

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by actress and playwright Sara Hardy, author of *The Unusual Life of Edna Walling*. So let's start with a basic introduction to Edna.

SH: Who is Edna Walling? Edna Walling was a landscape designer, horticulturalist, gardener, journalist, photographer, author, and fine drawer and painter of her watercolor garden designs. Born in 1895, Edna was a trouser-wearing, animal- and nature-loving, highly individual being. Her legacy has been lasting, literally embedded in the soil. A soft-designed village of Bickleigh Vale in Mooroolbark, which is east of Melbourne at the foot of the Dandenong Ranges, retains its unique beauty, and many of her large-scale landscape gardens have been well-preserved. Her trademark design features include fine flights of steps, well-proportioned pools, circular terraces, extensive pergolas, flagstone paths, low stone walls, dry stone walls, outdoor rooms, and lawns with curved, sweeping borders that create beautiful vistas that extend to wild, natural areas using native plants.

Edna liked to surprise you and entice you, drawing you toward some half-hidden garden path. Even in very small gardens, she could create the illusion of depth and space and beauty. Her touch of genius was to combine her horticultural knowledge with her design knowledge to produce a style all her own. Her use of stone walls in particular, terraced or circular, and stone steps was innovative at the time and provided a distinctive skeleton to the garden design, which was then fleshed out with her inspired choice of planting. She used exotics and/or native plants in her designs, these choices always depending on the literal landscape of the site, the soil, the architecture of the house and of course the desires of her client - to a degree anyway. Edna was forceful, determined, highly creative, unconventional and great fun to be with. She became passionate about ecology and conservation early in her career and was deeply concerned about safeguarding the natural beauty of the Australian landscape.

AT: You mentioned native species, in terms of one of the elements that she often incorporated and that's interesting not just because I am a big proponent of taking back the landscape from the rose bushes and planting natives, but also because she is not originally from Australia. Can you tell us a bit about how a girl from Devon ended up designing gardens in Melbourne?

SH: Yes, it's a very strange, massive leap. Edna wasn't even interested in gardens when she was a child but what happened was she had been very sick. She was born in, well she grew up in Devon and was very ill and her father used to take her up to Dartmoor which is north of Plymouth on the coast there in Devon. And the landscape of Dartmoor is full of rocky outcrops and undulations, dry stone walls and her father ran a shop that sold tools, nails, hammers and ironmongers, which is what they called it then. And Edna was a tomboy, interested in all those tools rather than cooking or sewing or any of the girly stuff that her sister did. And I think the formative aspect of walking around Dartmoor seeing how the landscape worked, the natural beauty and she was always talking about, "look let's not restrain nature, let her do her thing and if it self-roots, let it." She used to have this thing about putting potatoes in a bucket for planting silver birch trees. She said "okay, put five potatoes in a bucket, go to the area where you want to plant these trees, throw the bucket in the air, let the potatoes land and you plant that tree

wherever each of those potatoes lands, however close," because it's arbitrary, it's natural. Mind you she could be known to sort of move one of those potatoes along if she didn't quite like where it had landed.

So as a child her father used to say, "okay what's the distance between where we are now and that rocky outcrop over there?" or "how many yards do you think it's between here and that tree stump over there?" And after a while, she used to be able to answer the question without having to step it out. She had this innate sense of space. But all this was sort of subconscious because when the family left Devon and went to New Zealand initially, Edna thought she wanted to be a nurse. She wanted to do good and she started to train to be a nurse and then her father found a better job in Melbourne, so they all had to pack up and move to Melbourne. And Edna still wanted to be a nurse but she hadn't done enough schooling, she hated certain sort of study and she sort of flopped around, not knowing what to do with herself. And her mother, Margaret Walling, came up with the idea after many failed ideas. "There's this place called the Burnley School of Horticulture and Agriculture in the suburb of Burnley in Melbourne. Let's go and see if you can get in in there." And Edna says, she wrote a brief memoir that was never published, she said, "you know, I'd never thought of gardening." And when the interviewer said, is she - meaning Edna - "is she artistic?" Her mother said oh yes definitely and Edna thought, "what the hell she talking about?" But I think her mother knew her daughter far better than her daughter knew herself.

AT: So she designed more than 300 gardens between 1920 and 1960. So she was establishing a career when it was expected that women, generally speaking, would be homemakers. Did you find much in the way of how that impacted her trying to start this business and get her career going?

SH: Oh yes she was in the vanguard really as, they called them girl gardeners. There were very few of them the few that came out of the Burnley College, because we're actually talking about 1918 when Edna left the college having learned about horticulture and plowing and you know plants generally - almost nothing about landscape design by the way. There was a course that sort of touched on very limited aspects. So she was self-taught, but she liked it enough to want to set up her own business. She had no interest whatsoever in taking the conventional route of finding a husband and getting married and having a family - that never entered the equation for her. Some girls went to Burnley, they were sent by their parents and they used it as a sort of finishing school, a cheap finishing school where they would learn about flowers and how to arrange them. But that wasn't what Burnley did, and those girls didn't last very long because in the first week of Burnley, the teachers there would give the girls in particular the hardest tasks to do, you know, fill this wheelbarrow with soil and take it across that plank to the little island in the lake there. Edna did that. She did that with glee whereas a lot of the other girls thought, "oh I can't, I can't. I'm not strong enough" and all the rest of it. But Edna took very well to wearing the uniform of jodhpurs, shirt, with just an overskirt of modesty, because we are still talking about the 1900s, to show your legs when you were a woman was you know very risqué. But Edna took to all that. I think the tomboy aspect of her just kicked in. She also always called herself odd or a misfit. She was never going to follow the conventional path and her mother must have

recognized that.

And so when she left Burnley it was it was natural for her to say, "okay I'm going to make a living at this." And she started getting clients and working on their gardens and over time she began to see she could improve their gardens and suggested design changes. And these were very posh gardens in the posh end of Melbourne, and she knew people like the sister of Nellie Melba, the opera singer, and you know the very wealthy, well-to-do. And it was because she kind of came in on that level and was a lady enough to be able to talk to these people with intelligence and some force, that her ideas were taken up by the client. Especially, it's usually the women who employed a girl gardener - mind you for half the pay of a male gardener. But she stuck to it and started earning a living and developing her ideas. And gradually her name began to spread and the most important aspect of that also was she began to write about her ideas in popular magazines such as Home Beautiful. And she could draw her ideas very simply, almost cartoon-like but not much more eloquent than that. And so it was a two-pronged offensive, as it were - the practicality of doing the jobs but also writing and drawing the work.

And that was another part of why she was unique because there were other girl gardeners trying to do the same thing but it was Edna Walling who rose to the top and literally changed the face of Australian gardens. Because you know she was an artist ultimately, an artist who combined all her skills to create this beauty through extremely hard work.

AT: And even today her gardens, the ones that remain intact, are still considered to add value to real estate prices. Was she primarily working in Melbourne exclusively or did she venture further afield?

SH: She ranged over many states. She has done gardens in New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia, and Queensland. At the latter part of her life there she moved to a village on a mountain called Buderim, and I've been there and there's lots of dry stone walls all over the place, little patches of Edna in people's gardens. And those gardens still exist, in part at least, in all those states and her name traveled throughout Australia because she wrote five books and her magazine articles were always appearing in various publications so that people who lived absolutely in the middle of Australia, thousands of miles from anybody else would still know Edna Walling's name and read about what she was doing. And then they would practice her ideas because she would also write about practical hints on how you can do this yourself. She was always encouraging people, you know you're newly married, you want a little garden, this is how you do it and little practical suggestions tips, like how do you plant a tree? You dig a square hole, not a round one because if it's a round one the roots will just go round and round in a circle in that hole initially. If it's a square hole the roots are encouraged to spread out right from the start. So simple but everyone still tends to make a round hole, because you know the roots are balled up. But she was full of tips like that which is why she was so popular with everybody in her heyday because she knew how to speak to people and encouraged them to do their own thing.

AT: I actually checked a book out from my local library here in regional Victoria a couple months ago about how to attract birds to your garden and then I discovered very quickly that it was an

English book written by an English person for English audiences. Nothing I did in my garden was going to attract birds all the way from England to Australia. I love the idea that you've got a British person what I think of as decolonizing the landscape in terms of reclaiming it for native species. Was that really just her focus on making her designs reflect natural environments or was there something else going on there?

SH: Well I think initially she did bring Devon with her in her heart, and as I explained that sort of dark more landscape. She did recreate that and also she built her own cottage, which you know, it didn't have a thatch roof but apart from that was a stone cottage she built herself with her own hands - you'd swear it was a little Devon cottage. But as she explored the outer parts of Melbourne she went bushwalking a lot and she began to appreciate the natural environment of Australian landscapes and plants and she had a sort of epiphany moment where she realized she'd been planting all the wrong things, all the exotics. I mean later on she found the compromise, the balance which is what we do now. She said, look you choose the right plant for the right place. But she began to love and respect the natural Australian landscape and she worked very hard to protect it, like there are certain beautiful trees that she recognized only grew in certain areas of of Melbourne let alone other states. And she recognized if you cut down all these trees they're going to disappear and so she virtually was chaining herself to trees at some point, by writing letters and saying, we've got to preserve this not cut it down. So she was an eco warrior in that respect. So although she always carried Devon in her heart when she finally moved in her early 70s to Queensland that mountain, Buderim, she went back to, she said "oh I just like these little English flowers." But by this time she was aged, her body was worn out. you know she'd been wheeling wheelbarrows all her life um and she liked the pretty little, pretty Englishness. When you get older, you return to your origins I think, but her books reflected a very different theory entirely. It was all about conservation and respecting that and reproducing that in one's garden rather than copying the European. So she embraced Australia in that way, I think.

AT: As a fellow transplant to Australia who loves it here, that is something I can relate to.

SH: well me too I'm from England I'm from Devon in fact. And so I understood exactly the landscape that she saw because I saw it as a child as well exactly the same. And that's in my heart but my little garden has a mixture of exotics and natives plants and they all get along very well.

AT: Now when I first saw the term landscape designer, that sounds like a fairly lovely, artistic job for a woman to be doing, but from what you've been describing of her experience in school and later it was a bit more hands-on than that, shall we say.

SH: Indeed. Edna Walling was a petite woman with her standard shirt jodhpurs and hat uniform. And she was surprisingly strong because she had to heft manure around to fertilize the soil. She had to lift heavy things all day long really as a gardener. And this is not pretty flowers, this is not flower-arranging, although of course you're arranging flowers by planting them in the garden in

particular ways. But it was heavy going stuff, not when many women were interested in pursuing that sort of career, not that the openings were there. It was just a very unique kind of mind that Edna had, to see the possibilities and to use what she was good at, which which she sort of found by surprise almost. She just fell into it because her mother thought, "oh we're trying that." But no, there weren't many opportunities. There were some women artists who painted flowers beautifully but how many women could actually make a career and actually earn a living and be independent with this kind of pursuit, I would suggest would be minimal.

AT: It is always funny to me when men try to claim that women are dainty and delicate and weak because I think it's a very classist thing a lot of the time because there were obviously plenty of women doing back-breaking work, whether it was farming, laundry I mean it's a long list, I'm gonna stop. But the idea that you know we've got these dainty women who can't even be asked to pick something up was definitely not reflective of most women's experiences I think at any time or place in world history.

SH: Well I agree 100 percent. We talk about the laundress, hauling those heavy baskets of wet clothes to the line. Working class women were working very hard physically so much at the time, of cleaning, you know, all that and those long hours. What could you do? You could be a typist, you could teach maybe, you could be a nurse - being a nurse was, it's no picnic. But that might be more, and teaching might be, a more middle-class pursuit for a woman who didn't want to marry or couldn't marry because there'd been a war and all the men were dead or damaged. That was an era also Edna grew up in or or was working in, when she started during the second World War but I found no place where Edna was attracted to any males or fawned over any males or wished to be engaged. Whereas for instance one of her great supports was, she often trained up a student from Burnley. Once she was established, she had some terrific friends who were her assistants initially and then she would give some students from Burnley a chance, female ones who used to live in or live on her village of Bickley Vale that I mentioned earlier, in a barn or a shed or or something she built. These women she trained up, they were fantastic, they learned so much and then they went off and got married, which infuriated Edna no end because then she'd have to start all over again. She expected them to stay, she couldn't understand why an earth they'd want to go off and do the other thing. A lot of them or at least one in particular, Gwyneth Crouch, for instance, she did go off and get married but she continued her work as a horticulturist and indeed her daughter Sue Forrester continued that legacy to this day, and she has a wonderful property of native plants and billabong and it's gorgeous. And that's the sort of lineage, that's a beautiful ongoing line from Edna where women gradually have done their own thing more and more. And you know the feminist thing, you can do it all if you really really work hard, you can have a career and a family and children and husband and you know cook the dinner. But Edna usually had an assistant. You know, every working woman needs a wife. Edna had an assistant and she usually had meals prepared for her, someone did her washing and laid out her jodhpurs each morning. These assistants worked very hard to to maintain Edna so that Edna can do what she could do best. She couldn't have done it without that, but she had to pay for it, and she did willingly.

AT: Yeah and that is something that's come up a couple times in different conversations that I've had is the unpaid and unrecognized work of wives and so when we're talking about she needed "a wife," what we're talking about is, she needed someone to do all of the domestic labor that is just necessary to getting by in your day-to-day life while she goes and does her professional work.

SH: Indeed it's that support, that silent support that, you know, men had. Naturally all the architects in Melbourne and the landscape designers in Melbourne at the time, they would have had wives or at least sisters or mothers they would be living at home or whatever, supporting them so that they simply worked. They came home and they had a meal ready, waiting for them whatever time it was. It was and still is so much harder for the single woman to maintain a career without that kind of unique support that a wife provides, the emotional as well as the practical, all those suggestions you know the sound board, talking things out with a wife. It's a very interesting area, which people like you are beginning to explore and read and uncover and tell us about. Walter Burley Griffin and his wife -

AT: Marion Mahony Griffin, I was thinking of her as well when you mentioned architects and unsung wives.

SH: Yes, now we begin to say the two names together, but in in their time she was the also-ran. You know, we now learn that she did so much and she was just as clever as he was. We recognize that now, but she's just one in a million really.

AT: And even when we're looking at her work with Frank Lloyd Wright, his name was the one that everyone remembered but how much of his aesthetics came from working with her, and how much did she contribute to that? And we really have no way of knowing, not least because most of the drawings that survive of his work were by her.

SH: Oh wow.

AT: When we're talking about the fact that she never married, she didn't seem interested in that. We also know that she didn't conform to gender presentations of the time, wearing pants, cropping her hair short, which obviously had practical benefits. But it does make me curious because my understanding is that although her work, there's plenty of documentation and publicity and everything about that. But her personal life was very private and not particularly well-documented, so is there anything about her private life that you found to indicate that she may have been something other than cisgender and heterosexual, or was it moreso she was just following what was most practical for her?

SH: When I was writing the biography, I sense that, she had so many close friendships with women. I sense that she was probably a lesbian even if she would never have caught herself that. In that era, the word was hardly known in any case and there was a lot of ignorance about homosexuality generally speaking or an absolute aversion and the fact of women having a

sexuality at all, to indicate that women could be passionate with other women was a novel idea that no one wanted to talk about. So I feel that Edna may have been somewhat ignorant about who she was. I now would describe her as a lesbian. Eventually I did find a letter in my research, I had almost finished the book and thought I wouldn't have any kind of evidence as it were to back up what I thought, so I hadn't really expressed more than tentatively what I've just said but I think if Edna loved anyone passionately it was an actress and journalist called Esme Johnson. In the late 1920s, '30s, I don't know how they met but they both worked for Home Beautiful magazine and I think it was perhaps Edna came to visit Esme's garden and they struck up a friendship from there. And there is this letter that Edna wrote. It's full of longing and a certain amount of desperation. Edna's been away working on a major landscape job. She's come back for some reason, she's in an empty house in Melbourne, looking after that garden or working on it. And Esme lives just a little way up the road from where Edna is at the present moment. And even though there's a telephone, Edna says "I really need to see you. I don't like talking to you on the phone. I don't feel my natural self and in any in any case I feel that someone may be listening in." And Esme was married at the time and in those days, you could pick up a phone in another room and you could hear a conversation quite easily. And also Edna says, "I will bottle my emotions, just come, we can just talk." She's saying, this is my version of what she's saying, "I won't express the love I feel for you. I just want you to come and be with me as friends and we'll sit on the stoop and have a cup of tea." But interestingly she does describe the bedding arrangement in the house. It's most peculiar, that she says, "I've got this set-up here. There's no other furniture. A couple of you know wooden crates but I've got this bed in here and there there are two of them." Why has she said that? We'll never know but the complete letter is in the book. The other thing she does as she writes instead of a full stop she uses the x mark as a full stop which I see as kisses. She doesn't do it anywhere else, in all her writings, nowhere else does she use an x as a full stop. So I think that's another indication of some kind of love, some sort of expression of passion, unrequited or not, that I think is evidence of where Edna's passions lay.

And there's also evidence that she knew other lesbians. There's a bookshop owner called Margareta Webber, whose partner was Dr Jean Littlejohn and they were they were almost open as partners. They lived together and Edna Walling did their garden for them. And in those days between the '20s, '30s, '40s, even '50s, two women to living together was not unusual and a lot of lesbians could go under the radar just by living together in, you know, two separate bedrooms nothing to see here that's how lesbians got away with it as it were. If they were found out, if they were discovered, the world fell in. It was horrific in those days and it's so much better now. There are still problems, people still have difficulty with homosexuality, lesbianism, queer, trans all the rest of it. We're still having to fight that fight of saying, "we've got to broaden our horizons here and understanding." But for Edna, I sense that she did have at least one relationship with a woman and if you have one you probably have more than one. She writes a story about how a friend of hers, Alwyn Connors, when she'd had half built her cottage at Mooroolbark, this friend Alwyn arrives I think by a horse later in the evening, late enough to know there was too late to go back home to Melbourne because it was dark. And she basically invited herself to stay the night. And I bumped into a woman at an open garden scheme at Bickleigh Vale Village years ago. I was selling my book at the open day and she came up to me to say "that was my aunt

and she was a lesbian, Alwyn Connors.” And that was further evidence because when you're a biographer of someone, you never end. You never finish, you're always finding new information and she said, “yes she was mad about horses and women.” So there's lots of indicators that Edna perhaps struggled with her sexuality because she'd never settled down with anyone except a very close friend, Lorna Fielden, who was a teacher and a poet. They were very close, they lived in the village together and when Edna moved to Buderim in Queensland, Lorna, first of all said, “I'm not going there.” And then a year or so later she did go there and Edna found her cottage and they lived close by. Now I think that that was a very close friendship, potentially a passionate friendship but I just I don't feel the heat in it like I do with Esme Johnson. And interestingly Esme and Edna kept in touch all their lives and Esme kept that letter. Of all the things, she kept that letter and thank goodness her niece kept that letter too and she handed it to me when I was doing my research.

AT: I think one of the bigger issues with queer erasure in history is the lack of documentation and when we're talking about you know, Anne Lister's diary for example. Apparently. I believe it was her grand-nephew found it hidden in the wall of the estate and he and a friend decoded it but once they realized what it said, his friend said “oh you've got to destroy this, this can't come out.” And instead the nephew put it back in the wall. And that's now one of the most, I would say most interesting extant examples of queer documentation that we have in terms of being complete. But even then Anne Lister wrote it in code, hid it in a wall - like this wasn't someone who felt safe enough to have this lying around where anyone could read it. And I feel like the people who try to pretend queer people haven't always been here, look at the lack of documentation as proof that there have never been queer people before recent decades. Whereas in fact people like them and the fear that someone might have for their safety because of those people are more likely the cause of that lack of documentation.

SH: Oh for sure, the stories of women's papers just being chucked out when they die by a relative. So much we'll never know about. And even if it was found, as you say was often burnt immediately. But this letter - this letter survived. It's amazing. It's a wonderful find and the one, I think the only, true expression, the other side of Edna Walling that you don't you don't see anywhere else. Finally, I thought, here she is, here's that emotional side. Here's the love and the longing and the passion, it's right here in these words. I'm holding it in my hand. I don't know if Esme turned up or not but there were a couple of beds ready and waiting if she did.

AT: So you've mentioned that she was a prolific writer. She was a regular contributor to The Australian, Home Beautiful. She authored multiple books and she also developed photography skills to accompany her writing. So I guess her mom was right and she was artistic.

SH: Yes, she was. She did study drawing and painting at school in Plymouth, and geometry. And those were the two things that she was good at, interestingly. Both useful in what she did later. She just had that innate talent, either you can draw or you can't. I can't. But she could and it's the style. She's got a signature style in everything she does, the drawings, certainly the gardens and even even the photographs if you get your eye in or if you certainly see a plan of



hers without a certain signature, you just know that's Edna Walling. And these days, those plans are worth a great deal of money, beautiful watercolors. They're works of art in their own right now, just as her gardens are. So yes, she learned photography from other photographers who helped her and she was self-taught. There is a fabulous photo of herself, we call them selfies now, but she must have been one of the first to do it. She takes a photo of herself looking at a mirror which, she's got a brand new camera. She's looking down, she's mature woman by this time and so you see her totally concentrated looking down into the camera, into the frame and she would be seeing herself upside down, which is what the cameras did in those days as you looked, and snapped. And so you see her as a mature woman. She did a few of those. I've got some of those photos in my book, which show her aging when she was in Buderim in Queensland she took the last one. She dragged a mirror out into the garden for the light and she took a photo of herself as an old woman in her late 70s and it's sort of, it's beautiful and kind of heart-rending because you can see, god she's aged and she's got the hat again, the floppy hat, the shirt - one of the buttons isn't done up properly. She's a little disheveled and she always was. And she's taking this photo of herself, she's recording "this is me now. This is possibly the last time I'm going to do this and I'm doing it." it's interesting, isn't it, that she chose to do that? I don't know why, I mean it we all, people are taking photos - I don't. People take photos of themselves all the time now but I suppose she just wanted to mark the fact, "this is me now" because she'd been doing that through time since she got her camera.

AT: That feels like it speaks to an honesty that seems very in keeping with her character from what you've described.

SH: Yes I suppose I should say that she used that camera to take fabulous photos of the Australian countryside and plants and her own gardens. And she used her own photographs and other people's in her books. She wrote five five books all up and several books have come subsequently which are sort of collages of that and her gardening letters and articles. But one of the things that made her books popular was the style of her writing and these exquisite photos that, you know, she just had an eye. She had an artistic eye. She knew nature had made a picture for her, all she did was take take the photo but of course you have to have the eye to see a particular setup of that picture to its best advantage and she did that beautifully.

AT: There's also something a little disingenuous about saying that nature created this beautiful picture for me and all I took it, when you are also in turn creating all these beautiful gardens reflecting that nature if she in turn recreated what nature had created for her.

SH: Yes, yes that's right, it's all a construct. A garden is a construct, you're absolutely right there but I suppose with Edna, she was being informed by nature as much as possible and reproducing what nature told her but within that construct yes for sure. It's like painting a picture isn't it - you go out and you look at a landscape and then you put that picture, paint that picture within a frame, and a garden is within a frame or several frames, viewing frames, yes.

AT: Now I'm always curious when I talk to someone who has dedicated a fair amount of their

time to researching and writing about a particular person's story, what inspired you to want to do that and I think you have a particularly interesting origin story for your connection with Edna

SH: Well it's very peculiar because I was an actress and I played Edna Walling once. I was Edna Walling once - when you perform a part, you have to get inside the character especially if they were alive once. You have a great responsibility to interpret them to the best of your ability. There was a play called Edna for the Garden by Suzanne Spinner, which was set in the Fitzroy Gardens in Melbourne. So it was an outdoor play and it was about her life as far as it was known at that point. I think it was the late 1980s it went on. People used to brought their picnics and it was a moveable feast. It was set in four different areas of the garden to best display what Edna was talking about and about her life. And so I had to I had to research Edna and I wore the jodhpurs, the shirt, the tie, the hat. And I romped around and though it was a good play and it was very successful, lots of people came I always felt there was a lack in depth as to who this woman was, what pushed her, all the things I've been speaking about here, and her sexuality. I am a lesbian. I, you know, takes one to know one and I thought, you know what, I reckon she loved women. I reckon she did. There's this hint and that hint and some of the photos she took, the women all around her. But the play could only dig so far and you know, we were talking about evidence earlier. There wasn't really evidence. So ten years later, I'm a playwright as well and I was thinking, you know what, I'd like to research Edna again and write a play for a proper theatre indoors and explore that aspect of her emotional life that we didn't, couldn't see romping around outdoors. And I started researching and the more I found and the more I failed to write this play the more this voice said, "Sara this is a biography. Sara! Sara, it's a biography. You've got to write a book." And I said, "I don't know how to write a book," but that's what I started to do. And because my own childhood, I was born in Devon, brought up so close to where Edna had her childhood. I had holidays on Dartmoor. I knew so much about her early life. I understood the red soil that she'd walked on. I knew it. So she was a very strange part of me and I started on that journey. It took five years of research. I spoke to all these people. I found the story of the woman behind the work. I'm not a horticulturist, I was an actress, a playwright. It was very nerve-wracking to be writing about a landscape designer not knowing much about landscape design or gardening. I mean I have a garden I potter in but I couldn't tell you the name of so many plants. So it was difficult but I found enough to make it real, I suppose, and I found a way to write it. And I found, to my surprise I found a publisher even when I hadn't quite finished it, Allen and Unwin, who said "yes, yes we'll publish that." And of course since it was published, Edna Walling's never left me because here I am talking to you. That book came out in 2005 and I'm still talking about Edna Walling. And I was her once in a play and some of her will always be in me. I even look a bit like or I did when I was cast to play her - so be it!

AT: It was meant to be.

SH: Well I think it is uncanny, the bit about that we're both Devonians, proud Devonians and, you know, we both left England and came to Melbourne and find our way here. You know yourself that it's hard to make your way in another country. Even though you love the new country you're from somewhere else and that's in your bones. But you're in a new country and

you make your way.

AT: She definitely did.

SH: She did. She made a lasting, lasting legacy. People still go to open days to see her gardens and there are major ones still intact and people proudly protect those gardens now because as you said at the beginning, they add value to a property. That's the very least of it but it is a way of knowing that people are not going to you know, take a bulldozer to those beautiful steps or whatever she's created, or that pool she put in, the reflective pool, I think she's safe. She's often referenced in other books. She's part of the garden history language now. I think she deserves more recognition. Someone has taken an option out on my book to make a feature film about Edna Walling. I believe in long shots frankly but this one's a very long shot. But yes someone's discovered my book. They're called Lowick Films and they intend to make a film about Edna Walling based on my book which is very exciting. So you know she lives on and on and on. It's a wonderful thing.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast and remember - well-behaved women rarely make history.