

LANSELL'S FORTUNA



COMMANDING OFFICERS'
INTRODUCTION

'Welcome to Fortuna'. The activities carried out in this fine old residence today are perhaps a far cry from the golden years of the last century. Nevertheless, it is likely that George Lansell would have approved. He was a man of great industry and energy and perhaps the replacement of his busy stamper battery by equally busy and not quite so noisy Lithographic Offset Printing Presses, the hustle and bustle of the print shop floor and the conversion of his fine ballrooms, reception rooms and bedrooms into drawing offices and administrative offices committed to mapping the country he adopted and in which he established his fame and carved his fortune would have had his blessing. One might believe that George Lansell would have approved of a military organisation taking over his residence. He was certainly sufficiently pragmatic to appreciate that the edifice he left would be hard pressed to survive otherwise. Indeed it is very doubtful whether Fortuna would have survived had the Army not acquired the property in 1942.

This brochure attempts to encapsulate some of the grandeur of the old building and perhaps what is more important, the vision and enterprise that saw the strange complex of mansion, gardens and mine buildings develop on this site adjoining the New Chum Reef.

Cover front - Main entry to "Fortuna Villa"

back - Conceptual elevation for the development of Fortuna Villa by the contemporary architect W.O. Beebe.

Lansell's Fortuna



Mr George Lansell



Mrs George Lansell



Mr and Mrs George Lansell and their Pons



The Drawing Room

FORTUNA VILLA

Fortuna was a substantial but relatively small two storied villa when George Lansell acquired it in 1871. It was purchased from Messrs T. Ballerstedt and Sons along with the 180 Mine for the sum of £30,000.

George Lansell, whom Australians called the Quartz King, was born in Margate, England in 1823. He arrived in Bendigo in 1853 with his brother William and together they opened a butchery, soap and candle factory and tallow chandlers business.

The partnership was dissolved after three years but while pursuing this venture Lansell became very interested in the mining activities, in particular deep reef mining, on which the future of the gold field depended as the early alluvial gold ran out. Lansell dabbled in share trading without much success for a few years but his fortunes changed for the better when he bought a large interest in the Old Advance Company on the Victoria Reef. The mine yielded well in the late 1860's and this together with a previous investment in the Cinderella Mine on the Johnsons Reef founded the Lansell fortune.

Lansell's purchase of the 180 Mine on the fabulously rich New Chum Reef established the Quartz King and went far towards making him a legend in his own time. This mine had already yielded great wealth to the Ballerstedt family and within weeks of the purchase Lansell had recouped his outlay and went on to make a profit of £180,000. The mine was thought to be deep at 450 feet, but by the late 1880's it had achieved a record depth of 3,179 feet. This was against the expressed opinion of the experts that gold did not exist below a much shallower depth. Rich deposits were found at various levels of the mine.

Fortuna Villa grew with the Lansell fortune. The mansion sits astride the New Chum Reef and its lower floor penetrates the reef thus giving three floors at the present rear of the building and two at the front. The grey green stone of the reef is visible at many points around the lower foundations of the mansion and in the tunnel which runs beneath the mine buildings, roadways and coach house. An outcrop of white quartz occurs on the hill above the mansion and it was such outcrops which led the early miners to the riches which lay below. The mansion is continuous with the main mine buildings, separated only by the stable from the thunderous roar from the stamper battery, the wheeze and throb of the mine machinery: all within yards of the Lansell bedrooms.

Lansell returned to England in 1880 following a somewhat macabre episode. It is said that on his usual early morning stroll one day he walked into the stableyard and found a coffin lying on the flagstones, apparently smuggled in overnight. Lansell saw this as evidence that because of his undoubted success he had enemies who wished to remind him of his own mortality. His wife who had been in ill health had died some time before and Lansell despite his wealth had lived a lonely life in social detachment. He left Bendigo and settled in London where he was married to Miss Edith Bassford, a lady of English birth who was educated in Sandhurst. They travelled widely on the continent and many of the ideas which were to be incorporated into Fortuna were probably conceived during these travels.

In 1887 Sandhurst had fallen into despondency with a down turn of fortune and a number of influential citizens believed that the great mans' presence was needed again to revive the economy. Lansell received an illuminated letter signed by 2,628 Bendigo men begging him to return. This he did and a few months later the Lansell family moved into Fortuna and the big house entered its greatest days in which no cost was spared to beautify the building and surrounding gardens in a manner 'befitting a prince.' Fortuna passed through many phases of construction, the most notable of which reversed the building by the addition of an imposing entrance hall and cupola stairwell at the rear of the house to make this into the front. The Italian water garden was constructed and the four tier lakes, originally settling ponds from the mine operation, created. The original front entrance is now the rear entrance and the name 'Fortuna Villa' can be seen worked into the cast iron lace over the doorway. During this period many notable persons visited Sandhurst and were entertained royally by Lansell at Fortuna. these included Baron Sir Henry Loch, the Marquis of Normanby and the Earl of Hopetoun, all Governors of Victoria.

George Lansell remained hale and hearty into late life and died aged 82 years at Fortuna in 1906. He was a very wealthy man although the full extent of his personal fortune has never been assessed. One account puts the figure at three million pounds in 'debentures and bonds payable to bearer.' At one time he solely owned seven mines and was a director of a further thirty four mines.

Fortuna remained in the Lansell family until 1934, the year after Edith Lansell died. It was sold then at the depression price of £2,400 and its lavish furnishings auctioned at a sale lasting five days.

In 1938 Fortuna was to have been sold by auction for demolition but was purchased complete, to become a reception house. During this time the buildings and grounds fell into considerable disrepair. Guided tours of the building took place from time to time and it is perhaps remarkable that so much of the beautiful panelling, decorative ceilings, and stained and etched glass windows remain intact.

In 1942 the Army acquired a lease of the property for wartime mapping. Fortuna was occupied by the Land Headquarters Cartographic Company of the Australian Survey Corps and became the site of the base map plant of the Australian Army during the war years.

In 1951 Fortuna was purchased by the Commonwealth Government and in 1955 following a large increase in establishment the Unit was redesignated the Army Headquarters Survey Regiment, now the Army Survey Regiment and the largest unit of the Royal Australian Survey Corps.

Sources

Bendigo and Vicinity by W. B. Kimberly, published 1895.

Witness of Things Past by John Hetherington, published 1964.

The Gold Mines of Bendigo by A. V. Palmer, published 1976.

Proposed Entrance Hall.

FORTUNA VILLA

For

G. Lansell Esq.

W. D. Jackson
Architect

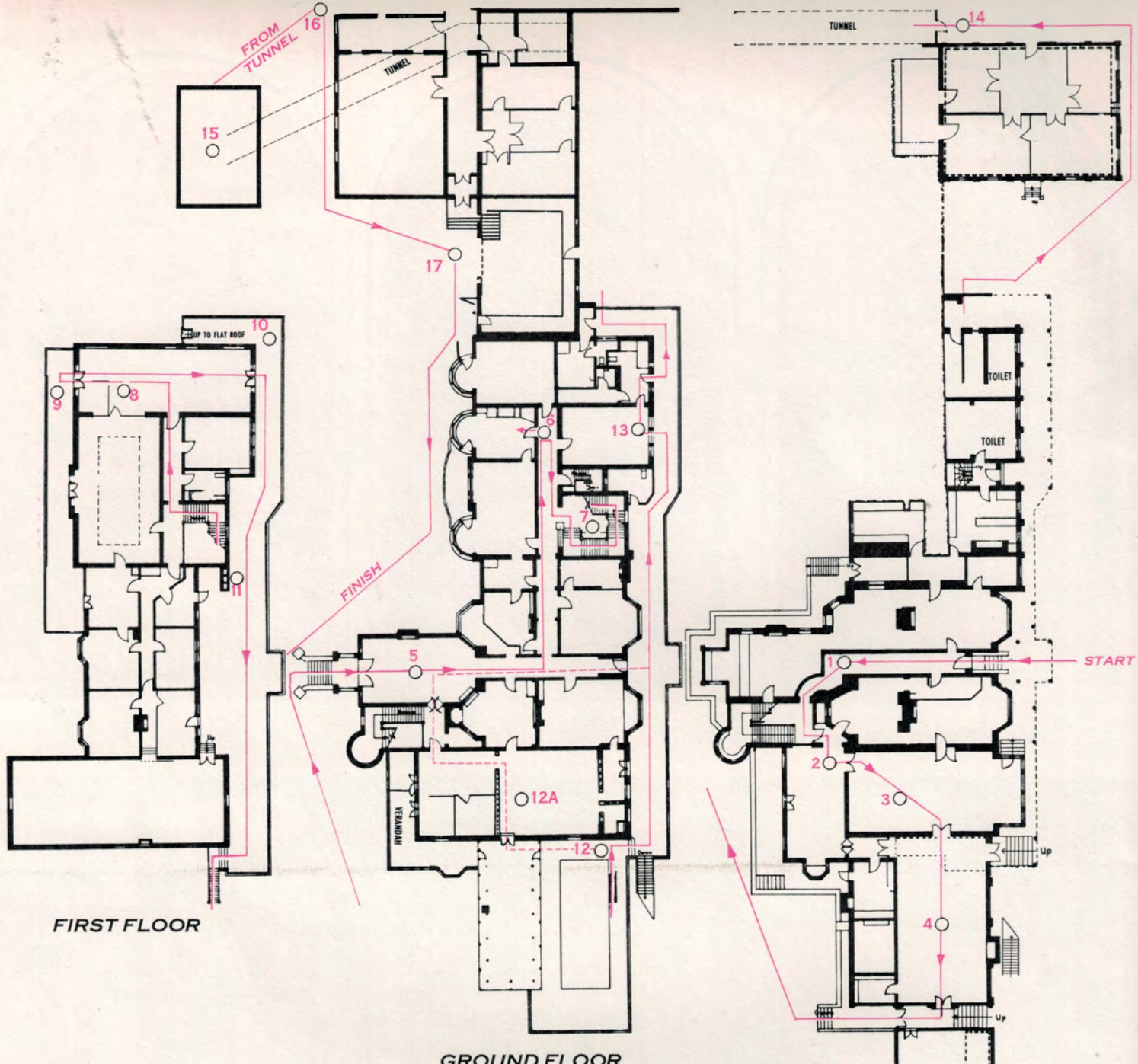
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Elevation





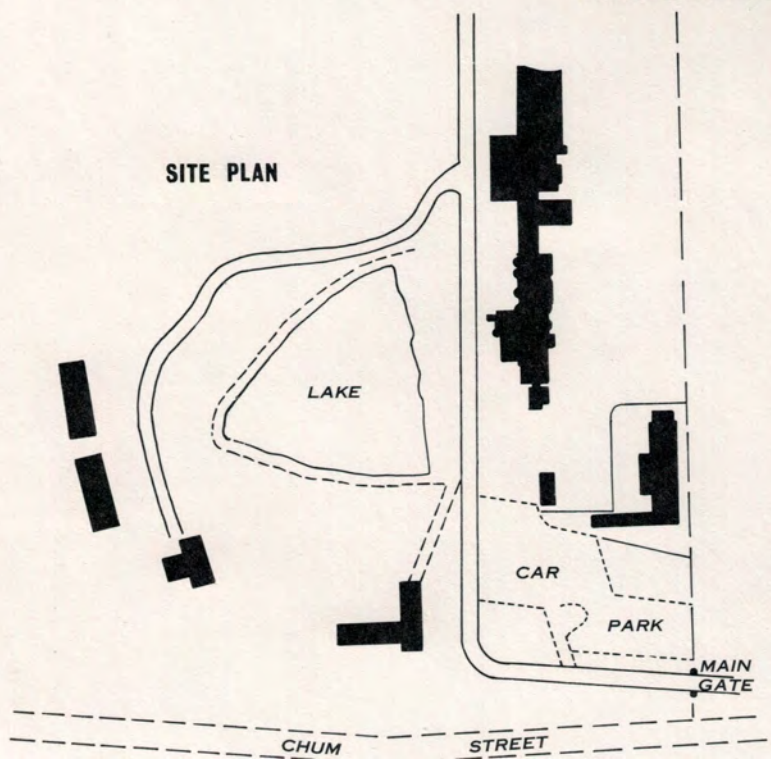


FIRST FLOOR

GROUND FLOOR

BASEMENT

SITE PLAN



TOUR ROUTE

FORTUNA TOUR

START

Fortuna Villa originally faced Bendigo with a commanding view over the township. This doorway was the front door - the name 'Fortuna Villa' can be seen worked into the cast iron lace below the verandah and above the entrance way. The front pedestrian gate to the property was directly opposite and was a large masonry arched gateway. As the mullock heap developed, encroached on the front entrance and occluded the view of the town, the direction of the building was reversed by the addition of an entrance hall and facade across the rear of the building to make this into the front. As can be seen from this side, the building is three stories high with cast iron lace along the second story verandah.

- 1 *This passageway and the rooms on either side represent the old building probably much as it was at the time Lansell purchased it from Ballerstedt. A steel strong room door was located in the right hand doorway behind which was the bullion room used to secure gold obtained from the crushing battery.*
- 2 *This room was originally a smoke and card room with very ornate stained glass windows.*
- 3 *Originally the dining room, this room has an elaborate parquette floor.*
- 4 *Formerly the billiard room. In more recent years the split level floor was raised to the same level as the adjoining rooms. The ornamental principal ceiling was at one time reputed to be the finest piece of craftsmanship in Victoria.*
- 5 *Lansell continued to add to and to expand Fortuna throughout his 36 years of occupancy until his death in 1906. Many ceilings within the building were remodelled shortly after the turn of the century. The cupola stairwell was constructed in about 1904 and this more than any other feature gives Fortuna its distinctive appearance. The upstairs gymnasium was also built during this period. The main entrance foyer was probably constructed in the early 1890's although modified from time to time after that date. The original rear wall is still apparent at the rear of the foyer, at the entrance to the central passageway.
Lansell commissioned many conceptual drawings and sketches from local architects from the time of his initial occupancy. Varhland appears responsible for the early development of Fortuna, but much of his design was modified or over-built by Beebe, a disciple of Varhland. The present front of the building appears attributable to Beebe, whose conceptual sketch appears on Page 5 of this brochure. A display of early items relating to Fortuna and other items of Royal Australian Survey Corps history and current mapping activities can be seen in the foyer.*
- 6 *The adjoining bedroom with this bathroom/dressing room was used by Vice-Regal guests when visiting Bendigo. These included Baron Sir Henry Loch, The Marquis of Normanby and the Earle of Hopetoun. It is likely that the Prince of Wales stayed here also during his tour of the gold fields in the 1890's. The solid cedar toilet chest containing the solid marble bath and wash basin are a truly magnificent example of Victoriana.*
- 7 *This solid cedar and blackwood staircase with a hall seat, combined with carved rouge marble columns and blackwood gallery rail, is a highlight of the old building. The upper balcony, a more recent edition by Lansell, cuts across the large stained leadlite window.*
- 8 *These two rooms were ballroom and ante-room, with the latter being a very late addition to Fortuna. Both were used as gymnasiums and the wings and eyes in the ceiling of the ante-room, testifies to this use.
A set of accordian doors could be used to either combine or separate the two rooms. The main ballroom has the elaborately painted and decorated curved ceiling while the other has an embossed pressed metal ceiling and cornice, a fine example of this craft.*

- 9 *An early photo of Fortuna suggests that the column originally had a Corinthian Head and the boy appears to face in the opposite direction, that is, towards the Italian fountain.
From this point can be seen the main lake of Fortuna. There were originally four lakes tiered into the re-entrant. The three smaller lakes have been filled to create the tennis courts and basketball court.*
- 10 *From the verandah can be seen the former swimming pool known as the 'Roman Bath'. The pool was originally open and surrounded by a ten foot high ivy covered wall. The roof was added by the Army in 1942. A panoramic view of part of Bendigo is available from this point, and no doubt this was the view from old Fortuna before it was occluded by the mullock heap. Also from this point can be seen the slopes of Chum Hill, and a prominent quartz outcrop from the New Chum Reef. The red brick buildings constitute the buildings of the mine and the Fortuna battery.*
- 11 *Mr. Lansell's crest containing his initials, G.L., can be seen on the chimney, now at floor level, but of course more prestigiously placed before this balcony was constructed.*
- 12 *The conservatory was an early addition to Fortuna and appears to have been in existence before Lansell's return to England. It originally had a flat roof in the form of an observation sun-deck partly shaded by an elevated structure over the deck. The acid etched glass, although not to everyone's taste, is considered to be a particularly fine and extensive example of the art and it is said to have been executed in Italy. The designs depict heraldic symbols of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland interspersed with Australiana and mining scenes.*
- 12A *This large room with its magnificent ceiling was the main drawing room of the house. It was also called the music room and on the remaining stained glass windows can be seen musical homilies such as 'If music be the food of love - play on!' The ceiling was remodelled from a typically Victorian to this Neo-Renaissance style in about 1910. The original open colonnade at the eastern end of the room was enclosed by a previous renovation during the 1890's. The room was magnificently furnished in Lansell's day, with most exotic furniture. Valuable works of art adorned the walls and the windows were heavily draped in expensive fabric.*
- 13 *This room along with the adjoining bathroom was presumably Mr. Lansell's bedroom. The solid marble bath and shower screen is truly a unique feature.*
- 14 *Various theories are put as to the original purpose of the tunnel, although there is little doubt that it was used for storage and most likely, to transport gold from the bullion room to the coach house in the front. Another tunnel is said to have crossed this tunnel, connecting the main Fortuna Villa to the battery. It is reported that afternoon teas were taken from the main kitchen by trolley, through the tunnel and into the front garden by the Lakeside. The brickwork in the tunnel is of particular interest as a fine example of bricklaying skill.*
- 15 *The old coach house is above the exit of the tunnel and it is from here that gold bullion was despatched in armed coaches, having been delivered via the tunnel.*
- 16 *The Fortuna battery is the large high roofed brick building. Set high in the wall is a stone which reads: "G. Lansell's Fortuna Crushing Works 1874". The battery building now houses the printing presses of the Army Survey Regiment. The other red brick buildings are of a later vintage and some had to be extensively rebuilt by the Army in 1942. Nevertheless, such re-construction was sympathetically carried out to a design similar to the original.*
- 17 *This brick wall and arched gateway, recently restored, is the last remaining section of a brick wall which enclosed this entire garden area at the time when the area beyond was a turmoil of mining activities. Lansell replaced the front section of the wall with the present wrought iron fence probably around 1900 when the landscaping of the major lake had been completed.*
- FINISH** *The tour finishes at the front steps which survive from before the time of the high surrounding garden wall. The two large pine trees are apparent in an early photograph of Fortuna and now are over 100 years old.*



The Billiard Room



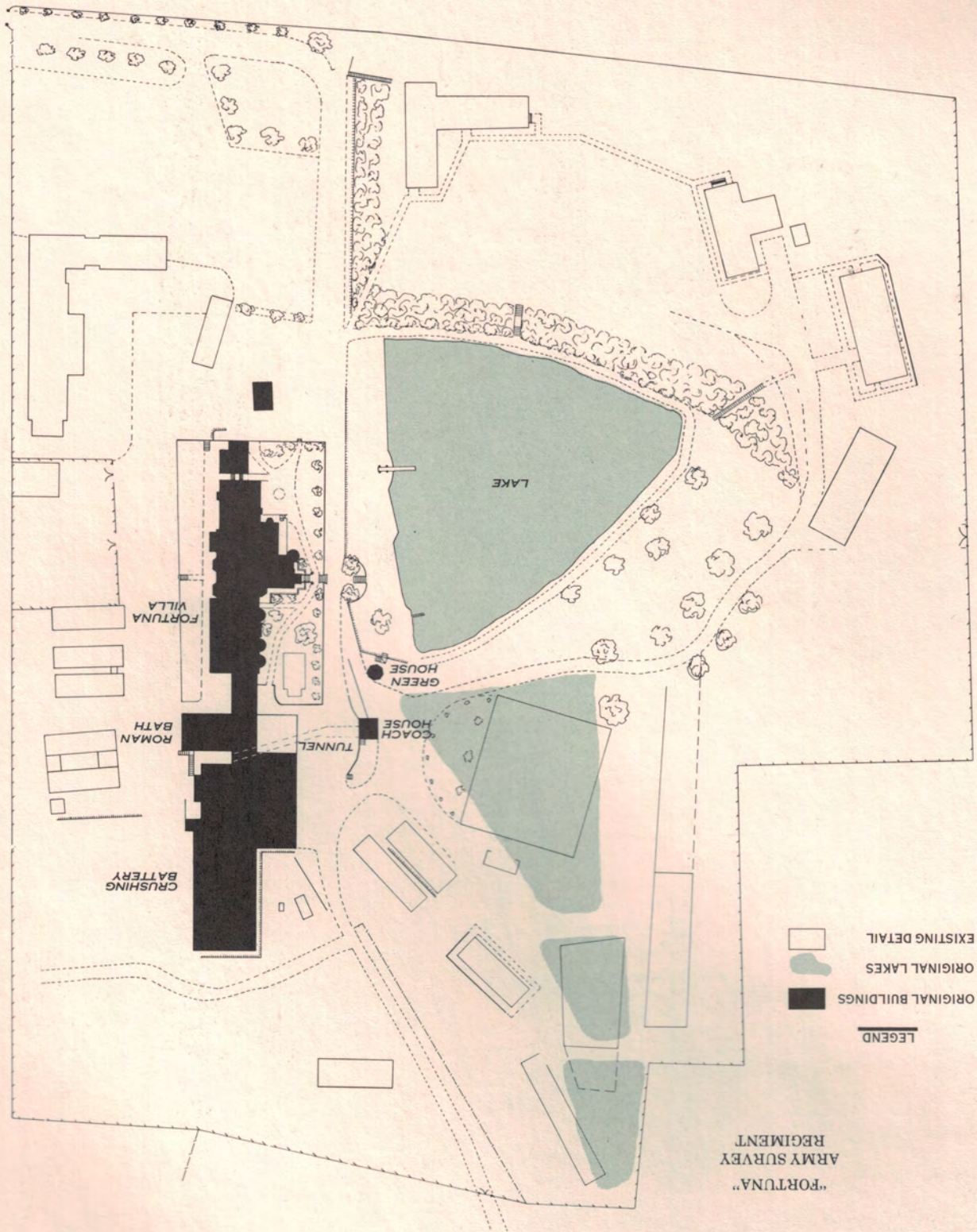
The Entrance Hall






Reproduction of the Pompeii Fountain

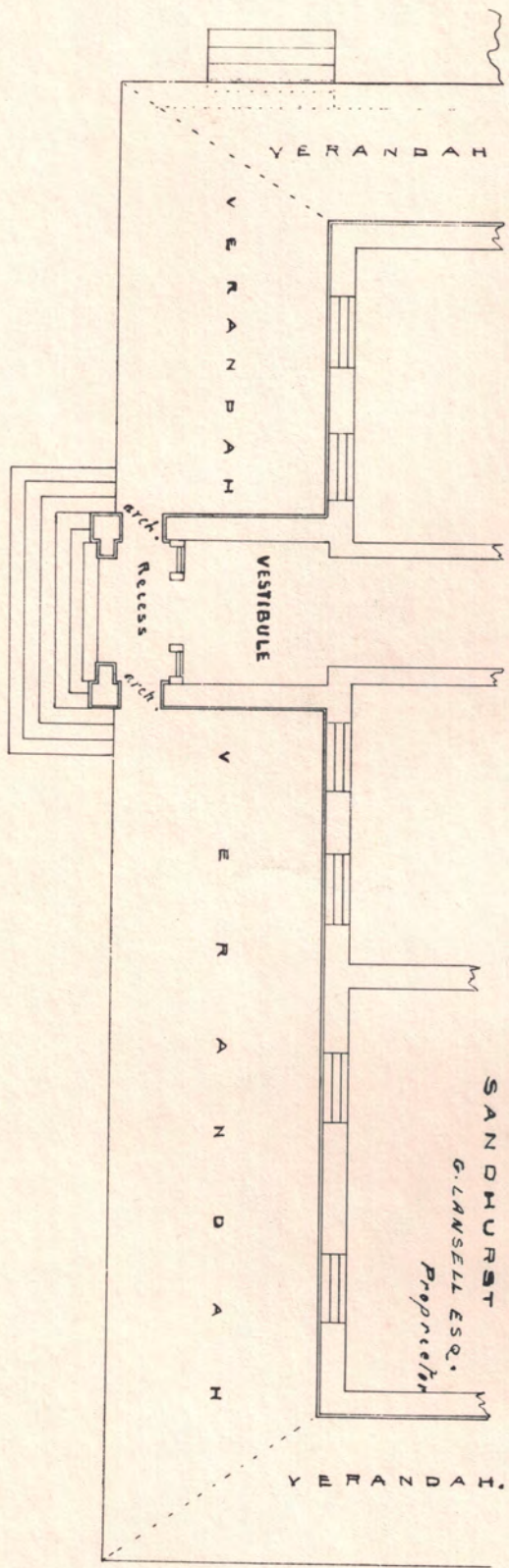


The Reception Room



"FORTUNA"
ARMY SURVEY
REGIMENT

- LEGEND**
-  EXISTING DETAIL
 -  ORIGINAL LAKES
 -  ORIGINAL BUILDINGS



PRINCIPAL ENTRANCE FRONT
FORTUNA-VILLA.

SANDHURST
G. LANSELL ESQ.
Proprietor

