

**DINING IN STYLE:  
UNCOVERING THE GASTRONOMIC HISTORY OF BELEURA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The objective of this thesis is to produce a gastronomic history of Beleura, an Italianate mansion built from 1863 to 1865 at Mornington, Victoria. Owned by a succession of wealthy families, Beleura has been a family home, private school, vice-regal residence and now a house museum and cultural centre. Beleura is significant not only for its grand architecture and majestic gardens, but also because of the carefully preserved contents belonging to the Tallis family who owned the house for eighty years. John Tallis, the last owner of Beleura, bequeathed the property to the people of Victoria. By constructing a microhistory of food provision at a household level, the thesis provides a commentary on the evolution of culinary practices in Australia from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. Using a combination of material culture, oral history and documentary evidence, the thesis examines how food was sourced, stored, preserved, cooked and served at Beleura.

Beleura throughout most of its history was essentially a rural property with significant land holdings surrounding it. A large proportion of food consumed in the household was sourced from its own gardens, orchards and pastures. Meals at Beleura were sometimes elaborate, with distinct influences from French and Italian cuisine, but for much of its history, food followed predictable lines, deviating little from the general populace. One area that distinguished Beleura from other houses was the speed of introduction of new technology such as domestic refrigeration. In other ways, Beleura remained steadfastly Victorian in style, particularly in the reliance on domestic staff long after they had disappeared elsewhere. This was reflected in the layout of the house with a distinct separation between service areas and the rooms occupied by the family. This arrangement remained until the end of World War II. Beleura is an ideal place to study the evolution of kitchen design as it has five intact and operable kitchens reflecting different design approaches ranging from the remnants of an early detached kitchen through to a small 1950s kitchen integrated into the living areas of the house.

In the reduced scale of microhistory, artifacts are particularly important because of their direct and intimate relationship to the individuals who used them. This project affords opportunities to consider appropriate methodologies for the interpretation of material culture along with their limitations. Artifacts do not give up their meaning easily and the few accepted methodologies that have been developed for assessing material culture are largely not appropriate for the mostly functional objects that are encountered in kitchens. However, with careful observation and a simplified approach that focuses primarily on the significance of the artifact with respect to gastronomy, the systematic evaluation of familiar household objects can be an effective way to reveal cultural history. The meaning of artifacts can be ambiguous and unreliable, but when combined with documentary evidence and oral history, material culture can effectively evoke the atmosphere of kitchens past and give voice to the usually silent and often forgotten people who have played a role in gastronomic history.

## **DECLARATION**

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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## **ETHICS APPROVAL**

The oral history component of this research project, consisting of five interviews with subjects associated with Beleura, was reviewed and approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval Number H-2012-173.



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Partners play a huge role in any project such as this. The reassuring conversations, soothing cups of tea and wise admonitions to not take it all too seriously are a necessary part of this research. I would therefore like to dedicate this thesis to my wife, Julie, who first suggested that I take a look at Beleura and who believed that I could undertake this project. I also dedicate this thesis to John Tallis who committed his life to the custodianship of Beleura and created a special place of immense cultural significance. Only through such a generous act was this research project possible.

## ABBREVIATIONS

cm – centimetre (length, Metric system)  
kg – kilogram (mass, Metric system)  
lb – pound (weight, Imperial system)  
oz – ounce (weight, Imperial system). 16 oz = 1 lb  
kg/m<sup>3</sup> – kilogram per cubic metre (density, Metric system)  
°C – Celsius (temperature)  
psi – pounds per square inch (pressure, Imperial system)  
kPa – kilopascals (pressure, Metric system)  
kWh – kilowatt hour (electrical energy, Metric system)  
£ – pound (Australian currency, pre-decimalization)

Note: In quoted recipes, the original measurement units have been retained. 1 kg = 2.205 lb