

# A visit to two castles

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# A VISIT TO TWO CASTLES

## LUCENS CASTLE AND THE CONAN DOYLE MUSEUM

The battlements of Lucens Castle emerge proudly from the wooded slopes of the Broye valley. A steep road leads the visitor up to a car park bordering a deep ravine. The visitor then crosses on foot a covered wooden bridge straddling a rocky stream before entering the medieval castle which is the property of the *Arthur Conan Doyle Foundation*. Its landlord has been Sir Adrian Conan Doyle, son of Sir Arthur, until his death in June, 1970.

The Foundation, which is the only British foundation abroad, has been set up to perpetuate the memory of the creator of Sherlock Holmes, and indeed Sherlock Holmes himself. The setting couldn't be more suitable to honour the memory of the man who also wrote the adventures of Soldier Gerard. Lucens Castle has behind it centuries of tormented history associated with the proud counts of Zahringen, the Bishopric of Lausanne, the House of Burgundy and a long succession of Bernese bailiffs who ruled the country with an iron hand.

When Adrian Conan Doyle bought the place with the help of the new Foundation and support from the Canton of Vaud, it was in a fairly dilapidated condition. The castle was after all designed to middle-aged standards of comfort. A limited sector has been made habitable and was the home of Sir Adrian Conan Doyle. The visitor can climb up the craggy battlements and enjoy a towering view of the Broye valley extending to Moudon to the east and to Payerne to the west.

The various parts of the castle open to visitors contain the Arthur Conan Doyle collection, which includes family relics, valuable pieces of furniture, Conan Doyle trophies and memorabilia, and a priceless collection of letters. There is no guide, but each room is presented by the gentlemanly voice of the former owner of the castle. The Hall of Knights contains among other evocative objects a tournament helmet designed by Anton Pfaffenhauser for the Grand Archduke Sogismund of Tyrol. The black armour used by the giant soldier Béjart in his attack of a Moorish camp in 1570 is also on show. It was given to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's great-great-uncle by the Spaniards during the Napoleonic wars.

There is sturdy old English furniture, Elizabethan column beds, oak sculptures, a 16th century chest and a beautiful ensemble of Charles II chairs. The Conan Doyle family table carries the signatures of Scott, Dickens, Churchill, Disraeli and many other famous

guests of a distinguished family.

The two rooms of greatest interest are naturally those concerned with Conan Doyle's best known hero: Sherlock Holmes. The literary room has innumerable documents bearing on the life and work of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The recorded voice of his son enumerates his many political, technical, medical and humanitarian achievements. The visitor is told that Conan Doyle introduced ski-ing in the Grisons in 1893. His works are the most read in the world after the Bible. The visitor can see that Holmes himself, and not only his memory, is kept well alive in the minds of the many people who have written to: Mr. Sherlock Holmes, 221B Baker Street, Lucens, Vaud.

Some of the expertise used in keeping Holmes living can be grasped in the exquisite reconstruction of Holmes' living room. It is in fact a replica of a similar exhibition at the Festival of Britain in 1951. Hundreds of objects and implements which have appeared in the Sherlock Holmes stories are exhibited in this painstaking model of 221B Baker Street, in which the butter and tea are prepared for the master detective and his indefatigable friend Watson, both of whom have temporarily left the room.

The windows are left open and its silence is broken by the noises of the Victorian street below. The visitor is immersed in the genuine world of Sherlock Holmes, patiently explained by Adrian Conan Doyle.

The room was designed according to a description to be found in the "Musgrave Ritual":

*"He was in his personal habits one of the most untidy men that ever drove a fellow-lodger to distraction . . . his cigars in the coal-scuttle, his tobacco in the toe-end of a Persian slipper and his unanswered correspondence transfixt by a jack-knife into the very centre of his wooden mantle-piece . . . and when he would sit in an armchair, with his hair-trigger and a hundred Boxer cartridges, and proceed to adorn the opposite wall with a patriotic V.R. done in bullet-pocks, I felt strongly that neither the atmosphere nor the appearance of our room was improved by it".*

And indeed, the visitor can see the "V.R." sign engraved with bullets by a royalist Sherlock Holmes to the left of the entrance of his living room. The jack-knife nailing a bundle of letters to the mantlepiece, the cigars in the coal-scuttle . . . all is faithfully reproduced. Holmes' library has every

single book mentioned in his adventures and it took many painstaking years to collect them. Other items are a biography of Florence Nightingale, whom Holmes greatly admired; a painting by Vermeer's sister of Holmes' grandmother; a photograph of Irene Adler, the only woman in Holmes' life; his Stradivarius. A survey map of Dartmoor used in the case of the Hounds of the Baskerville is pinned to a wall. There is also a picture of General Gordon, whom Dr. Watson had known well during the Afghan campaign. Authentic police journals of the Holmes period are piled on the table next to the tea tray. A hole in the wall above the doorway produced by a bullet aimed at Holmes by his arch enemy proved that the hero of deduction led a dangerous life. A cocaine set leads the visitors also to believe that he led an illegal life. However, the best authorities assert that Holmes never really smoked cocaine but only pretended doing so to tease Watson.

The visitor leaves Holmes' private world and is invited to the dungeon to view an inspiring collection of torture instruments. It comes as a surprise that a humanitarian and religious Conan Doyle should have assembled such lurid instruments. But he was a doctor as well . . . There is an impaling pole, an execution axe, a torture helmet (in which a screw is slowly planted in the victim's skull), a headman's block, and the "Virgin of Nuremberg". This implement with an innocent name was known only in a sinister legend until it was discovered in the Hall of Knights of a solitary Styrian castle. It is a cupboard with the approximate shape of the Good Lady and her head. The condemned man is placed inside it and the doors, each equipped with protruding blades of varying lengths, are gently shut . . .

The Virgin of Nuremberg can be bought at the souvenir shop. The caretaker doesn't appear to be overburdened by customers. She told us that Lucens had about 10,000 visitors a year. The Conan Doyle Museum was advertised at both entries of the village of Lucens, but she expected that more publicity would be undertaken. Lucens Castle seems to be surrounded by conflicting local rumours. Hardly anyone in the Broye valley seems to know what the situation of the castle really is—some actually think that it is about to be sold to an American millionaire.

The caretaker of the souvenir shop told me that the castle was the property of the Arthur Conan Doyle Foundation and that there was no question of selling it. Those who read their "Sunday Times" on 6th April, 1969, will remember an "Insight" story on the Conan Doyle Foundation. The article set out to prove in muddled detail

that Adrian Conan Doyle had attempted to sell the Conan Doyle collection to Texas University for two million dollars, and then to a New York dealer, although this went against the Foundation's statutes, which stipulate that the Foundation cannot dispose of both the Castle and the Collection.

The lady remembered this story all too well and said contemptuously that it was entirely false. A "pack of lies" was her way of qualifying a good "Sunday Times" scoop. Apparently, the Foundation Office in Geneva had been broken into at the time. The caretaker couldn't say for sure whether the "Insight" team had been responsible

for this indelicacy, but said that the Foundation has seriously considered taking legal action after the "Sunday Times" article. Judging from the amount of details and the use of material which must have been confidential in the "Insight" story, one cannot rule out entirely that private detective methods may have been used to concoct it. However, the Swiss Press hardly reacted at all. I believe that only two papers mentioned the article and one took the trouble of making some enquiries. As for the villagers living at the foot of Lucens castle, they had probably never even heard of the "Sunday Times".

## CHILLON AND THE VISIONS OF BYRON

Chillon Castle is perhaps the best known castle in Switzerland and one of the most famous monuments of Europe. The tableau of its feudal ramparts rising from the placid waters of Lake Geneva against the backdrop of the towering Dents du Midi must be a vision as ingrained in western culture as the smile of Jocunda.

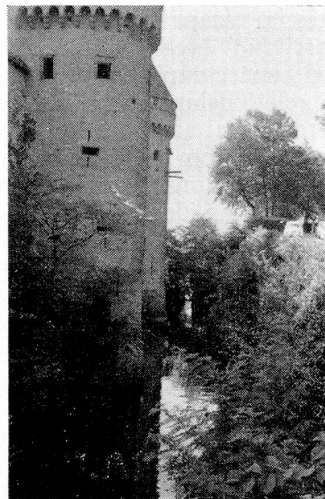
It is a fair guess, however, that the majority of the people living in the area have never bothered to make a visit to the castle since the organised excursions of their school days. Busy commuters and tourists speed past it on the crowded road to Italy and the Simplon railway, both of which are wedged by the castle against the mountain which plunges into the lake at this point. The Castle of Chillon was built on a rock rising from the lake to guard the access to the Saint Bernard pass and Italy and to levy taxes on the goods using this route.

The traveller hurrying on his way south misses much of its prestige. The castle is surprisingly large and surrounded by a wide natural moat which is invisible from the road. The visitor who has crossed the drawbridge and passed the guard house soon finds himself walking across a succession of three courtyards. The balconies and gables on each side give him the impression of being in the square of a medieval town.

The Guide Books recommended itinerary begins with the vaults hewn from the rock. These are the recesses of Chillon Castle which have given it such a sombre reputation and inspired Byron's "Prisoner of Chillon". Having entered a narrow doorway, the visitor climbs down a flight of dank, granite stairs to the store of the fortress. This leads on to the arsenal, the dungeon, the Gibbet Room and Bonivard's Prison. The whole succession of these subterranean chambers partly hewn from the rock are 256 feet long.

Narrow loop-holes with the appropriate wire protection preventing child-

ren from falling into the lake admit a feeble light which hardly breaks the darkness inside. The summer afternoon sun flares on the mirror-like waters, washing the foot of the massive walls 15 feet below. A steamer with sightseers in shirt-sleeves crowded on the sun-deck coasts slowly to land at the neighbouring pier. With eyes smarting from so much light, the visitor hardly distinguishes anything when he turns again to the penumbra of the Bonivard Prison. Families on holiday and guided tours stare at this combination of terror and charm with glazed eyes. Children run in the mysterious cellars, perhaps not quite as inspired as Byron when he wrote:



*Lake Lemman lies by Chillon's walls,  
A thousand feet in depth below  
Its massy waters meet and flow,  
Thus much the fathom-line was sent  
From Chillon's snow-white battlement.  
Which round about the wave intrhals:  
A double dungeon wall and wave  
Have made—and like a living grave.  
Below the surface of the lake  
The dark vault lies wherein we lay:  
We heard it ripple night and day.*

*Sounding o'er our heads it knock'd;  
And I have felt the winter's spray  
Wash through the bars when winds  
were high*

*And wanton in the happy sky;  
And then the very rock hath rock'd  
And I have felt it shake, unshock'd,  
Because I could have smiled to see  
The death that would have set me free.*

Byron was putting these words in the mouth of Francis Bonivard, Prior of St. Victor in Geneva, who was chained for four years to a pillar in the vaults of Chillon for having attempted to bring the Reformation to Geneva. Byron carved his name on a neighbouring pillar and wrote thereafter the "Prisoner of Chillon".

It was in these chambers that unknown men were left and forgotten to wither for timeless years.

The visitor leaves this underworld by climbing a spiral flight of stairs to the Hall of the Chatelein where the prison's gaolers revelled, separated from the martyrs below by a few feet of rock. The next storey has a series of chambers encircling most of the castle and housing the masters of the house. There is an ancient Ceremonial Hall ornamented with banners and flags, a succession of spacious guest-rooms and bedrooms with solid wood panelling reminiscent of Berne's grandeur. The floor above has a vast Baron's Hall, spacious 13th century latrines, sleeping chambers and the Defence Tower, which offers a plunging view of the lake. A torture chamber has incongruously replaced a small room adjoining a sleeping chamber during the Bernese occupation. Beneath it is a chapel.

The traces of human settlement on the rock of Chillon date from the Bronze Age and Roman times. It is not exactly known when the foundations of the Castle were laid but the existing courtyards were built during the 11th and 12th centuries. Chillon Castle was originally the property of the bishops of Sion before falling in the hands of the counts of Savoy in the 12th century. Under Peter II of Savoy the architect Pierre Mainier gave the edifice its present imposing aspect. The military services were located at the first courtyard. The quarters of the castle's prefect were at the level of the second courtyard, and below were the storerooms and the prison. The apartments of the counts of Savoy and their court were at the west end of the castle.

Chillon was captured by the Bernese in 1536 and remained in their hands for nearly 300 years. They used it as a depot, an arsenal and as the headquarters of their bailiffs. In 1798, when the Revolution had broken over the Bernese province of Vaud, the castle became the property of the new canton.