

REPORT ON AN INVESTIGATION
OF THE INTERNAL DECORATIVE
TREATMENT TO "FORTUNA VILLA",
BENDIGO

prepared for

THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT
AND CONSTRUCTION

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Introduction

This report contains the results of an investigation of the decorative treatments to the interior of Fortuna Villa in Bendigo. The report was commissioned by the Department of Transport and Construction to establish whether evidence of original treatments existed, and the relationship of these to the various stages of development of the house.

The investigation involved limited historical research to establish the sequence of construction of the building, and more detailed physical investigation of surface coatings. This latter part of the work was carried out by sampling and microscope analysis. The extent of the sampling varied according to the area examined. Four rooms were investigated in detail, and the remaining designated rooms investigated at a more general level.

The complexity of the building in terms of alterations and additions is such that it has not been possible in this report to precisely date all particular decorative schemes. It does appear that detailed family papers exist that may provide more information on this matter, but it has not been within the scope of this report to investigate these. Should full scale reconstruction or restoration work be undertaken it would be necessary to regard these matters more fully.

Historical Research

Fortuna Villa, as it stands today, is the product of many additions and alterations to its original fabric for over one hundred years. The date of the oldest part of the building is uncertain. It was built and named by a successful German speculator by the name of Balderstedt. The building was recorded as a relatively small two storied villa in the late 1860s, when the mining magnate George Lansell bought it for 30,000 pounds.

Lansell owned Fortuna until his death in 1905, and it was then kept on by his widow until her death in 1933. Lansell added to the house as his mining ventures flourished. He lived there from c1869 to 1880 and then after a period in England and Europe, from 1887 to 1905. The house was sold in 1934 and has subsequently been occupied by the army since 1942.

The appearance of the house at different stages can be seen from early photographs. Photographs exist of both the exterior and interior. Those of the exterior have aided in a tentative dating of the additions to the house, while the interior views reinforce the type of interior schemes found in the paint sampling.

Building Sequence

Of the photographs located, the earliest view of the house is a touched-up photograph of about 1871. The house was already substantial and the stables, mining battery, baths and an unidentified castellated structure spread off to the south (refer attached plan).

A distant view of about 1875 shows a new verandah on part of the west facade. At this time the west wall of Room 1-32 and Room G-9 below was set back behind an open porch that has since been filled in to become the external wall. The original wall line to the central block ie, Rooms 1-36, 1-37P and 1-55, appears to have been consistent with the original wall line in Rooms 1-32 and G-9. Its position is now only evident as the beam across Room 1-55 and the alignment of the ground floor door to the exterior. During the 1870s this door appears to have been the front door, that on the east face into the first floor was added in the next decade.

A photograph dated as about 1888 (ie, around the time of Lansell's return from England) shows the entry porch added and the platform on the north of the house glazed-in to become the conservatory.

Substantial additions were made to the house by about 1903, as a photo dated as such shows the mansard addition to the central portion of the second floor, and the addition of the south block, ie, Room 2-65 with 1-42 and 1-43 below (and presumably stairwell 53).

In 1903, the house was far from the form it is in today. There was no verandah to the east facade, north or south; the south rooms topped by 2-65A had not been built, nor was there the circular tower and stairwell by the front door (although a box-like projection is visible in its place); the circular bay windows to Rooms 1-42 and