



COUNTRY HOUSES FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

INTRODUCTION

OVER £1 MILLION FOR BUILDING CONSERVATION

At the end of 2007 the [Country Houses Foundation \(CHF\)](#) passed an important milestone when it awarded a grant to the Farms for City Children Charity to undertake some urgent repairs at Wick Court in Gloucestershire. This brings the total amount offered to projects to just over £1million, encompassing a wide range of buildings and structures right across the country.

Many of the projects that [CHF](#) have supported have made good progress and some, including Clavell Tower in Dorset have now been completed. The tower had to be painstakingly dismantled and re-erected 25 metres back from the crumbling cliff face but now looks as if it had always occupied its new (much safer) position. The Landmark Trust have received a huge amount of interest in this building and bookings for short holiday lets extend well into the future.

Applications to [CHF](#) continue to increase. At the beginning of 2008, Trustees had the difficult task of choosing from 18 projects requiring almost £17million for essential repairs and conservation work. Unfortunately the Foundation's limited resources are unable to cover all of these costs but it strives to provide support, often in partnership with other grant making trusts and bodies, for a growing number of England's important buildings.

As a charitable grant-making foundation the objects of [CHF](#) are:

- ◆ **To advance the preservation, for the public benefit, of buildings of sufficient historic or architectural significance or importance to merit preservation together with their gardens and grounds, and**
- ◆ **To protect and augment the amenities and furnishings of any such buildings, gardens and grounds.**

The rich diversity of our built heritage is reflected within the applications received and recent awards have included grants for work on an enigmatic crinkle crinkle wall in Oxfordshire, the restoration of some 14th century wall paintings in Gloucestershire, essential conservation work on an extremely fine collection of painted/stained glass near Twickenham and the repair of a fine hilltop folly on the Grimston Park Estate in Yorkshire.

In the remainder of this newsletter we provide brief accounts of three projects recently grant aided by us:

- ◆ **Combermere Abbey, Shropshire**
- ◆ **Norton Conyers, Yorkshire**
- ◆ **Eastnor Castle, Herefordshire**

Further information about the [Country Houses Foundation](#) and details on applying for a grant may be obtained from

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The Manor
Haseley Business Centre
Warwick CV35 7LS
Tel: 0845 402 4102
Email info@countryhousesfoundation.org.uk

www.countryhousesfoundation.org.uk



COMBERMERE ABBEY

Whitchurch, Shropshire



Founded 850 years ago, Combermere Abbey is a complex of Grade I listed buildings, situated on the edge of a large mere on the Cheshire/Shropshire borders.

The buildings reflect the economic and social changes of the last eight centuries. Starting as a Cistercian monastery, they were transformed into a timber framed Tudor Manor House and then an 18th century Gothic Country House, the whim of Viscount Combermere. During the course of these changes the complex also acquired and lost service wings and buildings. The Abbey is considered of national importance historically and architecturally and as an exceptional example of the smaller Country House of which so many were lost during the 20th century.

The Abbey is privately owned and on the English Heritage At Risk Register. With only limited funding for restoration its survival, until quite recently, was uncertain. The current

owners initiated a 20 year repair and conservation programme, with English Heritage support. So far they have restored the 19th century stables and converted them into 11 holiday cottages which provide income for future repair work, and have repaired the roof structure over the medieval abbot's lodge. The next phase of repair will focus on the North Wing of the house and also try to secure the vulnerable early 19th century service wing whose decay had accelerated in the past few years while the owners concentrated on the main Abbey building.

One building that stood out in particular was the unusual and distinctive octagonal Game Larder. With large gothic windows and original hanging stands inside, it had fallen into

serious disrepair, with the roof structure weakened through loss of tiles and rotten timbers. Its prominent position in the centre of the service courtyard made its restoration a high priority and the Country Houses Foundation provided for this with a grant of £50,000

Work began on the Game Larder in the autumn of 2007 and was completed on time and within budget by the end of November. The plan is for the building to be used as an interpretation room where visitors can learn more about the historical background to this important historic site.

The Abbey is open (pre-booked only) to the public in 2009 between Tuesday 24th March and Thursday 21st May. Tours will run on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at 12noon, 2pm and 4pm. Pre-booking is essential. Group tours (for between 20 and 50 people) can also be arranged between April and October.

Further information may be obtained from:
Combermere Abbey
Whitchurch, SY13 4AJ

Tel: 01948 662876
www.combermereabbey.co.uk



NORTON CONYERS

Wath, Nr Ripon

Norton Conyers is a late medieval manor house with Stuart and Georgian additions and has been owned almost continuously by the Graham family since 1624. The exterior has distinctive Dutch-style gables, and inside there are fine 18th century plaster ceilings in the principal rooms with collections of good furniture and accumulated family pictures, especially portraits and a famous John Ferneley hunting group, 'The Quorn Hunt in 1822'.

The house was visited by Charles I in 1633, James II and his wife in 1679 (the room and the bed they traditionally used are still on display), and Charlotte Brontë in 1839. The legend of a mad woman confined in the attics in the previous century is said to have given her the idea for the mad Mrs Rochester in 'Jane Eyre', and the house is claimed to be the original of 'Thornfield Hall'; the discovery in 2004 of a blocked staircase connecting the first floor to the attics aroused world-wide interest. The house is listed Grade II* and is set in 200 acres of listed parkland.

Problems were recently identified with the historic oak-planked floors in the principal ground floor rooms and their supporting structures which had been subject to severe attack by death watch beetle. The beetle was highly active and a plan for its control was

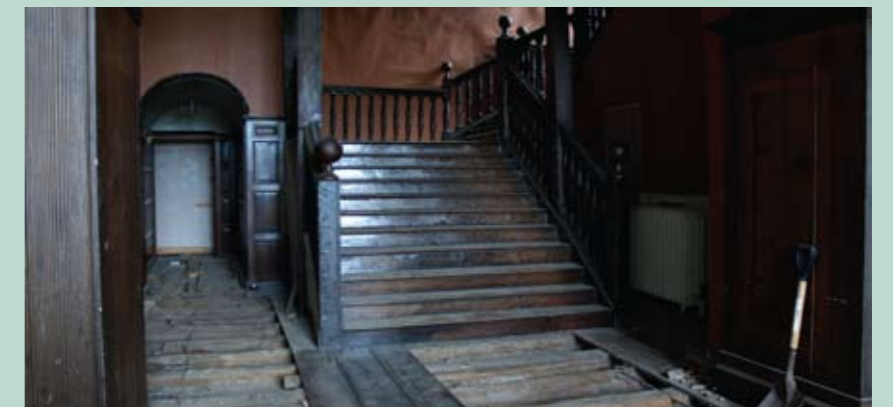
needed in order that these floors and other timbers in the house could be preserved. A grant of £75,000 from the Country Houses Foundation allowed work to begin in 2007 on the complex process of sequential lifting of the boards (the oak planks are all of varying widths, butt-jointed and dowelled to their neighbours), removal of the loose fill between the bearers to improve ventilation, and the treatment of timber with insecticide.

Whilst the floorboards were being lifted, heating pipe work was replaced and alterations carried out to the electrical services. Although not covered by the CHF grant offer, these improvements were undertaken as an important step in securing the future of the fabric and continued use of these rooms. As work progressed, Sir James and Lady

Graham also commissioned a detailed archaeological survey of the under floor areas, an opportunity that is unlikely to present itself again (hopefully) for several more centuries.

Due to these major repairs, the House unfortunately was closed to visitors during 2008 but the Gardens remained open.

For further information about the property or opening times in 2009 please contact:
Norton Conyers
Wath, near Ripon, Yorkshire,
HG4 5EQ
Tel: 01765 640333
Fax: 01765 640333
Norton.conyers@bronco.co.uk



EASTNOR CASTLE

Ledbury, Herefordshire



Eastnor Castle is a Grade I Listed Regency mansion standing on the western side of the Malvern Hills in Herefordshire. Designed by Robert Smirke, it was completed in the early 1820s for John, 1st Earl Somers to replace a rambling Jacobean house, which had been the family home since the end of the 16th century. The construction incorporated the use of cast-iron beams and joists, and the external walls and battlements were finished with ashlar blocks of Forest of Dean sand stone; the roof coverings are slate, with lead valleys between the pitches.

Like many houses in the 20th century, repairs and maintenance had been neglected due to lack of finance. Some roof coverings were replaced by corrugated iron sheets, effective if unsightly, and asphalt was an effective, if short-term, substitute for many lead valley gutters. Stone work was suffering, and the occasional rusting iron cramp was causing cracking and movement. By the 1980s, when the major roof repairs programme was drawn up, all those temporary repairs were reaching the end of their useful life and urgent action was needed.

Initially, following an earlier grant from the Historic Buildings Council, English Heritage came to the rescue. A series of substantial grants was offered between 1987 and 1999, enabling the most serious problems to be addressed, including the replacement of the battlements of four chimney

towers. Matched funding was largely provided by revenues generated from new commercial activity on the estate, including from weddings in the house itself and increased visitor income as the interiors, previously threatened by the occasional seriously-leaking roof, were also restored. However, after 2000, priority had to be given to other estate projects, including the restoration of the castle lake and the repair of several redundant estate buildings to be put to commercial use. The castle repair programme was suspended.

When it was decided to resume the programme and finish the roof repairs completely in 2007/8, English Heritage grants were no longer available. Government funding to EH had been slashed, and their more limited resources had to be directed towards Buildings at Risk. The estate turned to their bank and the Country Houses Foundation to see if this combination could help finance the repair of the three untouched roofs on the Octagon, Portculis and Porte Cochère and to replace the wooden cobbles at the Front Door, which had deteriorated into a dangerously rough state.

Thanks to a grant of £75,000 from the Country Houses Foundation, using a local builder for all three projects, and saving costs and buying the lead forward, each roof has now been renewed, to a very high standard, and a dangerous parapet has been stabilised with new stonework.

The business of the house had to be interrupted for several months, incurring further costs but it is hoped the likelihood of further breaks in the future has been greatly reduced. The total cost came in about 10% over budget due to extra work identified after the old coverings were removed.

Eastnor Castle is open to visitors from Easter until the end of September but not on every day of the week. Please visit the website for further details www.eastnorcastle.com

