

**M**YRTLE SPEECHLEY had an insight into one of Bendigo's first families that is now only a romantic memory.

For eight years, from 1921 until 1929, Mrs Speechley worked as a maid at Fortuna, described as Bendigo's finest home.

In those far-off days the age of the gold barons was coming to an end, however the wealth and lifestyle that came with it was still in evidence, even after George Lansell's death.

Boating on the lake in the grounds at night when the family was out at dinner parties, and climbing onto the pergola to eat oranges on long summer afternoons, were just some of the simple pleasures available to domestic staff in those long-gone days.

The Roaring 20s live on through Mrs Speechley, now a resident at St Laurence Court, long after most of the Lansell family has disappeared from Bendigo.

In 1921 Mrs Speechley had just left school and was given a job as a kitchen maid at Fortuna, which before its Army days was set in magnificent gardens in Chum St.

A staff of seven serviced the 40-room house in those days, including two German maids who spent 50 years with the Lansell family.

The long days started at 7.30 am and finished well after 10 am in service to the Lansells.

"In the afternoons you might get a chance to sit down," Mrs Speechley said.

"About 20 people would come over to go swimming in the lake and you

# Gold and governance

would have to carry out afternoon tea in big baskets for the guests from Bendigo's leading families.

"We had to work in those days."

In the 1920s Mrs Edith Lansell, George's widow, lived at Fortuna with her daughter Nancy and despite only two people living there the entire house was kept opened up and in use.

"It was beautiful, absolutely beautiful," Mrs Speechley said.

"They had a ballroom but never held a ball in it."

In the 1920s the Lansells owned some of the city's finest homes, and entertained many of His Majesty's Governors throughout Mrs Speechley's years in service to the family.

Lords Stradbroke, Stonehaven and

Sommers were among some of the elite guests.

Working at Dendra (now Coolock, in the grounds of Catholic College Bendigo in Barkly St) and Lansellstowe, also in Barkly St, Mrs Speechley holds fond memories of a wealthy family enjoying the finer things in life.

She also was called upon to work for various visiting relatives from England, including the Norburys, who stayed at the magnificent Albert Park near Serpentine.

One particular incident which has stayed in her mind occurred at Fortuna.

Mrs Speechley remembers attending to her duties on the magnificent balconies while Lord Stonehaven was in residence.