

# Top tourism award for family's restored abbey

Prize is normally reserved for French nationals after years in the industry

A BRITISH man who gave a new lease of life to a 12th-Century abbey in the Bourgogne has received a regional tourism medal for his family's meticulous work.

Clive Cummings, a former manager of the 900-year-old Amberley Castle in West Sussex, bought the Cistercian abbey in Bussière-sur-Ouche near Dijon from the Catholic Church in April 2005 and transformed it into a luxury hotel.

It opened to the public in March 2006, and its restaurant picked up a Michelin star just a year later.

The family's work has now been rewarded with a medal from the French tourism ministry – a prize that is normally only given to French nationals who have been working in a given region for at least 12 years.

The prize was presented by the president of the Côte-d'Or departmental council, François Sauvadet, and local tourism chief Jean-Pierre Rebourgeon, who praised Mr Cummings, his family and 34 employees for turning the abbey into an attractive tourist destination and boosting the local economy.

It is the latest in a string of awards for the hotel, which joined the Relais and Châteaux global group of exclusive places to stay in



**ACHIEVEMENT:** Clive Cummings, wife Tanith and their four children in the abbey grounds

2007 and picked up prizes from the departmental and regional tourist boards as well as independent inspectors.

The site is set in a beautiful seven-hectare park and is well-placed, being half an hour by car from Dijon and near several Bourgogne vineyards.

"We find it lovely here," Mr Cummings said. "The way of life and the people are great.

"We have made lots of friends and the locals are very positive about what we're doing to keep the abbey alive."

The renovations were on a large scale – the walls, ceilings and floors of the bedrooms had to be replaced, the 60ft-high refectory needed replastering and redecorating and

the lake dredged.

The maintenance of the abbey is an ongoing work and there are future development plans which will see the number of bedrooms increase from 17 to 28.

## Diverse

"The clientele is very diverse," Mr Cummings said. "The hotel welcomes more English guests than any other nationality, but the French clientele remains very important. Many former Amberley Castle guests remain loyal and come regularly to the abbey."

In September last year, the abbey broke its record, welcoming clients from 16 different countries in one month.

Mr Cummings started out in the hotel and restaurant business at an early age, washing pots for his parents, Joy and Martin, in their pub and then working in the family hotel. His parents have now joined the rest of the family in the Bourgogne and are finishing renovation work on another property, the Château de Loiserolle, just a few kilometres away.

The two buildings are linked through the Cistercian monks, who first settled at Loiserolle before a fire forced them to move out and found the abbey in 1131.

To find out more about the Abbaye de la Bussière, call 03 80 49 02 29 or see [www.abbayedelabussiere.fr](http://www.abbayedelabussiere.fr)