Rosslyn Chapel’s 16-year conservation project comes to an end

05/09/2013

Work to the chapel, which is Category A-listed, was instigated after a report in 1995 warned of damage to the stonework because of dampness and high humidity levels. In March 1997, a free-standing steel structure was erected to cover the building and allow the stone roof to dry out naturally, and this remained in place until summer 2010. Since then, within the project, stone and mortar repairs to the chapel’s external walls, pinnacles and buttresses have been undertaken, the roof has been made watertight, the stained glass windows have been conserved, a new sustainable heating system has been installed, the organ has been restored, internal lighting has been renewed and a new visitor centre has opened.

Ian Gardner Director of Rosslyn Chapel Trust, said:
‘This is a great moment as the far-sighted conservation project in the chapel comes to an end and the scaffolding, which had become a near permanent feature, has all been removed. For the first time since 1997, visitors can now enjoy an uninterrupted view of the exterior of the building, which, like the rest of the chapel, is rich in carvings and details.’

Rosslyn Chapel was founded in 1446 by Sir William St Clair and its building took 40 years to complete. The chapel is still privately owned by the Earl and Countess of Rosslyn and continues to be a working church, with its congregation part of the Scottish Episcopal Church. The mysterious symbolism of the chapel’s ornate stonework has inspired, intrigued and attracted visitors for generations although the chapel came to prominence after featuring in Dan Brown’s novel, the Da Vinci Code, which was published in 2003. As a result of interest in the book and subsequent film, annual visitor numbers rose to 176,000 and income from visitors has helped to fund the conservation project.

The chapel’s Conservation and Access Project has totalled £9.3 million, which has come from Rosslyn Chapel Trust and a variety of supporters and funders including the National Lottery, through the Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Scotland and WREN Heritage. Rosslyn Chapel Trust, which is a recognised Scottish Charity, gratefully acknowledges support from them and from other organisations and donors from around the world.
Colin McLean Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, said: “The spectacular architecture of Rosslyn Chapel has captivated hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over the world. The craftsmanship of its stonework is as fascinating as the mysteries its designs hold. The Heritage Lottery Fund is delighted to have been able to support the meticulous conservation of its medieval fabric so that visitors can continue to be impressed and inspired by this remarkable piece of Scotland’s heritage.”

Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs said: "Rosslyn Chapel is utterly unique and is of international significance in terms of both its architecture and cultural heritage. I am delighted that Historic Scotland has been able to contribute £1.6 million towards this worthwhile project which has safeguarded the future of Rosslyn Chapel, allowing visitors from around the world to continue to enjoy it. The conservation work carried out on the structure over the past two decades has been extensive and painstaking and it is to the credit of everyone involved that the finished project – complete with an impressive new visitor centre – has not only conserved Rosslyn Chapel for future generations to enjoy, but allows us to see it in a whole new light.”

Rosslyn Chapel is open to visitors daily throughout the year. Further information is available from the chapel's website – www.rosslynchapel.com.

Further information

Rosslyn Chapel Trust: Ian Gardner on 0131 440 2159, email: ian@rosslynchapel.com.

Notes to editors

Rosslyn Chapel Trust is a recognised Scottish charity, no. SC 024324
Visitor numbers in 2012/13 were 128,114
The professional team for the Conservation and Access Project is as follows:

- Architect – Page/Park
- Stone conservation – Nic Boyes Stone Conservation
- Stained glass windows conservation – Scottish Glass Studios
- Organ restoration – Lammermuir Organs
- Interpretation - StudioArc