

[Image] Owners [Image]
George Lansell and Occupiers Edith Lansell

A look at the history of the owners of Fortuna

[The Quartz King | Bendigo Mines | Maud Nott | Army Survey Regiment]

Historically, Fortuna is significant for the record it provides from 1855 to 1871 of Christopher and Theodore Ballerstedt, Australia's first mining magnates, and from 1871 to 1935 of the Lansell family. George Lansell, (The Quartz King) being one of Australia's most successful and adventurous nineteenth-century gold mine owners and speculators.

Gold was officially discovered in October 1851 at a place called 'The Rocks', near present-day Golden Square along the Bendigo Creek. Where sheep had grazed quietly in the 1840s, the cry of "Gold!! Gold!!" in late 1851 turned the tranquil valley into a turbulent scene of human activity.

The gold rushes followed and thousands of miners swarmed into the Bendigo valley to seek their fortune. A government camp was established at Golden Square but moved to Camp Hill, (now part of Rosalind Park), in 1852. By 1855 the small bustling shanty town had given way to the township of Sandhurst, based on a plan by R.W. Larritt.

By 1856 with the decline of alluvial gold on the Bendigo fields, the diggers were required to turn to something other than alluvial sinking and their attention was directed by newspapers and old experienced miners to the quartz reefs, of which huge outcroppings were so often observed on every side.

On Victoria Hill, to the northwest of Sandhurst town above New Chum Gully, gold was discovered in 1854 on the New Chum or Victoria Reef. This was the first reef worked in the Bendigo area and one of two principal lines of reef on the Bendigo gold fields.

The eccentric German JCT Christopher Ballerstedt, who had begun working systematically an open cut mine in 1855 on the Victoria Reef, was laying the foundations of a handsome fortune from a claim allegedly bought from a couple of schoolboys who had opened it up successfully.

The Ballerstedts had come to Bendigo in the early 1850s from the California Gold Rush of '49. JCT Christopher Ballerstedt was born in Russia in 1796 and fought in the battle of Waterloo as a soldier in Bluchers Army.

Ballerstedt and his son Theodore were possibly the first to prove that gold yields were not inversely proportional to the depth below ground.

Interest in reef mining grew from the mid 1850s as the alluvial deposits dwindled. However, progress was hampered due to the difficulty of extracting the gold from the quartz. Soon steam crushing plants replaced hand dollies and Chilean Mills and, as the shafts went deeper, windlasses were replaced by stem winding plants. With the introduction of this equipment, the need for capital resulted in the formation of mining companies in Sandhurst as early as 1857.

Another who was firmly convinced of the future of the reefs was a young Englishman, named George Lansell, who had been lured to the Bendigo gold fields by reports sent to him from Australia by his younger brother,

Wooten.

Born in Margate, Kent, England, on 24 August 1823, George Lansell was the eldest son of Thomas Lansell, a grocer and tallow chandler. At the age of 14, George left school to assist his father in the family business.

When Lansell received letters from his brother, a ship's officer who had travelled widely and visited Australia several times, he decided to emigrate and try his luck on the Australian gold fields. Sailing aboard the 'Virginia' bound for South Australia, George was accompanied by his brother, William. Landing at Port Adelaide in 1853, the Lansell brothers headed for the diggings at 'Echunga' where they prospected unsuccessfully for gold.

After a time, they returned to Adelaide and fell to their old trade of tallow merchants. Shortly after, they decided to move to the Victorian gold fields, where news of fantastic finds was now thrilling the Colony. The two young men sailed to Melbourne and, on arrival, made directly for the Bendigo valley, where they were re-united with their brother. ^(Wooten) Realising that few of the thousands of diggers had made any real fortune, the brothers formed a partnership, setting up a butchery and soap/candle factory at View Point, the very heart of the small community of Sandhurst. ^{Wooten}

The business prospered, but not without problems. In November 1857 the Municipal Council received a number of complaints about the smells emanating from tallow works of G & W Lansell, View Point. There followed a flurry of correspondence to the editor of the Bendigo Advertiser, both for and against the Lansell brothers. Eventually, public opinion forced the Lansells to remove their business from the sensitive noses around View Point.

While the Lansells were struggling to find their feet in the new country, the Ballerstedts had already accumulated great wealth. In 1857, Theodore Ballerstedt purchased from the Crown the site of 'Fortuna' (allotment 1 of section 33B) above New Chum Gully, adjacent to the New chum Reef. He had already established a substantial house on the allotment, along with a small crushing mill, detached kitchen and storehouse, to house his wife and four surviving children.

Between 1855 and 1861, Ballerstedt and Son made the extraordinary profit of 243,000 pounds and subsequently became Australia's first mining magnates. As evidence of their standing in the community, the Ballerstedts hosted a dinner for the Governor, Sir Henry Barkly, during his visit to Sandhurst in 1857.

Lansell, however his lust for gold heightened had been taking a keen interest in all around him, observing the diggers in the various gullies and the men prospecting on the reefs. Deciding to try his luck again, George dissolved the partnership with his brothers, investing all his savings into some of the more primitive sorts of quartz endeavours, succeeding only in losing everything.

Again after a time, he invested all he had in claims and again he lost then lot. Going back into business, with his brother, Lansell was determined to win, buying into various companies and parties over the next few years though few of these returned him any profit whatever. Then he purchased a large interest in the Advance Company, on the Victoria Reef.

During the first three of four years of the 60s, the Advance had been

working with fair returns. The middle of the decade saw the bulk of Bendigo's quartz claims in a depressed state. The Advance Company and three or four others alone yielded well. In the years up to 1866, 7600 tons of quartz had been crushed from the mine from which 10,640 ounces of gold were obtained. The working expenses had been 8,571 pounds and the dividends paid were for 31,080 pounds. September of that year, 792 tons were crushed for 1048 ounces of gold. The mine was finally paying dividends to Lansell. He also had previously made a substantial investment in the Cinderella Mine on Johnson's line of reef and the returns on it too were splendid. The Advance and Cinderella mines were the cornerstone of the Lansell's fortune.

In time he became interested in almost every reef in the district and his sound judgement proved most useful in their development. He rose head and shoulders above the other quartz reefers. He was appointed Director on the boards of over thirty-four mines and his influence over the destiny of Bendigo mining grew year by year.

From this time forward the history of George Lansell is practically the history of Bendigo quartz reefing. He made a careful study of quartz reefing and never hesitated to sink deeper and deeper in his search for gold, this in spite of the contrary opinion of many of his associates. Financially, it was a potentially hazardous business. He stood to lose all as well as win much. A major win saw him profit by 14,000 lbs in one fortnight and, though he was by-and-large successful overall, he did lose thousands over the years through bad investments.

THE QUARTZ KING

George Lansell prospered, and poured money into new mining companies. So consistent and confident was he, that he became known as the 'Quartz King of Bendigo', and was the most sought after adviser in mining matters. He was the promoter of the Garden Gully United Mine, the most-famous of Bendigo's Mines and one which, in spite of its varying fortunes and long-delayed success, Lansell had always maintained the greatest faith.

[Image] [Image]
The Big 180 222

Lansell was always ready to back his opinion and stand by it, with the result that he became the sole owner of a number of local mines (the 180, 616, 222, 83, Comet, Sandhurst, New Red White and Blue Consolidated (Big Blue), South Red/White and Blue and the Sheepshead among others). Most of these claims were originally held by companies in which Lansell had large investments. He continually increased these interests, buying off the faint-hearted shareholders, sinking the shafts deeper and deeper, venturing large sums of money but maintaining his firm faith in the properties, ultimately reaping the rewards.

On the 17th October 1869, JTC Christopher Ballerstedt died at the age of 74. Theodore continued the mining interests of Ballerstedt and Son' until the 6 May 1871, when he sold his residence at New Chum with the machinery and his many valuable claims to Lansell for the sum of 30,000 pounds.

In what appears to be a typical example of Lansell's luck, one of the claims purchased by him from Ballerstedt turned out to be his most famous acquisition, the 'Big 180'. Originally worked by the German digger, Wittscheibe in the early 50s it was sold to 'Ballerstedt and Son' for thirty pounds and they are said to have made a fortune from it. The reef had been reached at 180 feet (hence the name) but Ballerstedts workings had

reached about 450 feet. Typically, Lansell didn't hesitate to apply his invariable custom and continued to sink deeper and deeper. From the first stope he worked in the 'Big 180' mine he yielded a clear profit of 180,000 pounds. In another speculative move he subdivided land he had purchased around the former Government House in Melbourne's Toorak Road. He named the subdivision the 'Vice Regal Estate' and its streets 'Lansell Road' and 'St Georges' Road.

Eventually the '180' workings reached a depth of 3,179 feet making it the deepest mine of its day in the Southern Hemisphere. By 1889 it was estimated that collectively Ballerstedt and Lansell had taken 1,000,000 pounds worth of gold from the 180 proving it one of the richest on the New Chum line of reef.

After selling off his interests in Sandhurst, Theodore Ballerstedt returned with his family to Germany. Theodore died at Magdeburgh in 1876.

In 1872, Lansell then aged forty nine married Bedelia Mary Jarvis (nee Mulgauney), a young Irish woman who had emigrated with her family to South Australia in about 1850. However Bedelia (who had first married at 16) had trouble adjusting to her newly acquired social status as the wife of the 'Quartz King', George Lansell.

In 1876, Lansell returned to England for the first time. He also toured the continent and visited, with great interest, the excavations at Pompeii. Returning home, Lansell again immersed himself in business, leaving for the United States where he visited Nevada and California, inspecting mining methods there. He was very impressed with what he saw, especially the recently introduced diamond rock drill, which he subsequently used very successfully in some of his mines after returning home.

The '70s' 'Fortuna' 1870 saw the coming of age of several very promising new mines, including the 'Londonderry' and Lansell's own 'Cinderella', whilst the older mines continued to dazzle the Colony and delight the investors. This period also saw an influx of Cornish miners into the Sandhurst mines, as a result of the discovery of extensive alluvial tin deposits in Malaya in 1872 which spelled disaster to the deep and impoverished Cornish tin mines. With their skill and knowledge of deep mining, Cornish men were attracted to the Victorian quartz mining fields. Many of the Sandhurst mine managers were themselves Cornish and the new arrivals soon found employment. Knowing the worth of these highly skilled miners, Lansell was an active sponsor of Cornish migration for his mines.

RETURN TO ENGLAND

²⁰
In September 1880, Bedelia died in hospital in Melbourne after two years of illness, aged only thirty eight. Not long after her death Lansell was confronted with a somewhat macabre episode. A procession of angry men carried an empty coffin through the darkened streets of Sandhurst and silently placed it in the courtyard outside the stables in Fortuna Villa, as a gesture of their dissatisfaction of the poor ventilation of mines in the Bendigo gold fields and the mine owners' seeming indifference to the plight of miners suffering from 'Miners Phthisis' or pulmonary tuberculosis.

*at her residence
St. Kilda Rd. Sunnyside*

Lansell, discovering the coffin with his name engraved on the lid, during an early morning stroll, saw it as evidence that others wanted to remind him that he too was merely mortal. The combined effect of these episodes greatly affected him so, with little to hold him in Sandhurst, Lansell left

for England again, handing over his affairs to his close associate E.I. Dyason vowing never to return to Sandhurst or the mines of the Bendigo valley.

Beginning a new life in London, Lansell renewed his acquaintance with Miss Edith Bassford, a young Englishwoman who had been educated in Sandhurst and introduced to Lansell during the social evenings so often held at Fortuna. Lansell with no heir to his fortune and facing the prospect of advancing age in solitude, continued to court Edith. Their relationship blossomed and they were married the next year. Travelling widely throughout Europe, Lansell and Edith indulged themselves acquiring the best in art, furniture, beautiful and exotic curios and exquisite pieces of jewellery for Edith's growing collection.

Three children were born to the couple during their stay in England. George Victor was born in October 1883, Edith Fortuna Victoria, the following year and Horace Vernon in August of 1886.

Back in Sandhurst mining began to languish. The decline in yields during the '80s' was largely the result of the difficulties associated with mining at depth and as well of the inadequacy of existing methods of gold extraction. However others attributed it to the absence of the drive and confidence of George Lansell and his indomitable belief in the future of the Bendigo gold fields. Lansell too was having second thoughts. Although acting in a private capacity for the Victorian Government during his residence in England, on 3 June 1886 he wrote to Dyason that he was becoming bored with life in England.

Such was the charisma of the man known as the 'Quartz King', a petition was drawn up, 2628 signatures collected and an 'illuminated letter' was dispatched to London begging Lansell to return. Deeply moved he decided to end his self imposed exile. His return to Sandhurst was a triumphant affair demonstrating the affection of the local citizens for this man who meant so much to their and that of their city.

Lansell prospered greatly through the '90s'. Another three sons, Leonard Vivian born in 1888, Eric Vere 1891 and Cyril Vane 1893 were welcomed into the Lansell family at Fortuna, in spite of Lansell now approaching his seventies.

The '80' saw the development of secondary industry in Sandhurst, with almost 1000 men being employed in foundries supplying mining equipment or maintenance services. The Harkness foundry produced the largest air compressing plant in Australia for Lansell to use in his private mines. The United Iron Works in Wills Street, (owned by the Cornishman Abraham Roberts) erected the great crushing battery of 105 stampers for Lansell's 'Big Blue' mine on Sheepshead Hill, then the largest quartz crushing battery in the Southern Hemisphere. Lansell's brother Wooten also owned a foundry located in Lyttleton Terrace, while the foundry adjacent to the stamping battery within the grounds of Fortuna catered to the maintenance of many of Lansell's private mines.

The '90s' were golden years for Lansell and for Bendigo, now renamed from Sandhurst. A glimmer of the gold fields recovery from the decline so evident in the late eighties, manifested itself in 1891 when Lansell's 'New Red White and Blue' mine on the Sheepshead line unexpectedly struck a rich formation as it was almost on the point of ceasing operations. From 18,344 tons of stone that year it returned 11,422 ounces of gold and paid out 25,875 pounds to shareholders.

The strike marked a turning point, justifying Bendigo's faith in their Quartz King, and by 1892 a revitalization of the field had occurred. There were dazzling old time returns from the mines such as the 'New Chum United' (of which Lansell was a director) situated on the southern side of Chum Street opposite Fortuna and abutting his '222' mine.

In the three years 1890-92, the Bendigo mines produced just over half a million ounces of gold and for the quarter ending 30 September 1892 paid almost as much in dividends as the rest of the mining districts in the Colony together. In 1891, Lansell's 'New Red White and Blue' was the premier mine and continued to yield abundantly throughout the decade.

As a director and/or principal shareholder, he enjoyed astounding success in his association with mines such as 'Princess Dagmar', 'Koch's Pioneer Mine', the 'Great Southern', 'Victoria Quartz' and 'New Moon'. In 1898, the 'Garden Gully', of which he was both a principal shareholder and a director, staggered the mining world with its returns and retained pride of place in the dividends catalogue until the turn of the century.

Lansell was a familiar and a patriarchal figure around the gold fields in his buggy drawn by a pair of splendid piebalds. On special occasions he used a Victorian coach drawn by two fine blacks and driven by his own coachman. Despite his knowledge of the reefs and the underground formations, he rarely went underground and always relied on reports regarding the various mines and his own assessment of them. It is known that he only descended four mines, The 'Big 180', the '222', the 'Eureka' and the famous 'Garden Gully'.

Daily he would move about the gold fields obtaining information, discussing it and sifting it with his mine and legal managers. He ended his rounds about 4 pm at the Bendigo Stock Exchange to read the latest reports from the 3 pm shifts at the mines.

His pride and (sense of purpose) is demonstrated by the unique brick chimney-stacks of the Lansell mines. Nearly all featured their name in coloured bricks with interesting patterns and designs. To further illustrate this sense of pride, when Lansell constructed his huge crushing battery, the 'Big Blue Battery' at Quartz Hill, the original plan was for one of 100 head of stampers; while it was being erected, the 'Quartz King' heard that another 100 head battery was being built in South Africa, so in order to preserve the record of the largest in the world, and his dominance in the field, Lansell promptly added another five head.

Needless to say, not only did his 'Big 180' have one of the tallest chimneys on the field, but the '222' on the New Chum Line, at the very entrance to Fortuna, had by far the tallest poppet legs of hundreds of such structures, being 121 feet high and having five plats or braces instead of the usual three. Its square chimney stack was 85 ft high, of pink brick with white corners and with a large '222' on all four faces. It also had a high elevated tramway from its first brace along which the quartz was trucked to the Fortuna Battery higher up the southern slopes of Chum Hill. A private tunnel ran from below the retorting room to the mansion.

George Lansell continued an active interest in mining throughout his life. In an interview in 1904 for Punch Magazine Lansell, then aged 80 stated that he attended all the mining meetings and drove around the properties by horse and buggy. Lansell did purchase the first motor car owned by a Bendigonian, a two-cylinder 10 hp Benz four-seater; he rode in it only once

for about a quarter of a mile, then, stating that he didn't want to die young, called on one of his mine managers to drive it home. He was then owner of six private mines and still connected with numerous others. His private mines at this time were not successful and had not been for some time. He stated that if he hadn't had such a strong reserve fund he could not have stood it. One out of the six, however was returning 5 shilling dividends and Lansell held 30,000 of the 36,000 shares. This sounds impressive but, as he states, "One the other side of the coin I was paying 15,000-20,000 pounds a fortnight in wages and from 4,000 to 6,000 pounds a month in calls".

Speaking of his earlier days, Lansell commented, "Yes I may say that those were my successful days. Why 5,000 pounds or 10,000 pounds here or there was really nothing to me. On one of my birthdays during my prosperity I gave away 7,000 pounds".

Early in 1906, Lansell's daughter Edith returned from a trip to India feeling unwell. She fell into a coma for several weeks before she eventually recovered. Lansell was frantic with worry over his favourite child. He became depressed with a belief that she wouldn't recover. His iron will deserted him and he too became ill. A short time afterwards on the 18th March 1906 he died at the age of eighty two.

Bendigo was plunged into mourning. Condolences poured into Fortuna from everywhere. Throughout the district flags flew at half mast. The Bendigo Stock Exchange, of which Lansell had been a member, adjourned as a mark of respect. As news of his death spread through the city many prophesied that the gold fields of Bendigo would die with the man who had given it life. Curiously, in the light of subsequent statistics, the prophets were not far astray. It was the last year in which the field was to achieve a yield of more than 200,000 ounces. Thereafter annual production declined steadily, culminating in the collapse of the industry during World War 1.

On the 20th March 1906, George Lansell was buried in the Bendigo cemetery. The funeral procession was the most impressive seen in the district, with over three hundred of Lansell's employees marching in front of the hearse from Fortuna to the cemetery. In addition to the five coaches containing the Lansell family and friends there were one hundred and forty-four vehicles containing an estimated seven hundred mourners including members of the Victorian Parliament and Vice-Regal representatives. The cortege route was lined with thousands of people in silent tribute to the man who had done so much for the development of Bendigo.

In his will he left money to the local hospital, asylum, churches and household servants at Fortuna. Under the terms of his will 70,000 pounds was set aside as a trust fund to help widows and orphaned children of Bendigo miners. All employees in his mines were left shares. His estate was valued for probate purposes at 339,316 pounds.

In honour of his services to the city (of which he was one of the most prominent pioneers) the citizens of Bendigo erected a statue to his memory, overlooking the busy main thoroughfare, Pall Mall, and only a stone's throw from the old Mining Exchange in the Beehive building, where he was such a familiar figure.

The Lansell family continued to live at Fortuna with Leonard Lansell carrying on the family's mining interests. On the 25th January 1910, George Victor Lansell (the eldest son) married his cousin Gwendoline Frew and after a honeymoon in Europe, made his home at 'Denderah', now part of

Catholic College in View Street Bendigo. In 1913, Leonard, who had married Geraldine Orme, moved into his newly-built mansion, 'Lansellstowe' at Barkly Place, Bendigo. Edith Victoria Lansell returned to London to take up permanent residence there while Horace and Cyril both married into local families.

The declining gold yields, the low price and high inflation after World War 1 led to the closing of some mines in 1922, after which time the shafts gradually became flooded as more and more mines ceased operations. Bendigo had produced 16 million ounces of gold of which some 13 million ounces had come from the quartz reefs.

Lansell's widow Edith remained at Fortuna, at times entertaining distinguished and vice-regal guests, until her death on 12 March 1934. Her last years were passed in comparative solitude as she had outlived three of her five sons. Eric died as a young lad of 10 in 1901, Horace died in 1928 aged forty-two and Cyril aged thirty-nine passed away on 30 March 1932.

The saga of the Lansells at Fortuna had almost come to an end. A public sale to dispose of the accumulated effects of Lansell and Edith Lansell that took place between June 18 and June 23 1934 generated such interest that an estimated fifteen thousand people passed through the gates of Fortuna, many coming from Melbourne on special excursion trains running each day and catering for the serious bargain hunter the interested and the idle curious.

With the disposal of Fortuna at auction on the 11th August 1934 to Bendigo Mines Ltd., the final chapter of the Lansell family's sixty-three year association with Fortuna came to an end.

BENDIGO MINES

E.C. Dyason, chairman of the Bendigo Mines Ltd, a subsidiary of Gold Mines of Australia and coincidentally the son of E.I. Dyason, Lansell's business associate, convinced GMA that the Bendigo gold field was far from adequately prospected and that a certain future in gold mining in the area was assured.

On 7th August 1934, the company decided to bid up to 5,250 pounds at the auction for Fortuna Villa and mining lease 9842, however bidding ceased well before that limit was reached and the company acquired for 2,400 pounds what George Lansell had paid 20,000 pounds for in 1871 and he and his wife spent a fortune developing over four decades.

On 1 November 1937, Bendigo Mines Ltd, now Bendigo Mines NL (No Liability) resolved to dispose of Fortuna by auction either as it stood or for demolition and removal. E.I. Dyason then took a forty day option to purchase the property for 1,500 pounds, however Mrs Maud Matilda Nott purchased Fortuna freehold and leasehold for 2,000 pounds prior to the auction on 22 June 1938.

MAUD NOTT

Maud Nott and her husband Charles Stuart Nott, an investor, operated the New Alexander ballroom in East St Kilda; their intention was to spend a considerable sum of money on alterations and renovations for the purpose of conducting an up-to-date public ballroom and a rendezvous for social functions. However, these grandiose plans never eventuated, although dances were held there from time to time and, on occasions, guided tours for the

interested took place. Eventually the buildings and grounds began to deteriorate.

ARMY SURVEY REGIMENT

The outbreak of World War II immediately brought forward the requirement for maps of training areas within Australia and other tasks for training purposes. To offset delays in the production of maps by civilian agencies, it was proposed to set up an independent Military Mapping Agency.

In January of 1942 Major Sarl and three other officers of the Australian Survey Corps inspected Fortuna in response to a directive from the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, General Rowell, 'to secure, north of the Great Dividing Range, a location for the printing and storing of maps for the Australian Military Forces'.

In March of that year the Commonwealth of Australia, under National Security (General) Regulation 54, compulsorily acquired a lease on Fortuna and surrounds from Mrs Nott, following approval of Major Sarl's recommendation that Fortuna would provide a suitable location for Land Headquarters (LHQ) Cartographic Company, Australian Survey Corps.

An advance party led by Lieutenant Ralph Westgarth took up residence at Fortuna, which by then was in a rather dilapidated state with the gardens and surrounding areas overgrown and unkempt. Under the direction of Warrant Officer Harold Trust and with the assistance of tradesman recruited from the nearby Military camp at the Bendigo Showgrounds, alterations and additions were soon under way.

On June 11 1942, Major Sarl arrived with the remainder of LHQ Cartographic Company, totalling some 150 men of all ranks.

During the war years, men and women of the Australian Survey Corps and the Australian Women's Army Corps, worked around the clock producing highly classified documents and mapping for the allied war effort.

In 1948, the title 'Royal' was granted to the Corps in recognition of its achievements during World War II. In 1951, Fortuna was purchased by the Commonwealth Government and, in 1955, following a large increase in establishment (reduced to 75 in 1948-50), the Unit was redesignated the 'Army Headquarters Survey Regiment', now the Army Survey Regiment and the largest unit of the Royal Australian Survey Corps.

The Army Survey Regiment is now a world leader in developing technology for the use in automated mapping systems. The sophisticated, state of the art, computerised AUTOMAP is propelling the Royal Australian Survey Corps into the next century, surrounded by the constant reminders of George Lansell's underlying belief in the future of Bendigo and his adopted country, Australia.

The men and women of Fortuna have continued this strong association with the City of Greater Bendigo. Most sporting clubs have members who are or have been associated with Fortuna, as have many of the Service Clubs. The Regiment was granted Freedom of the City in 1970 and from time to time exercise this right. As an indication of the affection for Bendigo held by past member, many retired military and civilian members, have chosen to retire in the Bendigo area.