

A visit to Rosslyn Chapel



Edinburgh is a tourist hotspot but students can enjoy its attractions all year round. Ossana, a Student Ambassador, went to Rosslyn Chapel.

The end of exams put me into a touristy mood. It is during these times, even more than usual, that I feel immensely glad that I chose to study in Edinburgh. The city offers endless beautiful spots and close proximity to other unbelievable sites.

I decided to take a trip to Rosslyn Chapel, only an hour bus ride outside of the city. It received many great reviews, and is renowned for its intricate carvings, and is considered one of the finest churches in Scotland. Built in 1446, the chapel has played critical roles in Scottish history, and continues to be a place of worship and an important site in Scotland.



The chapel was everything one could expect and more. Unfortunately, photographs were not allowed within the building, so you can be assured that the following is spoiler free. The church is rather small, but every wall, ceiling, and column is covered in intricate carvings and sculptures. The themes carved include Christian themes, as one would expect, such as the Seven Sins, angels playing instruments (including the bagpipe!), and the face of the Christ (hidden among the stars on the ceiling). But there are also more obscure themes which even experts are still baffled about. Among the decorations are 'Green Men' faces, that may have to do with paganism. Also among the carvings are ears of corn, monkeys, and the face of a frustrated master-smith staring angrily upon the superior work of his apprentice (there is a humorous story that goes with it, but I shall not ruin it for you).

My experience in the church consisted of repeatedly saying "Wow!" and playing a game of Medieval 'Where's Wally?' ("Where's the angel with the bagpipe? No. Not that one, that one is holding a harp! How many Green Men have you found? I've only found three. Oh wait, there's a fourth!").

In 2003, Rosslyn Chapel was featured in the bestselling novel

The Da Vinci Code. Subsequently, the 2006 movie adaptation, starring Tom Hanks, was filmed in part in the chapel.

Perhaps slightly to my disappointment, the local guide told us that the Star of David which was featured in the movie was nothing more than a prop, a sticker stuck on the wall. The sticker has since been removed, but it left a green mark which you can still easily find if you know where to look. Some think it damages the church, but it is undeniable that that mark has attracted many keen Hollywood worshippers there.



If you are still not convinced to make the trip, let me assure you that just outside the chapel is a beautiful visitors' center and a café that overlooks the best of nature. Coffee, views, and Medieval treasures: What more can one ask for?

While one cannot necessarily trust what one reads in books (especially one written by Dan Brown), you can be assured that Rosslyn Chapel is truly as beautiful as they claim, if not more. And while it may not contain the Holy Grail, there are secrets and unsolved mysteries hidden on every wall, column, and in its mysterious crypt, just waiting for someone to solve them...

Address: Rosslyn Chapel, Chapel Loan, Roslin, Midlothian, EH25 9PU

Opening times: Seasonal differences (please refer to website – www.rosslynchapel.com)

Wildlife Photographer of the Year

We have some impressive neighbours, including the National Museum of Scotland. Student Ambassador Carlotta visits an exhibition there.

Last week I visited the Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland. The exhibition shows the hundred finalists and two overall winners of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year awards, run by the Natural History Museum in London. The exhibited works have been chosen from among 48,000 entries, taken by photographers from 92 different countries. The exhibition's location at the National Museum, a short 5-minute walk from the William Robertson Wing, made it a perfect study break, and the £6 student price made it even more appealing. The exhibition is presented in a darkened room, with the images illuminated, making their colours stand out, and the focus of the images even more striking for the observer. Alongside the photographs was a description of how they were captured, as well as information about the animals and environments portrayed. This gave the exhibition an important educational function, rather than just being visually impressive.

Many of the works also aimed to highlight conservation and environmental issues affecting the animals and environments they captured. This was particularly true of one of the overall winners, 'Memorial to a Species' by Brent Stirton. Taken as part of an undercover investigation into the illegal trade in rhino horn, the photo shows a black rhino bull who had recently been shot and its horn cut off. The image was part of Brett's documentary series, several more photos from

which were also shown at the exhibition, entitled 'Rhino Horn: The Ongoing Atrocity'. The series shows people on all sides of the story, from those involved in conservation efforts and taking care of injured rhino, to those fighting to overturn bans on rhino hunting, and those who use the rhino horn for medicinal purposes. The most striking image of this series was that of the world's last male northern white rhino and his armed guard, who keeps a 24-hour watch over the male rhino and his female companions. This sanctuary has recently featured in the news, following the tragic death of the last male, and thus the certain extinction of the species. The other winning image, 'The Good Life' by Daniël Nelson, depicting Caco, a 9-year-old gorilla in the Odzala- Kokoua National Park in the Republic of Congo, also had a conservation message. In the image description, the photographer said that he wished to raise awareness through the image of the endangered nature of such gorillas.

My favourite photographs as I walked through the exhibition were those which depicted interactions between animals, particularly parents and their offspring. I found that oftentimes these interactions revealed the similarities in facial expressions and body language between animals and humans. One of these was 'Bear Hug', by Ashleigh Scully, depicting a mother brown bear and her cub. In the image description was a comment from Scully herself, about how from her time observing these bears in the Yosemite national park she was struck by how much their actions mirrored those of humans.

One area of the exhibition that I was particularly impressed by was the Young Photographers section, exhibiting entries by photographers of 17 years old and under. This included works by photographers as young as 5. One of the winners, Daniël Nelson, was in fact only 16 when he took his winning image. While the adult photographers tended to have travelled for their shots, and known what they were looking for, the young

photographers demonstrated a natural connection to their subject matter. Many of the young photographers' photos were of the nature that surrounded where they lived, and most of them had captured their photos on a whim.

The Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition is on at the National Museum of Scotland until the 29th April 2018, and I would heavily recommend it to anyone who is interested in animals and conservation, but also anyone who has an afternoon to spare. See some of the photos and find out more about the exhibition at the Wildlife Photographer of the Year website on the National Museums Scotland website.

The Royal Yacht Britannia



The city is full of historical sites, and Student Ambassador Francesca visits one of the most popular.

Edinburgh is home to a wealth of tourist attractions, such as Edinburgh Castle, Holyrood Palace, the National Museum and National Galleries, Dynamic Earth, Camera Obscura and the Scotch Whisky Experience. There's something for all tastes and interests but the Royal Yacht Britannia is easily the best. Tucked away at Ocean Terminal, 15 minutes from the city

centre, it's also one of Edinburgh's best-kept secrets. The Royal Yacht, which you might know from Netflix's 'The Crown', was the Queen's home-away-home for over forty years. It was launched from Clydebank in 1953 and sailed over a million miles before being decommissioned in 1997.

Britannia carried the Royal Family across the world on numerous tours and state visits, and has hosted glittering receptions for world leaders, including Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher Nelson Mandela and Ronald Reagan. It was also used for family holidays off the coast of Scotland and several Royal couples have honeymooned aboard, most famously Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1981. Recently, it was the dramatic setting for Zara's wedding reception to Mike Tindall. The Royal Yacht today is a beautifully maintained vessel and presented with its original furnishings.



The Royal Apartments (from top left): the sitting room, the Queen's bedroom, the state dining room and the sun deck.

Except for maintenance hatches and the like, you can roam freely around the entire ship. The Royal Apartments, including

the bedrooms, offices and sitting rooms, are where the Royal Family lived. There's certainly a very 50s décor feel to these rooms, which are more functional than plush. There's also a beautiful sun deck (once equipped with a water slide !), complete with a tea room serving delicious cakes and snacks.

A few levels below are the sailors' quarters and social spaces. Yachtsmen on Britannia were known as 'Yotties'. These spaces are probably some of the most interesting parts of the ship. Tiered according to rank, sleeping quarters range from private cabins to bunking shelves (!) and while the officers' dining room is nicely furnished with trinkets from the ship's travels, the general mess hall looks more like a school canteen. What surprised me was the mini-pubs on board, where yotties and officers could grab a pint and settle down for games or entertainment. There's also a fudge shop on this level, where you can try some truly bizarre flavours.



The Junior Officers' pub onboard.

The lowest levels of the ship have been turned into more of a museum-like exhibition. The engine room has been opened up to showcase the original machinery, while the racing yacht, Bloodhound, has also been put on display. This yacht has raced at the Cowes Week Regatta and has been sailed by Prince Philip, Prince Charles and Princess Anne.

Britannia is an exceptional tourist attraction, steeped in history. She is an excellent example of heritage and conservation work in the sector. Visiting Britannia offers a glimpse of life at sea and a flashback into a bygone age. The Royal Yacht is also a remarkable symbol of British cultural diplomacy in the twentieth century and 'soft power'. I've visited Britannia four times since coming to Edinburgh, and really can't recommend it enough for showing family and friends around the city, or an afternoon away from the Library.

The Talbot Rice Gallery: A hidden gem



How many Universities can claim to have a world-class gallery as part of their campus? Student Ambassador Osanna visits Edinburgh's, the Talbot Rice Gallery.

I cannot remember which I fell in love with first: classical art or contemporary art. Though I have chosen to study Classics, I have maintained a great interest in contemporary art. After all, contemporary art often draws on historical themes and artistic styles, and challenges how we see and

study them.

Barely two minutes away from the HCA building (the William Robertson Wing) is the hidden gem that is Talbot Rice Gallery, the University's contemporary art gallery. Part of the University's famed picturesque Old College, the gallery includes its own Georgian hall, which has been transformed into a cinema for the current exhibition.

I had recently began volunteering at the gallery as an Information Assistant, and I was exceptionally excited about the new exhibition, displaying the works of video artists Rachel Maclean and David Claerbout.

I believe myself destined for this post, as I have happened upon Rachel Maclean's exhibitions not once, nor twice, but THREE times in three different cities (Edinburgh, Manchester, and Venice). Edinburgh-born Maclean is a graduate at our University and had recently represented Scotland at the *Venice Biennale*. It is an understatement to say I admire her deeply. Her work currently on display is titled *Spite Your Face*. It is based on the 19th century tale of *Pinocchio*, yet its message is evidently modern, reflecting on the questionable reliability of politicians, consumerism, and the media. Placed in the context of Brexit, controversial presidential issues in America, and ongoing battles for rights around the world, Maclean's work is an honest, if brutal portrayal of the darker sides of society. It is vivid, dynamic, and begs reflection, and viewers are unlikely to forget it in a hurry.

I had never before encountered David Claerbout's work, and I was indeed in for a pleasant discovery. The pieces on display were very different from Maclean's work, but compliment it wonderfully. Claerbout's work centers around exploring space and time. One particular piece which caught my attention is named *Radio Piece (Hong Kong)*. I do not wish to ruin the piece for you, as I believe one should be able to experience it however they wish. But as someone from Hong Kong, I believe it

reflects the feeling of being entrapped within a clustered space, both physically and mentally, and reflects consciousness of Hong Kong's colonial history and how it still affects us today.

I volunteered at the exhibition on its preview night and was overwhelmed by the influx of eager viewers. I was initially nervous, but quickly found my feet with help from a fantastic team of volunteers, who are also mostly students from the University, and a group of helpful gallery staff. It was truly a rewarding experience, and I was very glad to be able to witness it.

But the best was yet to come! After the preview, I recognized, swarmed by enthusiastic viewers, the artist Rachel Maclean herself! Like any fangirl, I could barely contain myself, but was too shy to approach her. After much chickening out and a lot of encouragement from my new friends at the gallery, I finally managed to greet her. She turned out to be the nicest, most approachable person one could possibly meet. I shook her hand, and muttered something unintelligible, which she somehow responded positively to. I managed to get a photo with her, which concluded perfectly a fantastic and fulfilling evening.



Osanna and artist Rachel Maclean

The opportunities for cultural enrichment and volunteering at the University of Edinburgh are fantastic and I cannot recommend them enough.

(The exhibition runs from 24 February 2018 – 5 May 2018)