

Beleura

Open 10 November 2005
Open Garden Scheme 2005-2006

Beleura is a house and garden of outstanding heritage significance to Victoria, which is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR 319). It is one of just over 2,000 registered places, which have been assessed as significant at the state-level for their heritage values.

Beleura's history

Situated on Beleura Hill between the Mornington Golf Course and the cliff-top, Beleura is an important part of the historic townscape of Mornington. Beleura was built in 1863 for James Butchart, a Scot who arrived in Melbourne in 1842 aged 19, and made his fortune selling sheep and cattle to the gold miners.

Later owners included shipping entrepreneur Charles Edward Bright, businessman and politician Caleb Joshua Jenner, and pastoralist Robert Smith, father of philanthropist Helen Macpherson Smith. These families all used Beleura as a summer retreat.

After its subdivision in 1915 a reduced but still substantial Beleura was bought by George Tallis, the theatrical entrepreneur. In 1948 it passed to his son, John, who improved and embellished the property in the manner of an Italian estate. John died in 1996, leaving the estate to be managed by the Tallis Foundation for the benefit and education of the people of Victoria. In the last five years the house and garden have been restored: "The garden has not been restored to a particular period, but reflects John Tallis's love of plants and his travels in Italy." [Kerr Forsyth]



View of the garden from the house



Beleura – front view

Beleura's Heritage Significance

Architectural Significance

The house is one of the most elaborate examples of a single-storeyed mid-Victorian Italianate house in the state. It was built in brick on granite footings with slate roofs. It is a symmetrical house with a balustraded parapet above the main façade. An elegant colonnade verandah of Corinthian columns supports a separate entablature (frieze) with urns, and returns to face the side wings.

"The relationship of the side wings is most unusual and significant...The colonnade with its own entablature dwarfed by the balustraded parapet is a particularly distinctive motif. [RNE].

The tower was built later. Beleura has since been altered, renovated and added to.

Historical Significance

The house, outbuildings, garden, grounds, interiors, contents and archival material encapsulate the life of the distinguished theatrical and musical Tallis family. Although at times eccentric and unconventional, John Tallis's enhancement and embellishment of Beleura are important aspects of its story of wealth and culture. [CMP]



Significance of the Garden

Three main periods are featured in the garden: the nineteenth century drives, the rear courtyard and the specimen trees; the early twentieth century additions by the Tallis family, such as the formal pool designed by architect Harold Desbrowe Annear; and the highly individual embellishment by John Tallis, re-designing the mid-20th C. formal garden on the basis of his Mediterranean travels.

The nineteenth century drives and outer grounds provide a context for the house and garden. These retain the original plantings of Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*), Monterey Pine (*Pinus radiata*) and Lemon Scented Gum (*Corymbia citriodora*). Some features, such as the Lemon Scented Gums and the lily pond now on the golf course, are no longer within the current ownership but are important markers of the extent and design of the original garden and grounds.

The entrance to Beleura is lined with lemon-scented gums (*Corymbia citriodora*) planted about 1920 by George Tallis. A fountain designed mainly by architect Harold Desbrowe Annear is set into the lawn and edged in babies' tears and dianthus. Behind a screen of espaliered apples and pears is a large decorative vegetable garden – once the site of Tallis's mother's rose garden – bound by a low step-over hedge of apples.

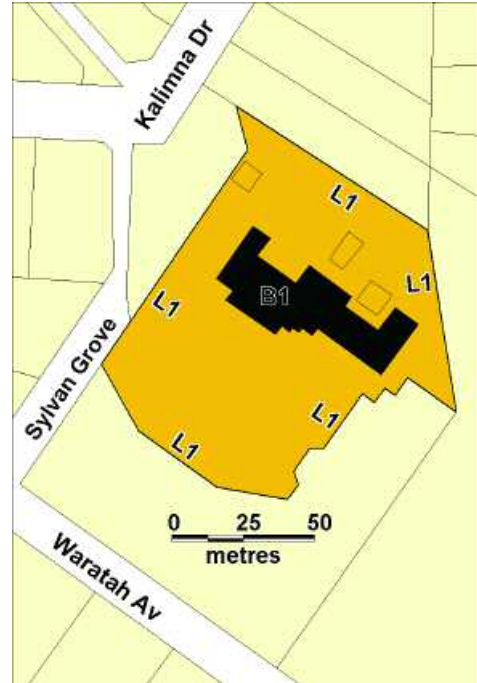
Receipts from nearby Lintons nursery, which was established in 1937, were used to guide the restoration of the garden at Beleura. There are banks of agave, swathes of plectranthus and rosemary, and hedges of the native hebe and golden diosma.

Who puts places on the Heritage Register, and what does it mean?

The Heritage Council of Victoria decides which places are of heritage value at the state-level, and should be added to the Register. Being on the Heritage Register is a recognition of the place's outstanding importance to the state. Registered places are eligible to apply for financial assistance to maintain or restore the place. Owners can also request expert advice from

Heritage Victoria, whose staff include architects, planners, information specialists, archaeologists, horticulturists, etc.

If the owners of a registered place want to make major changes to it, Heritage Victoria staff will work with them to achieve the changes with the least possible impact on its heritage values. It is not widely realised that 95% of applications for permits to alter registered places are approved.



Caption

Find out what else is on the Victorian Heritage Register on www.heritage.vic.gov.au or ring Heritage Victoria on 03 9637 9475.

In compiling these notes on Beleura the Heritage Council acknowledges the use of:

1. the National Trust's website at <http://www.natstrust.com.au/info.asp?pg=Beleura>
2. Register of the National Estate, Beleura details at http://www.deh.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_detail;place_id=5835
3. Beleura Conservation Plan, prepared for the Tallis Foundation by Nigel Lewis Richard Aitken Pty Ltd, March 1999.
4. Holly Kerr Forsyth's gardening column in the Australian, 1-2 October 2005, p.64, "Curtain call at Beleura,"