

In the Kitchen at the Moorna Bush Inn

Jeannette Hope, Wilfred Shawcross & Sarah Watts



Moorna Town

Moorna Bush Inn was situated in old Moorna Town (1850-60), about 35km west of Wentworth at the Murray Darling Junction. While the town was short-lived, the Bush Inn traded from the 1850s till 1899. It was an important stop on the Blanchetown-Wentworth coach route and continued as a mail change until at least 1912. It also serviced the riverboat trade as well as the employees of the surrounding pastoral station, also called Moorna. By 1921 the building was a ruin, and today there are no standing remains.

When Hope and Shawcross excavated the site in 2003-4, we found that the kitchen floor of the Bush Inn was very well-preserved, and the rubbish dumps contained a remarkable amount of animal bone. This has allowed us to speculate about cooking and menus at the pub and analyse the procurement and butchering of meat.

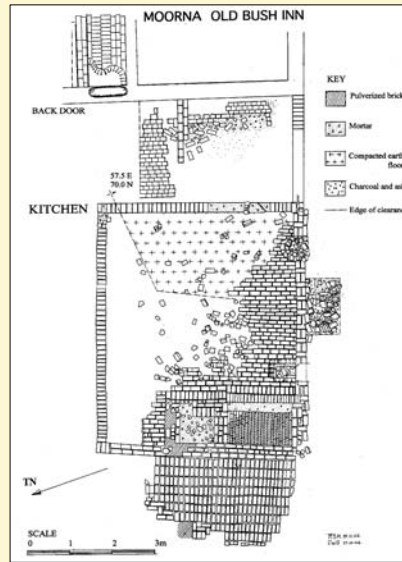
The Bush Inn Kitchen

The kitchen of the Bush Inn was a separate wing at the back of the building. Part of a beautifully brick paved floor survives. Along the back wall are the brick bases of a cast iron fuel stove and a brick bread oven. This arrangement is typical of early kitchens, as shown in the photograph of the Nulla Shearers' Quarters Kitchen. The kitchen burnt down probably after the Inn was abandoned – there are thick layers of ash between the fallen bricks of the south wall. A 1901 penny was found in the ash.

Food At The Bush Inn

The meat diet was predominantly beef and lamb/mutton. Sheep would have been easy to procure, because the Bush Inn was surrounded by a sheep station. When bullocks were occasionally slaughtered by the station, the Innkeepers got a share of the meat. Chickens and geese were kept. Wild game was mainly waterfowl and fish. No kangaroos were eaten. The possum may have been a pet, and the bat – who knows?

From the bones, we know that sheep came to the kitchen as whole carcasses and were totally consumed. Most of the beef came from limb joints. Pork is rare – there is only one head in the sample analysed. The carcasses were cut up with a heavy chopper. The nature of the bone fragments indicates that marrow was extracted, and stews and soups were prepared.



The Innkeepers

1865-1874	John Coombs
1875-1880	Charles Lambert
1880-1881	James Wicks
1881-87, 89-91	John Nichols
1898-1899	Frederick Plush

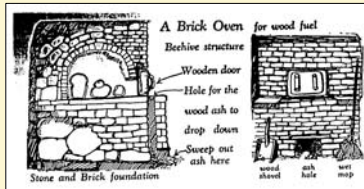
The Cooks



Sarah Coombs

Rebecca Lambert

Mary Nichols



Coombs Fruit Cake

Ingredients
3cups dried fruit
½ cup chopped dried apricots
¼ cup walnuts or almonds
1 cup coconut
1½ cups brown sugar
2 cups SR flour
Black tea for soaking

Method
Soak all fruit in black tea for several hours. Cover well. Add sugar and coconut and mix thoroughly. Fold in flour and nuts. Place in a greased and lined loaf tin 20cm x 20cm. Bake in slow oven 1½ to 2 hours. Cool in tin.

Handed down from Sarah Coombs, provided by great granddaughters: Joan D'Velle Smith, Vanda Barnes and Nona Wood.

Kitchen Inventory 1875

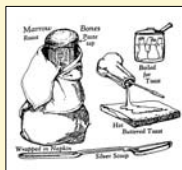
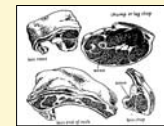
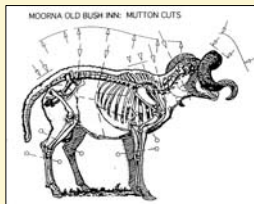
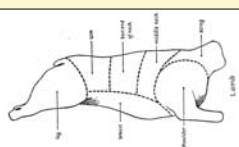
Large tin tea pot	Iron box
Flour sieve	Two candle moulds
Work box	Bellows
Safe	Six tin bedroom candle sticks
Two brass pillar candle sticks	Two jelly moulds
Two enamel dishes	Two delf pie dishes
One bread tray	Four large meat dishes
Two small meat dishes	Tin coffee pot
Small tea pot	Large tin tea pot
Three vegetable dishes & cover	Three shoe brushes
Slice	Ladle
Basting spoon	Salt cellar
Stew pan	Steamer and sauce pan
Two frying pans	Colander
Tea kettle	Milk pan
Dipper	Two large wash up tin dishes
Oval boiler	Iron pot
Fountain	Galvanised iron tub
Two keys	Camp oven

In August 1867 stock inspector Andrew McClymont had dinner at Coomb's Bush Inn. The meal cost 2/-, drinks 4/-.

Thanks to...

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Drawings from Bee Nilson 1947 The Penguin Cookery Book; Dorothy Hartley 1954 Food in England.

Animal Remains In Rubbish Dump FHI				
Taxon	N Bones	%	MNI	Kg Meat
Mutton	1638	64.7	11	300
Beef	157	6.2	3	400
Pork	10	0.4	2	3
Fish	316	12.5	6	45
Fowl	192	7.6	[10]	20
Bird's eggs	144	5.7	3	0.5
Mussel	46	1.8	[5]	0.5
Yabby	14	0.6	2	0.5
Rabbit	7	0.3	[2]	1.5
Turtle	6	0.2	[2]	0.5
Dog	1	0.04	-	-
Bat	1	0.04	-	-
Possum	1	0.04	-	-

Bird Bones

Common
Domestic fowl, Domestic goose.
Grey Teal, Pacific Black Duck, Black Swan

Rare
Australian Bustard, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Heron, Pigeon, Thrush-sized & smaller passerine, Emu eggshell

Bone Fragmentation

The bone fragmentation at Moorna is very similar to that at the Greek Paleolithic site Klithi, close to the LGM ice-fields. What can the periglacial hunters of Greece have in common with the presumably well-heeled patrons of the Moorna Bush Inn on the Murray?

