

Robert's Castle

Posted by Peter on 8 February 2010



Robert Fidler's castle - but no planning permission!

We have a [saying](#) in English that an Englishman's home is his castle. What exactly does it mean? Some people say that it means that you can do anything you like in your own home. But that isn't true. You are not allowed to kill people in your home, for example. Perhaps it means that you can decide whom to allow into your home. If you say no, then they have to stay outside. But that isn't true either. The police, for example, sometimes have the right to come into your house even if you don't want them to.

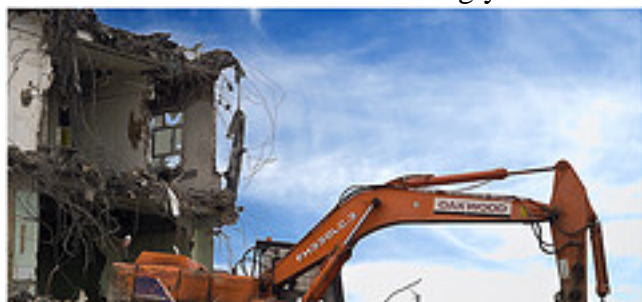
So perhaps the saying just means that English people like to think about their home as a castle. It is safe, secure and private. It is my place. It is not anyone else's place!

Robert Fidler is a farmer in Surrey, which is a county south of London. He wanted to build a castle on his farm as a home for himself and his family. Unfortunately, in Britain you cannot build a castle, or any other building, anywhere you want. You need to get [planning permission](#) (sometimes called planning consent) first. So Robert Fidler applied for planning permission. The local authority said no. Robert Fidler's farm is in the [Green Belt](#), which is the area around big cities where new houses and other buildings are generally not allowed. The Green Belt stops towns and cities from getting too big and destroying the open countryside. So Robert Fidler could not build his castle.

However, Robert decided to build the castle anyway, without planning consent. First, he built a high wall with [bales of straw](#). If you are a farmer, like Robert was, you can do almost anything as long as it is agricultural, and bales of [straw](#) are definitely agricultural. Behind the wall of straw, where no-one could see, Robert Fidler built his castle, or rather his house which looked like a castle. There is a picture of it on the website. It has two round towers, with ramparts on the top. The newspapers said that the castle also had [cannons](#), but I cannot find a picture of them.

Robert finished his house in 2002. He moved in with his wife and small son. When they looked out of their windows, all they could see was the wall of straw, but they did not mind. Birds built their nests in the straw, and it was fun to watch them. Besides, it was [vital](#) to keep the castle secret. They hoped that after four years, they would be allowed to keep the castle, even without planning permission.

In 2006, Robert removed the wall of straw, and now everyone could see the remarkable house which he had built. The local authority were horrified. They told Robert that he had to [demolish](#) the house. He refused. The local authority started legal action. Last week a judge agreed with the local authority and said that Robert's castle had to go. But Robert Fidler will continue fighting, and says that he will go to the European Court of Human Rights if necessary. He told the newspapers, "This house will never be knocked down. This is a beautiful house that has been lovingly created. I will do whatever it [takes](#) to keep it."



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Knocking a building down - will this happen to Robert Fidler's castle?

So, should Robert be allowed to keep his castle, or should it be knocked down? Some people say that it is a really nice building and that it would be wrong to demolish it and leave Robert and his family with nowhere to live. Other people say that everyone else has to obey the planning laws, and it would be unfair to [make an exception](#) in this case. What do you think?

Our phrasal verb this week is "to knock down". If you knock down a house, or a wall, or a building, it means that you demolish it. You use a big hammer, or a machine, to hit the walls until they fall down and there is nothing left except a pile of bricks and stones. The local authority have told Robert Fidler that he must knock his house down. He says that it will never be knocked down. OK?

There is a quiz on the website. Have fun.

This is the text of the podcast at <http://www.listen-to-english.com/index.php?id=511>,