

Highcliffe Castle, Christchurch, Dorset, England

Highcliffe Castle is a Grade I listed building now owned by Christchurch Council, and has been described as arguably the most important surviving house of the romantic and picturesque style of architecture, which flourished at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. Its significance is recognised nationally by its Grade 1 status on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historical Interest.



Bought for £21,000 in 1967 by three local businessmen, a fire just before this badly damaged the Great Hall, and another fire the following year caused more devastation, the staircase having to be removed.

Blocked from any form of development or demolition, resultantly exposed to the weather and vandals, the Castle deteriorated into a ruin. National concern about its fate was voiced by local people, English Heritage, the Ancient Monuments Society, the Victorian Society, the Buildings at Risk Trust, SAVE Britain's Heritage, as well as prominent architectural historians.

In 1989 the Council and English Heritage jointly commissioned Niall Phillips Architects of Bristol to consider what future the Castle might have. In 1990 a shroud of scaffolding and sheeting was put around it to protect it.

In 1994 a start was made on a phased scheme to repair and conserve the building, funded initially by Christchurch Council and English Heritage. The first phase repaired the Castle's south wing, including the Wintergarden, Drawing Room and Library.

The fine oriel window is known as the King's Oriel because in the manor house of Les Andelys, it lit the room in which King Antoine of Navarre died from wounds after the siege of Rouen in 1562.



One of the main decorative features of the building is the oriel window above the entrance which was in a extremely fragile condition due to the corrosion of old metal cramps used in the original construction. The window had to be braced, wedged and supported while the cramps were removed before restoration could commence.



