women Photographers 1840 - 1960, Hall, Barbara and Mather, Jenni, 1986

The Happiest Days of My Life, Walling, Edna, 2008

Edited Book

The Edna Walling book of Australian garden design, Barrett, Margaret, 1980

The garden magic of Edna Walling, Barrett, Margaret, 1988

A gardener's log, Barrett, Margaret, 1985

Heritage : the national women's art book, 500 works by 500 Australian women artists from colonial times to 1955, Kerr, Joan, 1995

Resource

The Edna Walling Website, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Cinemedia, State Library of Victoria, 2001,
<http://www.abc.net.au/walling>

Edna Walling, Landscape Designer, Gardening Australia, 2000,
<http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/stories/s147137.htm>

Beyond the Picket Fence: Australian Women's Art in the National Library's Collection, Carr, Sylvia and National Library of Australia, 1995,
<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/36337/20030703-0000/www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/fence/picket.html>

The Markdale Experience,
<http://www.markdale.com>

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Resource Section

Edna Walling, 1995,
<https://www.daa0.org.au/bio/edna-walling/>

Walling, Edna Margaret (1895-1973), Watts, Peter, 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A160566b.htm>

Book Section

Edna Walling, Kerr, Joan, 1995

Play

Edna for the garden, Spinner, Suzanne, 1989

Newspaper Article

Mooroolbark village given heritage protection, Boulton, Martin, 2004

Site Exhibition

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders>

Archival resources

State Library of Victoria

[Exchange of correspondence and accounts, 1937 Feb. 5-Aug. 14. \[manuscript\].](#)

[Papers, 1962-1970. \[manuscript\].](#)

[Papers, 1937-1964 \[manuscript\].](#)

[Papers of Jean Galbraith, 1900-1990. \[manuscript\].](#)

[\[Edna Walling: Australian Art and Artists file\]](#)

[Papers, ca. 1940-ca. 1970. \[manuscript\].](#)

The University of Melbourne Archives

[Cuming Smith & Company Limited](#)

[University of Melbourne. Photograph Collection](#)

National Library of Australia

[\[Biographical cuttings on Edna Walling, architect, and horticulturalist, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals\]](#)

National Library of Australia, Ephemera Collection

[\[Walling, Edna: photography related ephemera material collected by the National Library of Australia\]](#)

Author Details

Anne Maxwell (with Morfia Grondas and Lucy Van)

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