

Long live the king

As part of Bendigo's 100,000 population celebrations, **MAX THOMSON** suggests there could be sound support for a film documentary to cover the incredible story of the Quartz King.

HOST to royalty and visiting dignitaries, the man who took off his boots in Bendigo's grandest mansion, Fortuna, had a life that embraced all the elements for an enthralling film documentary.

Backed by initial planning from council, the Bendigo Historical Society, plus Bendigo's federal and state parliamentary representatives, a sound submission could be addressed to organisations such as Film Australia, advocating production of an historic documentation of the life of George Lansell.

The drama, colour and excitement of the Bendigo goldfields could be immortalised on film for posterity in no better way.

Using much material from the old files of the *Bendigo Advertiser*, author Frank Cusack in his book, *Bendigo — A History*, whets the appetite for any film producer.

In what were described as golden hours of the golden days of the goldfield in its heyday, Cusack recalls that George Lansell was reputed to be reaping as much as £1000 a day from his mines — an immense amount of money all those years ago.

"He had private ownership of a string of producing



MINING MAN: The "Quartz King", George Lansell.

mines, heavy investments in many others on the Bendigo field, plus extensive investment in mining elsewhere in Australia and abroad," Frank writes.

"A mining magnate, he was a patriarchal figure, very proudly Bendigonian, living amid the roar of his beloved stampers and overshadowed by the huge poppet legs of his mines."

Fortuna, built by George Lansell, was one of the most palatial mansions in the colony, lavish and elegant in the most ornate Victorian manner.

"Probably, the most famous of the many Lansell mines was the Big 180, which, by 1895 was at 3179 feet, was the deepest mine in the Southern Hemisphere," Cusack writes.

"By 1899, it was estimated that Ballerstedt and Lansell had taken three million pounds worth of gold from the Big 180."

Cusack also recalled that "following the death of his wife, George Lansell left Sandhurst in 1877 to return to England where he remarried and settled".

As the Bendigo goldfield

began to languish, a petition signed by 2628 people induced him to return, and "he rode through the familiar streets of Bendigo in triumphant return and the field soon began to prosper yet again.

"Immensely wealthy, George Lansell also was immensely generous.

"His gifts to public institutions and local charities were legendary, as were the reefers, diggers and tributers down on their luck whom he helped over the years."

That year of 1906, when George Lansell died, was the last year in which the goldfield was to achieve a yield of more than 200,000 ounces.

At his death, all employed at his mines, many hundreds, as well as his personal staff at Fortuna, each received a parcel of shares in the rich Lansell mines.

His will set aside £70,000 as a trust fund to help widows and orphaned children of Bendigo miners.

Pioneers, still alive at the time of his death, also were to receive a parcel of shares.

What a veritable mine of material is now available for the production of a well-researched and well-produced documentary on the life of the Quartz King.