

Archive Article relating to the Fire published in 2001.

Slane Castle in Co Meath reopened to the public in 2001 following a 10 year restoration process after it was partially destroyed by fire.

The castle's owner, Lord Mount Charles, believes the reconstructed building is "bigger and better" than before the fire in November, 1991.

Standing in a new room on the top floor, Lord Mount Charles takes a break from overseeing the final preparations for the opening and says he is considering calling this new room the "Phoenix Room" because the first file he created after the fire was called the "Phoenix" file.

The castle was designed by two of the country's most famous architects, James Wyatt and Francis Johnson, and built in the late 18th and early 19th century. A Gothic Revival ballroom was its heart before the fire. Fire-fighters spent hours ensuring the fire did not engulf the room and it subsequently became the first to be restored.

All of the castle's internal features have been reproduced in the style of that time. "An example of this is that all the windows and plasterwork in the ballroom are brand new, and I defy you to tell me the difference," Lord Mount Charles says.

Skilled craftsmen from Meath and Louth have done the bulk of the work, while Lady Mount Charles oversaw the interior decoration.

Aside from fire damage, the team's biggest challenge was rampant dry rot. After a decade the castle is ready to reopen and is seen as a project of regeneration - especially for those who saw it immediately after the fire.

"It was an awful sight; it was very, very emotional to see it during the fire. I thought I would never see the day when it would be completed," says builder Mr Noel Baldwin.

Architect Mr Jim O'Farrell says the restoration work was a magnificent example of its kind. "Working on this project has been a great privilege. It has been a joy and a worry too, but we had a great team. Henry Mount Charles supported us and was with us every step of the way."

The castle was not insured and annual open-air concerts have contributed to the cost of the restoration.

This year, U2 are playing two sell-out concerts and in a strange twist of fate they played support to Thin Lizzy at the first concert 20 years ago and recorded their album *The Unforgettable Fire* in the castle some years before the actual fire.

Does Lord Mount Charles worry about tempting fate by having the band perform there again? "No, there is a wonderful feeling of regeneration and what happened, happened. I have been drinking water from the Holy Well here for years and in a sense this renewal is spiritually-driven."

"It is the 20th anniversary of the first show and that the castle is back, braver and better than ever, is kind of a statement, I would have thought."