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## Jousting to be king of tourism castle

By DEBORAH GOUGH

IT IS a tough gig, taking arguably Victoria's daggiest tourist attraction and turning it into a theme park that draws the new wave of fans of all things mediæval. Think *Harry Potter*, *Game of Thrones* and *The Hobbit*.

Ballarat's Kryal Castle will reopen on Saturday after a \$10 million overhaul that recaptures the swords and sorcery magic of its 1970s' heyday.

The old brown weatherboards and tin roofs have been replaced with more convincing sculptured concrete ramparts, with daily full-costume jousts and light shows, a torture chamber, a wizard's workshop, tooth fairy sweets shop, costume parlour and a throne room. The park's attractions are built around the story of a royal family, their naughty twins and a dragon and her stolen eggs.

International jousting champion Justin Holland, an Australian, says original builders Keith and Joyce Ryall were ahead of their time when they built it in the 1970s.

"I think that probably the Ryalls were a generation too early to capture the enthusiasm for this sort of thing that is just exploding, right now, in just about every Western country in the world," Mr. Holland said.

Mr Holland, known as Sir Baldwin Silverhand, said 37,000

people attended a mediæval jousting event in Queensland last year.

The new owners, Castle Tourism and Entertainment, a consortium of local and international investors, shut the castle just over a year ago and enlisted theme park creator Sanderson Group, whose projects include Gold Coast Movie World and more recently Universal Studios in Singapore.

"There has been a lot of science put behind the project," said Evelyn Joyce, a member of the consortium.

The castle's redevelopment follows years of failed schemes for its reinvention, including a 2010 proposal to turn it into an X-rated "adult entertainment playground, and a 2011 scheme for a New Age centre, complete with psychic readings.

Unlike the Gold Coast's many theme parks, Kryal Castle will not be open all year round, closing for six weeks mid-year.

"Ballarat is very cold in the winter," admits Evelyn Joyce, one of the new owners, "and it is even colder on the hill."

More works are planned inside the 2.8 hectare castle complex, such as an ale house and gift shop.

On the remaining 11 hectares, it is planned to build four-star cabin accommodation for families and rides that may include a dragon roller coaster.



Knights joust at Kryal Castle, which is being reopened as a mediæval tourism venture. Akeaneus the wizard (top) and knights at the round table are among the new attractions.

PICTURES: JASON SOUTH