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Larnach Castle within its 51st year of private ownership is recognized as a Landmark property by Heritage New Zealand.

It's been a year of celebrations and the highest of accolades – Landmark property –

Tick – Qualmark Gold sustainable businesses – Tick – Rated a six-star garden by NZGT – Tick

TripAdvisor - 10 must visit New Zealand Landmarks -Tick

For more than 50 years Dunedin's Barker family have restored and commercially operated Larnach Castle. Friday 3 March 2017 marked the official anniversary of their guardianship. To celebrate this milestone the family held a series of events for former staff, current staff, patrons, and the public.

The pinnacle of this important milestone year was to be credited as a Landmark property by Heritage New Zealand.

For Margaret Barker who was only 24 when she and her late husband Barry Barker purchased the Castle, this was an incredibly satisfying endorsement. The Barkers were told they were mad to take on such an endeavour and people were quoted as saying the property wasn't worth saving. These comments were soul destroying in the early days, but the young couple persevered.

In 1990 aged 21 Norcombe Barker took over the running of the Castle. It is now New Zealand's oldest privately funded conservation projects; hosting annually over 120,000 guests, 65% of these being international visitors.

Accommodating these numbers of visitors in what was essentially built as a private home can have its challenges. To be successful the business has had to be innovative, the decision to build accommodation in the early days was dismissed as too ambitious. The thought was; why would people want to stay on the Otago peninsula so far from the city. The Barker family proved once again to have made the right business decision.

All three of the Larnach Castle products meet the Gold Sustainable tourism business criteria. The products include Larnach Castle and Garden, Camp Estate (5 star), and Larnach Lodge (4 star) To achieve the prestigious Qualmark award, the properties underwent a comprehensive on-site evaluation conducted by an experienced tourism assessor. This achievement required the business to be independently reviewed against specific standards of best practice, including health & safety, general business practices and their environmental and social performance.

General Manager, Paul Phelan says, "We are very proud to have reached this level across the breadth of all our products, we now have our eye on achieving the 100% Pure NZ Experiences rating".

This category will recognise the very best, sustainable operators. These are the operators that reinforce the preference for New Zealand products and are regarded as a uniquely New Zealand experience.

The significant ongoing restoration continues, but alongside this protecting and enhancing the visitor experience is paramount. The goal for 2019 being to open some more of the Castle for the public to enjoy. Our executive director Norcombe Barker says, "The dramatic increase in visitors over the last three years has meant we need to rethink the flow of the Castle, in William Larnach's time he did not need to accommodate computer server rooms and staff areas for up to 90 staff members".

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Background information:

Situated on the picturesque Otago Peninsula, Larnach Castle is one of New Zealand's premier visitor attractions. Lovingly restored by the Barker family, the castle and surrounding grounds are at the heart of the Dunedin visitor experience. A diverse business, Larnach Castle Limited offers the castle experience, award winning gardens, luxury accommodation, event management and unique dining experiences. Larnach Castle has received numerous national and international accolades.

Built over 16 years from 1871 by William Larnach, merchant baron and politician, for his beloved first wife Eliza. It took 200 workmen three years to complete the exterior master craftsmen from Europe spent a further 12 years decorating the interior.

Larnach spared no expense on his home, which featured the finest materials from around the world and many New Zealand native woods such as Kauri and Rimu.

The architecture style of Larnach Castle is of Gothic influence and was designed by RA Lawson in 1870, often described as one of New Zealand's finest mansions it features delightful craftsmanship, a unique collection of New Zealand antiques, a one tonne marble bath, a hanging staircase, panoramic tower views, and an exciting, tragic and somewhat scandalous history. In 1887 the building was further extended by the addition of a 3,000-square-foot ballroom built in honour of Larnach's daughter's 21st birthday celebrations.

At the height of his wealth Larnach employed 46 staff to serve him and his family. Married three times with six children, he served as New Zealand's Minister of Finance and of Mines. Larnach committed suicide in the parliamentary building in Wellington in 1898, not because of the financial stresses of the Colonial Bank as previously thought, but because of circulating rumours about an affair between his son and his third wife.

Today the Castle continues is privately owned and is now under the careful stewardship of the Barker family who purchased it as a near ruin in 1967 and have spent the last 50 years lovingly restoring it.

Larnach Castle is set in 35 acres of meticulously maintained grounds, when the Barker's purchased the Castle the resulting clearing and felling of the grounds revealed wonderful vistas, allowing the new garden to be developed within the original framework of paths, hedges and trees. The garden is a listed "Garden of International Significance" by the New Zealand Gardens Trust.

Larnach Castle is open daily from 9am – last entry to the Castle is at 5pm. During the summer months (1st of October to the 31st of March) the Garden is open until 7pm.