

VILLA RESIDENCES

'Currajong' was called a villa residence. The term 'villa' has a long history, and its meaning has changed over the centuries.

Origins of the villa residence

The word 'villa' comes from the Latin language of ancient Rome. Villas were residences, often on farms. Many were large and luxurious. After the conquest of Rome by Barbarians in the 5th century AD*, and the break-up of the Roman Empire, most of those villas were demolished or just decayed from neglect.

For nearly ten centuries, during the medieval period known as the Dark Ages, ancient Roman history was ignored or forgotten. In the 15th century a movement known as the Renaissance started a revival of interest in the ancient world. The art and architecture of ancient Greece and Rome were rediscovered.

The idea of the Roman villa set in open country and surrounded by gardens influenced many Renaissance architects. Beautiful villas appeared in the Italian countryside. The most famous of them were designed by Andrea Palladio and they became known as Palladian villas. You can still see some of them, mainly in the Veneto region, north of Venice in Italy.

During the 17th and 18th centuries

visitors to Italy were very impressed with Palladian villas, and took the idea of the villa residence back to other European countries. In England many country mansions were built in the style of the villa residence.

The Industrial Revolution created many wealthy industrialists and businessmen, who lived above or beside their workplaces. As pollution from steam engines enveloped cities and towns, many of these people could



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Gates from the first villa residence at Hermit Park, now at the entrance to St Matthew's Church, Rising Sun

* Anno Domini (= in the year of Christ)



'Rogart', Hermit Park

afford to move away from their factories to villa residences beyond city pollution, travelling daily to work.

Such villa residences were more modest in size and decoration than the original country mansions, with less extensive gardens.

'Rosebank', Mundingburra showing the house and gardens, and a dairy herd and horses. At the back are stables and a dairy,

So the idea of the villa residence as a retreat from urban pollution and

overcrowding was firmly entrenched in Britain by the time Australia was founded.

The villa residence in Australia

The idea of the villa residence may be said to have arrived with the First Fleet in 1788. Several notable early Australians built villa residences near Sydney. Some of them, like Elizabeth Bay House and Vaucluse House, are now famous historic houses.

As settlement penetrated throughout the country and to north Queensland, villa residences appeared in many parts of the country.

Villa residences in Townsville

Villa residences in Townsville (as they were described in sale notices and reminiscences) were more modest.





'Osler House', Sturt Street

Some were built on the hills where they caught cool breezes, and overlooked vistas of the sea and surrounding countryside.

Others were in the western suburbs of West End, Hermit Park, Hyde Park, Mundingburra, Aitkenvale, Pimlico and Mysterton. There the soil was more productive. Good underground water supplies enabled the cultivation of ample gardens around houses set on blocks of five or ten acres, or more.

The first villa residence was also the first house built in Townsville. It

'Kardinia', Stanton Hill



was the home of John Melton Black, the founder of the city. All that remains now are remnants of the stone wall that once surrounded it.

Other villa residences were built in the 1860s and 1870s on the hills and along the beachfront. None now survive.

The first villa residence in the western suburbs was built about 1880. By then Charters Towers Road was a busy thoroughfare, leading from Flinders Street, through the former Black and Towns plantation and along Ross River to the goldfields to the north and west. Local people thought Leo F. Sachs quite mad when he purchased part of the plantation and built a house. They called his house 'Eremit' or 'Hermit Park', because the house seemed to be isolated in a wilderness.

The Sachs house no longer exists, but the entrance drive became the street we know as The Avenue, and its grand entrance gates were relocated to the entrance of St Matthew's Church at Rising Sun.

Others soon followed Sachs, building villa residences on large blocks of land along Charters Towers Road and along the banks of Ross River. The names of suburbs such as Mysterton and Pimlico remind us of some of these houses, though you can still find some of them. 'Rosslea' still stands in Riverview Street, 'Rosebank' in Lawson Street, or 'Courtley House' in Stagpole Street. 'Kardinia' and 'Pallarenda' on Stanton Hill and 'Warringa', 'Selhurst', 'Rockton' and 'The Rocks' on Melton Hill



'Currajong' on its original site

Few villa residences were constructed of brick or masonry. Most were of timber. Two-storeyed villa residences were also uncommon; on present information, probably ten two-storeyed houses were built before 1940. Only three remain — 'Osler House' in Sturt Street, which is of brick, 'Yongala Lodge', of Oregon pine, and the Hunt house on Cleveland

are some of fine examples of hillside villas.

Two main forms of villa residence can be identified. The most common form was a square or rectangular core house surrounded by verandahs, with a semi-detached kitchen at the rear.

The second form was the asymmetric house, with a gable-roofed wing projecting to one side and verandahs on only three sides. 'Kardinia' and 'The Rocks' are good examples of this form, which was much less common.

Terrace, probably of rendered concrete.

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'Currajong' is a very good example of a single-storeyed timber villa residence with a core of four rooms divided by a passageway, the whole surrounded by verandahs, and with rooms enclosed at both rear corners. Originally there was a semi-detached kitchen wing. Unfortunately, it could not be saved. The house stood, as it does now, in extensive gardens.