

**FORTUNA VILLA  
HOUSE, GARDEN, GATES  
CHUM STREET**

**SURVEY DATE: 1991-2**

**AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION REGISTER: R**

**STUDY GRADING: A**

**CONSTRUCTION DATE: 1869-**

**FIRST OWNER : LANSELL, GEORGE**



**CITATION:**

**History**

'This mansion was the home of George Lansell, Australia's 'Quartz King,' so named for his extensive involvement in mining the deep quartz reefs for gold. Though he had amassed a fortune by the time he died in 1906, he had started humbly enough as a brewery worker in Margate, Kent. Lured by the tales of their brother, Wooton, George and William Lansell decided to try their luck in Australia. After a short time digging unsuccessfully in South Australia they came to Bendigo where they made soap and candles. Shrewd investments, and a belief in deep

**BENDIGO & EAGLEHAWK HERITAGE STUDY-SIGNIFICANT SITES  
GRAEME BUTLER & ASSOCIATES**

mining which sustained him through many failures, eventually paid off. He was already wealthy when he bought Ballerstedt's claim on Victoria Hill for 30,000 pounds, with Fortuna Villa included. That mine made him a millionaire.

The two-storey villa that Lansell bought from Ballerstedt, he modestly enhanced with the addition of an ornamental cast-iron verandah and balcony in 1875. Mr. Lansell went on a tour of the world in 1876, during which he visited the ruins at Pompeii. On his return he had a replica of the famous Pompeii fountain made for 'Fortuna,' but the major additions followed his return to Sandhurst in 1887, after an absence of six years. He returned with a wife and family and a need for more space to accommodate them and his acquisitions of paintings and sculptures.

He extended the house to the west and included a third storey (with lantern light) on this section. A mansard roof, added in 1890, gave a third storey to part of the original house, and a new billiard room was built behind the conservatory in 1893<sup>1</sup>.

The last major additions were undertaken during 1904-5. The mansard roof was extended to cover all the original building, a turret was built adjacent to the entrance porch and a major restyling both inside and out took place. A flat-roofed gymnasium was added to the third storey. The overall result of these additions could not possibly be described as harmonious, yet there is much to interest the visitor in a house which may have lacked an overall plan but not money<sup>2</sup>.

#### Other sources:

A successful German speculator, Theodore Ballerstedt, purchased a mine for 3 pounds from another German, Mr. Wittcheibes, in the 1850s according to Hetherington, or the 1860s according to Kellaway.<sup>3</sup> Theodore Ballerstedt developed the mine, naming it 180 because the length of the reef was 180 yards.<sup>4</sup> He and his son built a 'substantial single-storey residence' and named it Fortuna.<sup>5</sup> Ballerstedt was Chairman of Directors of the Victorian Mining Company, to which George Lansell, Fortuna's next owner, was a contributor.<sup>6</sup>

Having made his fortune from the 180 mine, Ballerstedt sold it and Fortuna to George Lansell in the early 1870s for £30,000 and returned to Germany.<sup>7</sup> Fortuna was described as 'a relatively small and plainly appointed one-storey villa' at that time.<sup>8</sup>

Under Lansell's ownership a three-storeyed west wing was added to the house and a mansard roof, added in 1890, gave a third storey to part of the original house.<sup>9</sup> A new billiard room was built behind the conservatory in 1893.<sup>10</sup> In 1904-5, major renovations were made to Fortuna, both inside and out. The mansard roof was extended to cover all the original building, a flat-roofed gymnasium was added to the third storey and a turret built near the entrance porch.<sup>11</sup> George Lansell died in 1906 but the Lansell family kept Fortuna until 1934, a year after Lansell's widow died.<sup>12</sup> The house was sold in the depression for £2,400.<sup>13</sup> The furnishings, including a collection of pictures and other art objects from around the world, were auctioned in an eight day sale.

Fortuna's fate became uncertain for some years after its sale. A mining company bought the house, intending to preserve it.

However, within a few years the company closed and Fortuna faced demolition and subdivision of its grounds.<sup>14</sup> In 1942 the Commonwealth Government acquired the property and the Army's Land Headquarters Cartographic Company (now the Army Headquarters Survey Regiment), have occupied the property since that time, making

1 Butcher & Flanders p.80  
2 Butcher & Flanders p.80  
3 Hetherington, J., 'Witness To Things Past'. 1964,p.58; Kellaway, C., Research Into Fortuna, 1983, in NTA FN1177  
4 NTA FN1177  
5 Kellaway, C., op.cit., p.2  
6 ibid.  
7 Cusack, Frank, 'A Brace of Millionaires'. *BHP Journal*, 1975, in NTA FN1177  
8 Hetherington, John, op.cit., p.58  
9 Butcher, M. & Flanders, G., *Bendigo Historic Buildings*, 1987, p.81  
10 ibid.  
11 ibid.  
12 ibid.  
13 ibid.  
14 ibid.

only essential alterations. Only the largest<sup>1</sup> of the six ornamental lakes remains, but the trees and shrubs planted by Lansell's gardeners are still in evidence.

George Lansell was born in 1823 at Margate, England. The eldest son of Thomas Lansell, a fallow chandler, he joined his father's business when he left school early.<sup>2</sup> The letters of his seafaring brother, Wooten, about Australia, were so enthusiastic that George and another brother, William, decided to try their luck there. After two brief unsuccessful gold prospecting attempts at Echunga in 1853 and at Bendigo in 1854, they set up a butchers, soap and candle manufacturing business in Bendigo.<sup>3</sup> His belief in quartz reefing did not wane, even though he lost everything in two separate mining ventures in the late 1850s and early 1860s. Continuing his business, he invested in mining shares when he could. His belief in quartz mining was vindicated when, in the mid-1860s, first the Advance Mine and then the Cinderella (in which Lansell held large interests) began yielding well.<sup>4</sup> Already a wealthy man, Lansell bought Fortuna and the 180 mine for an extravagant 30,000 pounds in the early 1870s.<sup>5</sup> However, the mines first stope entered under Lansell's ownership netted a clear profit of £180,000.<sup>6</sup>

Lansell continued to invest in mining. He was on the board of some forty mining companies and was a heavy shareholder in most local mines. As W.B. Kimberley wrote, "...he was associated with almost every reef in the district, which he not only helped by capital in opening up, but assisted by his experience and advice in thoroughly developing."<sup>7</sup> George Lansell was also the sole owner of the 180, 616, 222, 83, Comet, Sandhurst, North Red White and

Blue, South Red White and Blue, and Sheepshead Mines.<sup>8</sup>

Not long after purchasing Fortuna, Lansell's first wife died after a long illness. About 1880 a coffin was maliciously smuggled into Lansell's stable yard overnight for Lansell to find in the morning.<sup>9</sup> It was after this incident that he sailed to London, leaving managers to run his mining business.<sup>10</sup> Settling in London, Lansell met and married Edith Bassford, an English girl he had first met some years before when she was living in Bendigo with her parents.<sup>11</sup> Together they travelled the continent, collecting art objects, pictures and fine jewellery. Two sons and a daughter were born to the couple and it seemed Lansell would remain in England for the rest of his life. However, in 1887 he received a letter signed by 2,628 Bendigo men, including every figure of consequence in the mining community, begging him to return to Bendigo. The letter said his absence was 'keenly felt and regretted' and his return would 'afford the utmost pleasure and gratification.'<sup>12</sup>

Edith and George Lansell returned to Bendigo that same year. Major renovations and additions to Fortuna followed, to accommodate his family and collection of paintings and art objects. Fortuna grew to thirty main rooms and seven bathrooms, with two large conservatories, a swimming pool and a Roman fountain.<sup>13</sup> The grounds contained sunken gardens, sweeping lawns and six ornamental lakes.

During this time three more children were born to Lansell and his wife. Lansell continued to invest in mining, buying up ailing companies and launching new ones. His intelligence, knowledge, tenacity, imagination and courage earned him a fortune and the respect of the mining industry, as is shown by the nickname, 'the Quartz King,' by which he was known throughout Australia.<sup>14</sup>

George Lansell died in March, 1906, at Fortuna.<sup>15</sup> Flags flew at half-mast throughout Bendigo and people wept openly in the streets.<sup>16</sup> Mr. Lansell's Victorian estate was valued for probate purposes at 339,316 pounds.<sup>17</sup> He had always been a generous giver and the Bendigo Hospital, the Benevolent Asylum, the All Saints Church and

1     ibid.  
2     ibid.  
3     ibid.  
4     ibid.  
5     Cusack, Frank, op.cit., p.28  
6     ibid.  
7     Quoted in Heatherington, John, op.cit., p.59  
8     FN1177  
9     Heatherington, John, op.cit., p.60  
10    ibid.; Cusack, Frank, op.cit., p.29  
11    Heatherington, John, op.cit., p.61  
12    ibid.  
13    ibid.  
14    NTA FN1177  
15    ibid.  
16    Cusack, Frank, op.cit., p.29  
17    NTA FN1177

the Roman Catholic Church all benefited from his Will, with bequests of £500 each. Not forgetting his less affluent days, he left £10 worth of shares to all Bendigonians whose photos appeared in a large group hanging in the committee room of the Bendigo Art Gallery and who arrived in Bendigo 1857 or earlier.

The miners and mining managers of his private mines also received bequests of shares.

#### **GATES:**

Entry gates designed and hand-forged by the late Thomas Pierce, employed by George Lansell from 1898-1923.

### **AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION CITATION**

#### **DESCRIPTION**

A complex three-storey mansion of rendered brick with cast-iron verandahs, erected in stages as additions to an 1860 villa, bought by George Lansell with the adjacent 180 Gold Mine. The house has elaborately decorated rooms surviving from the three main periods of construction, including plaster and pressed metal decoration, and stained and etched glass. A battery dating from 1874 joins the house, illustrating the mixture of home and work environment. A Victorian garden surrounds the villa and battery. The garden includes a Roman bath and utilises one of the mine lakes (ponds).

#### **CONDITION**

Lansell added to the original villa between 1870 and 1880, then with his second wife extended the villa again between 1887 and 1905. From 1906 to 1920 Mrs. Lansell added further. The decorative surfaces inside are being revealed and restored.

#### **SIGNIFICANT ASSOCIATIONS**

George Lansell, owner; W Beebe, designer.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE**

Fortuna Villa is significant as one of Australia's best examples of a Victoria/Edwardian era mansion associated with the gold rush period. (Criterion 3.2).

It is one of the few such residences to be closely associated with a workplace, industrial site, and significant for its location on the site of the 180 mine. (Criterion 2.2)

It is significant for its associations with millionaire George Lansell, also known as the Quartz King, who lived there and transformed the original villa cottage into a mansion. (Criterion 4.1).

It is significant in an aesthetic and creative sense for its architecture, decorative treatments and its situation in a Victorian garden of considerable interest. (Criteria 5.1 and 5.2).

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

'Australia Home Beautiful,' vol.7, No.9, 2 Sept., 1929.

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1      *ibid.*