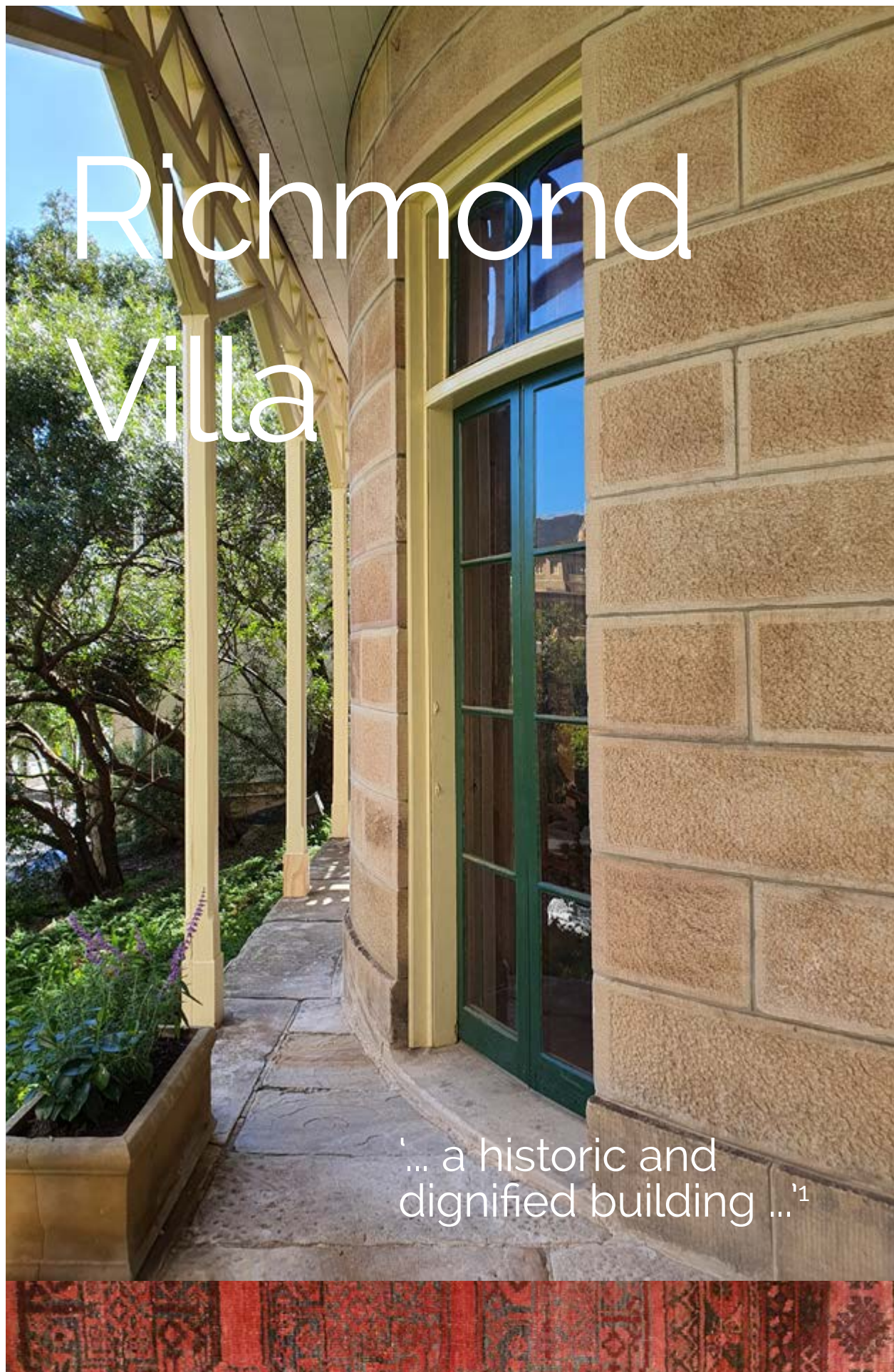


1932-2022



# Richmond Villa

'... a historic and  
dignified building ...'<sup>1</sup>



In December 1976, the New South Wales Government announced that the Society of Australian Genealogists would be granted a long-term lease of Richmond Villa.<sup>2</sup> Less than 12 months later, coinciding with the Society's 45th Anniversary in 1977, Richmond Villa was moved from its original location and re-erected at its current Kent Street site.<sup>3</sup>

Each stone was painstakingly recorded and numbered before the dismantling of the building began and the move took place.<sup>4</sup> Heritage NSW describes the reconstruction as 'a successful and rare example of careful dismantling, re-erection and adaptive re-use of a state significant building'.<sup>5</sup>

The official opening of Richmond Villa at the Kent Street site took place on a 'perfect summer Sunday afternoon' on Sunday, 12 February 1978 by the then Governor of New South Wales, Sir Arthur Roden Cutler, VC, AK, KCMG, KCVO, CBE.<sup>6</sup>

Richmond Villa is a glorious 'two storey stone building with large rooms and a full-length basement'<sup>7</sup> and is built from Hawkesbury Sandstone.<sup>8</sup> It is presently located at 120 Kent Street, Millers Point only two minutes' walk from Sydney Observatory on Observatory Hill.

Richmond Villa was designed by and built for, then Colonial Architect Mortimer Lewis between 1849 – 1851 and "originally adjoined Richmond Terrace and stood behind Parliament House, facing the Domain from 1849 to 1975".<sup>9</sup>

Mortimer Lewis became insolvent in 1849 and Richmond Villa was sold to George Rogers, Samuel Peek, Josiah Vincent Lavers and finally James Williams and family resided at the property until 1872.<sup>10</sup> In 1880 Richmond Villa was resumed by the New South Wales Government and 'was one of a number of privately-owned properties on the east side of Macquarie Street resumed under the Macquarie Street Land Resumption Act'<sup>11</sup> for "quarters for the Parliamentary Librarian and a Storage Depot for Books'. Known as Richmond House<sup>12</sup>, the building operated as an annex of Parliament House and had been the office and party rooms of the NSW Country Party until 1975.<sup>13</sup>

Richmond Villa has almost seen it all, from Colonial Architect, to merchants, grocers, importer, city councillor, cordial manufacturers, families with young children, a stock & station agent through to parliamentarians and distinguished characters.<sup>14</sup> At least two children (both daughters of George Neville Griffiths a leasee of the building<sup>15</sup>) were born in the building!<sup>16</sup>

In the time that SAG has occupied the building, politicians, parliamentarians, presidents, and former prime ministers have graced its majestic rooms and hallways. Richmond Villa has been the backdrop to photography sessions, morning teas, dinner parties, book launches, events and tv shows. It has also been (or maybe still is) home to a ghost!

Richmond Villa has obviously also seen the likes of thousands of enthusiastic genealogists and those attending family history events pass through its doors over the past 45 years and even witnessed the awarding of the very first Diplomas of Family Historical Studies to the first three successful candidates in 1978.<sup>17</sup>

In 1982, Jean Watson (Fellow) remarked in 'Golden Jubilee History: Society of Australian Genealogists 1932-1982' 'The Villa was proving to be a gracious home for the Society' and 40 years after Jean's comments, this remains true.<sup>18</sup>

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 9. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1978, p.1  
 10. Heritage NSW, 2022.  
 11. Martin, M., 2022.  
 12. ibid.  
 13. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1978. p.1  
 14. Heritage NSW, 2022.  
 15. ibid.  
 16. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1978. p.1  
 17. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1982. p.62  
 18. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1982. p.63

