

# Villa may op

By **NINO BUCCI**

DEPARTMENT of Defence representatives have revealed Fortuna Villa may be open for public inspection prior to their vacation of the Bendigo landmark.

Speaking at the Villa Fortuna Action Group public meeting last Thursday evening, the disposal representatives said the department would consider a public opening as part of their community consultation process during either September or October.

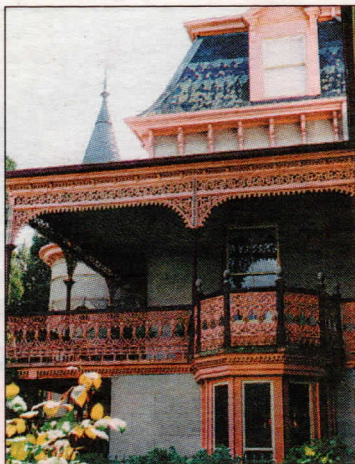
President of Villa Fortuna Action Group Merle Hall said the speakers also confirmed the City of Greater Bendigo and the Brumby Government would be given first opportunity to place a bid for the property before it was placed on the open market.

Exactly what price the property would demand is the matter of huge conjecture, with Ms Hall saying one Defence spokesman had devised five different ways of valuing the Golden Square mansion, all of which had variances of millions of dollars.

She also said the group would have little option but to wait patiently as the Department of Defence wound down operations at the former residence of mining mogul George Lansell, which has been owned by the Federal Government for more than 60 years.

"As soon as the property is fully vacated it will be assessed by heritage people, architects, surveyors, engineers and so forth to work out what it needs to get it into good order; they are still liaising with the council, though," Ms Hall said.

"We have to wait for the Defence Department to commence their audit, their checking out of



**OPPORTUNITY:** Fortuna Villa may be opened for public inspection.

Picture: JULIAN PROWD

the property, their decision as to what work they have to do to get it in suitable order for sale and all the rest of it.

"Nobody has a clue what the ultimate valuation will be.

"All I could say about our committee is that we know that things aren't moving at a rush, but that doesn't mean we'll sit back and wait."

Ms Hall lavished praise upon Abbotsford Convent Foundation chief executive officer Maggie Maguire, who spoke to the crowd of about 75 regarding the fight to save the iconic Melbourne building and the similarities to the Bendigo battle.

"There was a very broad cross-section of the community at the meeting and Maggie Maguire was really fantastic," she said.