



**HISTORY:** Fortuna Villa will open to the public before Christmas. Picture: JULIAN PROWD.

# Fortuna to open up

By **NINO BUCCI**

THE people of Bendigo will again be allowed inside arguably the city's most famous address within weeks.

Once the epicentre of Bendigo social life, Fortuna Villa will open to the public before Christmas.

The Defence Department confirmed the Christmas gift on Monday, saying it was committed to opening the mansion within the next month.

*The Advertiser* reported earlier this year that the department's disposals unit believed a late October or November opening was likely as part of the community consultation process being

undertaken before the sale of the property.

A Defence spokeswoman on Monday confirmed the open day would go ahead, but said a date was yet to be finalised.

"Defence is committed to holding an open day at Fortuna before Christmas," she said.

Visitors will be able to visit the Villa and walk around the grounds.

"Discussion is ongoing with our heritage consultant about the appropriate level of access to the Villa," the spokeswoman said.

She said further details of the community consultation process were yet to be finalised, and there was no time-

line for the disposal of the Villa.

As the site investigations have not yet been completed, the timeline for disposal of Fortuna, including further community consultation, is unknown.

Villa Fortuna Action Group president Merle Hall welcomed the announcement, but expressed some reservations about the timing of the opening.

"We are delighted, but we hope it does happen as soon as possible, because we're aware of the pressures of time that build up around Christmas, and these pressures may prevent some of the public from coming along for a look," she said.