

Fortuna blacksmith stood out in the well-respected trade

Ironwork to test the mettle

PREVIOUSLY I focused attention on some individual blacksmiths in a series of articles.

Blacksmiths as noted on that earlier occasion, worked with iron and steel. This metal was worked, twisted, bent, forged and welded to be shaped into many varied components, both practical and aesthetic.

Every blacksmith requires a forge or furnace of some kind to heat their metal to a bright cherry red colour.

The metal can then be removed from the heat and, with the use of a hammer on an anvil, shaped according to what is required.

The shaping process is able to be conducted while the iron is still in its very hot state; normally an anvil was used as the means for beating the heated metal.

An anvil is a heavy cast-iron block, which can vary in size. It usually has a flat area, or table, on which the hot metal can be hammered or forged.

At the end of the flat table is a pointed beak referred to as the horn.

It is amazing to see a skilled artisan shaping and bending, tapering the heated metal in question.

There is a square hole at the end of the table of the anvil, a large variety of metal stakes can be inserted into this square hole, allowing



■ **GRAND GATE:** The metal has been scrolled, twisted, forged and welded in the forge to create the impressive entrance at Fortuna Villa in Chum Street, Bendigo.



the blacksmith to increase the shapes or angles at which he would be required to produce for the particular piece being crafted.

A good blacksmith is like a sculptor, having the ability to visualise what the

finished product's appearance is going to be.

A blacksmith who worked in Bendigo in two centuries – the last quarter of the 19th and the first quarter of the 20th – was Thomas Pearce.

What set Pearce apart from the scores of blacksmiths working at that time in the Bendigo area?

Pearce was responsible for creating the magnificent pair of gates leading into one of Bendigo's largest and most ornate homes, Fortuna.

Pearce was one of the large proportion of Bendigo's community to be of Cornish birth.

Pearce's father was also a blacksmith. He was born on August 17, 1850; Pearce married Mary Sobey at the parish church of St Keverne on May 2, 1871.

Apart from being a blacksmith, Pearce, according to the Cornish Census, also conducted the Five Pilchards Inn.

In common with many other Cornish folk during the second half of the 19th century, migration to other mining fields in various parts of the world was very much on the agenda.

Thus, in 1889 the Pearce

family came to Bendigo.

Pearce, practiced his skills as a blacksmith in Bendigo from the time he arrived, working at various mines, all of which had blacksmiths employed.

It was in 1898 Pearce was employed to be the blacksmith of Fortuna, then still in the hands of the aging George Lansell.

One of the many tasks Pearce undertook at

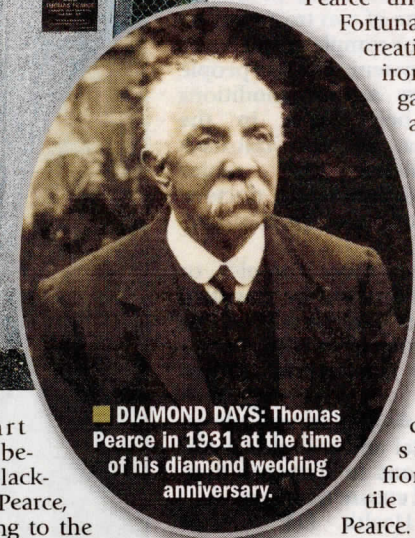
Fortuna was the creation of the iron entry gates. Every aspect of the blacksmith's skills can be seen in this work.

The entire concept of the gate's design stemmed from the fertile mind of Pearce.

Legend has it Pearce started making the gates without first having drawn out what he was about to create.

Pearce retired from his blacksmithing career at Fortuna in 1923, aged 73.

Thomas and Mary celebrated their diamond wedding in 1931.



■ **DIAMOND DAYS:** Thomas Pearce in 1931 at the time of his diamond wedding anniversary.