

Lansell family through the 1890s.

GEORGE and Edith Lansell arrived back in Sandhurst in December 1887 with their three young children and the children's English nurse, Miss E. Burridge.

During Lansell's absence, Fortuna Villa had been occupied by Lansell's capable but rather reclusive manager, Isaac Dyason. Dyason's role was to look after Lansell's business affairs, and Fortuna played little part in the social life of Bendigo during its owner's long sabbatical in England.

On his return in December 1887, George Lansell made plans for major alterations to the house to cater for a growing family and expanding domestic staff.

In 1888, an ambitious three-storey extension was added to the north side of the house, including a master bedroom with adjoining dressing room, and the first of several indoor bathrooms and toilets. These rooms adjoined the original billiard room, connecting the main house to the stables and battery. Central heating was installed in this section of the house, and Fortuna became the first private home in the colony of Victoria to have this amenity.

The most spectacular feature of these extensions was the picture gallery and billiard room on the third floor. This room measured 37 ft x 21 ft and was 22 ft high.

This room later became a ballroom, and a new billiard room, designed by William Beebe, was added at ground level on the south side of the house.

The expansion of Fortuna continued in 1890, as Emil Maurmann's design for a mansard attic bedroom addition was constructed above the original part of the house.

Changes were made outside, too. The industrial character of the grounds was mitigated by the planting of trees and rose gardens, the removal of the overhead flume of the pyrites works, and the placement of marble statues.

Between 1893 and 1895, a new entrance hall replaced the earlier hall, and a bay window was added



MAJESTIC: The impressive Fortuna villa and surrounding garden.

to the first bedroom at the front of the house.

By 1900, the whole of the eastern front of the house had been extended, and by 1904 the decorative plaster arches and metal ceiling had been added to the Reception Room. A shadehouse had been erected by the Pompeii fountain.

The addition to the lower level of the house of a spacious hall provided room for more statues, and allowed the music room above it to be extended.

Above the music room an attic was added, complementing the earlier mansard addition of 1890.

The famous 'candle snuffer' near the main entrance was added in 1904. This feature, along with the mansard roof, is largely what gives the front aspect of Fortuna Villa its continental European character.

While all this architectural extending and remodelling was going on, the family was also growing, in size and number. Three more Lan-

sell children joined the three — George Victor, Edith Fortuna Victoria, and Horace Vernon — who had been born in England.

Leonard Vivian was born at Fortuna in October 1888. Two more boys, Cyril Vane and Eric Vere, followed. Sadly, Eric died as a child.

There was no shortage of playmates among the various Lansell cousins. The large house and grounds, plus the constant noise and activity of the nearby mines, provided the youngsters with plenty of stimulation and opportunities for adventure.

Grown up Lansell children recall that the balconies were perfect for roller-skating.

Along with home and family, Fortuna's role in the social life of Sandhurst was also expanding.

In 1893, a Mayoral chain, consisting of a link for each Mayor, and a handsome pendant, made from Bendigo gold and donated by

George Lansell, was formally presented to the Bendigo Council.

Eleven years earlier, George Lansell had made a similar contribution to the council in his home town, Margate, in Kent.

There was no doubt, however, that for George Lansell, Bendigo (as Sandhurst was now known) was his true home, a sentiment pronounced emphatically in the stained glass of a new stairwell at Fortuna: 'East West Home's Best'.

Vice-Regal visits continued, guests including Lord and Lady Brassey, and Lord and Lady Hopetoun.

Family occasions involved a sizeable extended family which included the numerous Bassfords and their connections, plus the families of George Lansell's siblings.

Music was a prominent feature of social life at Fortuna, as it was throughout the Bendigo community,

which now enjoyed a vibrant cultural life.

To celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, George Lansell hosted a dinner at Fortuna, to which every surviving Bendigonian whose portrait was among the 472 'Old Bendigonians' in the picture at the Bendigo Art Gallery was invited.

George Lansell took great pride in being among the company who had contributed to the development of Bendigo.

One of his most prized possessions was his copy of the Pioneers portrait. At the time of the sale of the contents of Fortuna in 1934, it was displayed in the ballroom.

The pioneers had seen historic changes.

They had witnessed the renaming of their town, from Sandhurst to Bendigo. And in the 1890s, Bendigo was making a significant contribution to the most momentous change of all. Australia was to

Picture: JULIAN PROWD