



ALNWICK U3A Architecture Group

Thursday 26th September 2019

Visit to Rosslyn Chapel & Tantallon Castle

Timetable:

- 9.25 am Depart from Alnwick (Playhouse first then Leisure Centre bus stop)
11.30 am Arrive at Rosslyn Chapel
Note: at 12.15 there is a talk about the chapel.
This takes place inside the chapel.
2 pm Depart from Rosslyn
2.45 pm - 4.15 pm Visit to Tantallon Castle
6.00 pm Arrive back in Alnwick

The Rosslyn Chapel Coffee Shop provides light meals and there are also a small number of places to eat in the village.

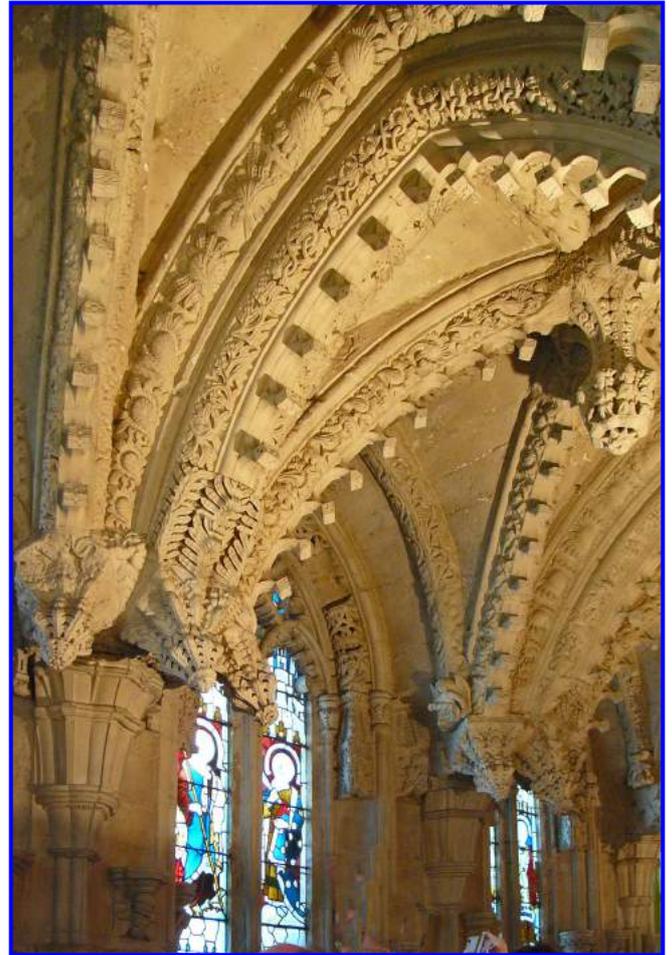
Rosslyn Chapel

The fame of the Chapel is based upon its stone carvings covering almost the whole structure. It doesn't seem British and certainly not Scottish. Spain and Portugal, where there are such buildings, are often suggested as models: but Rosslyn is earlier than them. The decoration is, apparently, late gothic - there is just more of it than you would see anywhere else.

The Chapel is the church of a college established in 1430 by William St Clair, 3rd Earl of Orkney. It was intended to be a cruciform church but only the choir and the beginnings of the east walls of the transepts were built at this time. Although it is a 15th century building many of the expected gothic features, such as the flying buttresses, perform no structural purpose and only the eastern chapels have rib vaults. The vaulting of the choir is a pointed tunnel vault which is a common Scottish, but only Scottish, late gothic feature. However Rosslyn is the only example of a tunnel vault on top of a clerestory: this is very ungothic. The sacristy, reached by stairs at the east end of south aisle is, in sharp contrast, undecorated. This may be earlier than the rest of the chapel. The baptistery at the west end (adjoining the transept walls) was added in 1810-1.

What does all this decoration mean? There are many different symbols: green men, saltire crosses, serpents, flowers, animals and so on as well as more usual religious imagery. With so much and with so little firm documentation, Rosslyn has attracted many legends. One is the connection with the Templars. The Grand Master of the Templars from 1118-36 (Hugues de Payen) was married to a St Clair and two members of the St Clair family were allegedly grand masters of the Priere de Sion, a shadowy order of which, some say, the Templars were the military arm.

And then there is the Da Vinci Code!





Tantallon Castle

Tantallon was originally built in the later 14th century and much of what remains is of this date. The great south-west wall and the castle's position are what impresses most today. However, the approach across the ditch and burn leads to a 16th century outer gate.

The owner of the castle in the 14th century was the first Earl of Douglas and the castle is associated with the "red" Douglases. These Douglases were regularly in conflict with both the "black" side of the family and the Scottish crown. The red Douglases, who became the Earls of Angus, often favoured the English and in 1491 were in a pact with Henry VII. Tantallon was besieged by James IV. The outcome is unclear, but the then Douglas, known as "Bell-the-Cat" seems to have reached an understanding with the Scottish King. Later, there was a notable siege by James V in 1528. While this was unsuccessful, James took possession by negotiation while Angus was in exile in England. James seems to have spent considerable sums strengthening the castle - including building a new barbican and altering the mid tower.

However, it was Cromwell's men who, in 1651, caused most damage to a castle that had resisted attacks for so long. Commanded by General Monk, a force of two to three thousand men bombarded the castle for 12 days. As a fortified castle, Tantallon's time was over.

