

ROSSLYN

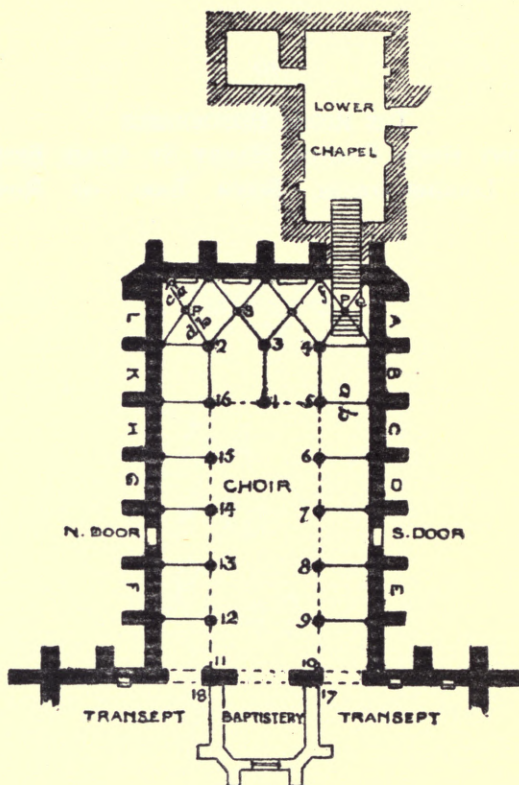
THE CHAPEL, CASTLE AND SCENIC LORE

By WILL GRANT, F.S.A.Scot.

DYSART & ROSSLYN ESTATES
KIRKCALDY

TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
ANTHONY HUGH FRANCIS HARRY ST. CLAIR ERSKINE,
LORD LOUGHBOROUGH, SIXTH EARL OF ROSSLYN



GROUND PLAN OF CHAPEL

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INTRODUCTION

ROSSLYN can be reached in twenty-seven minutes by car from the centre of Edinburgh. It is a thrilling journey ; for with every hill you climb out of the City the view expands—Arthur Seat, Liberton and Craigmillar Castle on the one hand; the conical Blackford hill and the rolling Braids on the other, with the Moorfoot hills in the distance. While all around is seen—

“ Lothian’s fair and fertile strand
And Pentland’s mountains blue.”

The Pentland hills beckon with their intriguing contours and glorious colours towards the Mecca of Rosslyn. Like the city itself the surrounding countryside is full of glamour and romance.

The purpose of this book is twofold. First, to enable visitors to see as much as possible of Rosslyn Chapel and Rosslyn Castle in a limited time, by making the information clear and concise, so that a good general idea can be obtained at a glance. Second, by enlarging some of the sections with full detail, as in the case of the carvings and ornament, to assist those who have time at their disposal, to understand it more fully. The longer the time spent in this small Chapel the richer the reward, the more deep and lasting the impression of its wonder, its glory and its power.

The Ground Plan showing position of pillars and architraves and the groining of the roof of the Lady Chapel, numbered and lettered, and the windows lettered in Roman capitals, is a guide to the section on the Carvings. For a period the Chapel was in an almost ruinous condition, exposed to the ravages of weather and the hand of the spoiler, and it says much

for the care with which it has since been guarded that the stone fabric is still perfect after five centuries, and that it retains much of its pristine beauty.

Rosslyn Chapel has been likened to a Hindu Temple, but there is no need to go to India, or to Greece, Florence, Canterbury or York until we have seen this fine Scottish gem of pure Gothic. And we can come again and again, and find something new. "You cannot bathe twice in the same river," said Heraclitus, "for it is renewed every moment"; and Emerson reflected, "A man never sees the same object twice; with his own enlargement the object acquires new aspects." So it is with Rosslyn.

The book tells the story of this wonderful Chapel, which of old was called "The Chapel amidst the woods," and the ancient Castle, gives a glimpse of contemporary history, and concludes with a sketch of the historical lore, literature and romance of the Rosslyn and North Esk countryside. And not least it provides a memento of one of Scotland's most beautiful shrines.

In my researches I have investigated most of what has been written on the subject of Rosslyn, and find that little fresh information of importance has been available since the MS. collections of the "Genealogie of the Sainte-claires," 3 vols., 1700, by Richard Augustine Hay, Canon Regular of St. Genevieve, Paris, and Prior of Pieremont, and MS. extracts therefrom by Dr. Forbes, Bishop of Caithness—"An Account of the Chapel of Roslin," 1774, which extracts appear in the Edinburgh Magazine for January, 1761 (Ruddiman).

Based upon these are various Guide Books—"A Description of Rosslyn Chapel, with engravings," 1815: "Historical and Descriptive Account of Rosslyn Chapel & Castle," with eight engravings (Oliver & Boyd), 1825: McDowall's New Guide, used along with the 1825 Guide in compiling the New Statistical Account (Roslin), 1843: "Rosslyn and Hawthornden" by Cuthbert Bede (Rev. Edward Bradley, 1827-89): and the "Illustrated Guide" by Rev. John Thompson, F.S.A., to whose faithful

descriptions I have given full consideration, and acknowledge my indebtedness.

Other valuable contributions are found in the "Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, Scotland," vol. XII, p. 218 (Chapel), p. 412 (Castle), 1876-7: vol. II (1927-8) (Chapel Carvings): "The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland" and "Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland" (MacGibbon & Ross): "Transactions of Edinburgh Architectural Association," vol. IX (1928). Other authorities are mentioned in the text. I also acknowledge the assistance I have received from the Curator, Mr. John Taylor, F.S.A.Scot., who is most zealous in all that pertains to the Chapel. Scottish historical and family records hidden in charter chests and cellars may yet contribute much to our knowledge of the ancient state of Scotland, and of the activities of those who made Rosslyn Chapel and Castle famous.

This book marks the five hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Chapel, and interest in this extraordinary treasure is still as widespread as ever, as witnessed by the vast numbers of all nationalities who visit it annually. I trust that the present account may help to make it even more widely known.

Acknowledgement

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ROSSLYN VILLAGE

THE modern spelling is Roslin, but the old spelling of the village name, as well as that of the Earldom, is Rosslyn, which has been adopted throughout this narrative. It is derived from the two Celtic words Ross—a rocky promontory, and lynn—a waterfall, both being features of the river scenery below the Chapel and Castle. An earlier spelling was Roskelyn—a hill in a glen, which might apply to College Hill, upon which the Chapel stands.

The village, which is cross-shaped, with the Chapel at the head, was of some importance in the mid-fifteenth century, under the fostering care of the St. Clair family. While the Chapel was being built it was accounted the “chiefest town in all Lothian, except Edinburgh and Haddington, and became very populous by the great concourse of all ranks and degrees of visitors that resorted to the Prince at his Palace or Castle, for he kept a great Court.”

On June 13, 1456, James II erected it into a Burgh of Barony, with a market cross, a Saturday market, and an Annual Fair on St. Simon and St. Jude’s Day (28th October). It was to St. Matthew that Rosslyn Chapel, or as it was originally planned, the Collegiate Church of St. Matthew, was dedicated, on 21st September, 1450 (*Pro Soc. of Ant., Scot., vol. 12*). An earlier church, prior to 1446, situated in the cemetery, just below the Chapel, of which the date is unknown, was also dedicated to St. Matthew. It is sometimes stated that these Dedications were linked with the date of the Battle of Roslin, which marked the beginning of Scotland’s victory in the fight for Independence, but that day—24th February, 1302, was St. Matthias’s Day not St. Matthew’s Day.

The first of the St. Clairs to reside at Rosslyn was

Sir Henry St. Clair, who lived in the days of David I and William the Lion, being knighted by the former, appointed an ambassador of the latter to King Henry II to re-demand Northumberland, and fought at the Battle of Northallerton in 1138. Confirmations of the Rosslyn Charters were obtained from James VI and Charles I in 1622 and 1650 respectively, both proclaimed "with sound of trumpet" at the market cross of Edinburgh. Rosslyn is thought to have been founded by Asterius, whose daughter Panthioria, a Pictish lady, married Donald the First, A.D. 203, so that the place is of great antiquity. Rosslyn was at that time a great forest, as also the Pentland Hills, where there abounded great numbers of harts, hinds, deer and roe, with other wild beasts. ("Genealogie.")

Opposite the two Hotels is the Parsonage, once owned and occupied by Prof. Jamieson of Edinburgh University, Professor of Natural History, and a distinguished mineralogist and geologist. Rosslyn was the site of one of the earliest linen bleachfields in Scotland (on the level ground beneath Rosslyn Castle), originated by Robert Neilson, son of William Neilson, Edinburgh, Lord Provost in 1719, when the Provost's gratuity was "settled at £300 upon his oath that he would accept nothing else." Robert acquired a fortune of £150,000 in France, lost it all, travelled in Holland and acquired the art of bleaching linen, and, returning to his native country, established the bleachfield at Rosslyn, where he once again prospered. There was a bleachfield at Corstorphine in 1698.

Coal-mining had an early origin in the district. The monks of Newbattle first worked coal at Prestonpans in the twelfth century: and Morrison's Haven, built in 1526, was the exporting centre. The making of carpets, gunpowder and paper still continue in the district, and agriculture is a staple industry.

If Rosslyn was the "resort of a great concourse of all ranks of people" in the days when the Chapel was being built, it was no less so in the days of Sir Walter Scott, for immediately after the publication of the "Lay of the Last Minstrel" in 1805, Rosslyn and the whole Eskside and Pentland district became a focus



NORTH DOORWAY



THE 'PRENTICE PILLAR

of resort for all visitors to Scotland's Capital, such was the influence upon the author of the "Border Minstrelsy" of the romantic vicinity of Rosslyn's "Castled rock," speaking of past magnificence and almost regal power, its lordly owners, and its centuries of human history and destiny. So it was that after the "Dirge of Rosabelle," which forms a charming feature in the "Lay," had directed special attention to Rosslyn, a coach was first started to convey tourists to the spot. The little village awoke and found itself famous in song and in popular favour. The four-in-hand coaches to Rosslyn became a feature of Edinburgh's Princes Street, with their high-spirited horses, gaily caparisoned, the driver in black-velvet-collared red coat and broad-brimmed silk hat, breeches, leggings and white gloves. The guard, similarly attired, with his long shining horn, which he flourished with evident gusto, reminding visitors that the Coach for Rosslyn and Hawthornden was about to start. Soon it was filled to capacity, and the gay equipage set out for Rosslyn with a sounding horn and a merry jingle. How it all reminded one of Sir Walter's description in "The Antiquary" of the "Hawes Fly" or Queensferry Diligence—"green picked oot wi' red, three yellow wheels an' a black ane," and the "Caravan," "The Fly" and Croall's Stage-coaches that passed Rosslyn on the way to Peebles by Auchindinny, Cleikhim-in (*i.e.*, lifting the toll-bar and passing the traveller through) The Howgate and Venture Fair, in days when there was excitement and romance in travel upon the road. It was during the times of the picturesque Rosslyn four-in-hands that accommodation was built in the village for the use of visitors, for the place soon became the annual resort of thousands of tourists. The old Inn of Rosslyn that entertained so many celebrities in its day, was at the Chapel gate. Motor-buses have now superseded all the old-time coaches. Indeed motor transport now passes through or near Rosslyn that will take you almost anywhere in the South of Scotland—to Border towns where there are comfortable hotels, to some of the finest hill and river scenery, fishing, walking, hill-climbing; to the

famous Border Abbeys, romantic Tweeddale, and the Scott country, the Allan Ramsay and the Carlyle country, Moffat Spa and the Galloway Highlands. All you require is a map, and your hotel proprietor will provide the bus time-table.

For the benefit of parties visiting the Chapel and Castle by motor-car, it may be stated that there is ample free parking accommodation at both, and facilities for food and rest at the latter, where the glorious prospect of the Esk valley may be enjoyed in comfort, and one may muse in the sunshine on things past and present. A trans-atlantic visitor as he looked out upon the storied landscape at Rosslyn Castle remarked—"Yes, we have our fine places in the States also, and many finer, it may be, but what ours lacks is the embodiment of the soul of the scene—the ancient chapel, castle, mansion: we have no such places hoary with age and hallowed by history and the centuries-old procession of humanity witnessing to the purpose that persists through war and revolution, and man's efforts in civilisation, pointing to what your poet has described—that one far-off Divine event to which the whole creation moves." Such experiences stir the imagination, and furnish us with a new perspective, broaden the mind, and enhance the value of travel. A new assessment of our present gift of life is learned by the study of the history of the past.