

Da Vinci Code keeps Rosslyn Chapel visitor numbers high

Dan Brown's mystery thriller, the Da Vinci Code, was published 20 years ago and the novel has had an enormous impact to visitor numbers to atmospheric Rosslyn Chapel in Midlothian.

Ian Gardner, director, Rosslyn Chapel Trust, said the chapel continues to welcome visitors from all over the world throughout the year, seven days a week, but he stressed that the chapel is still a working church and on a Sunday morning as it is used for worship. For reference, it is open for visitors at noon on a Sunday.

Before the pandemic the chapel, founded in 1446 by Sir William St Clair, was welcoming 180,000 visitors a year and numbers continue to grow again with all the income helping the registered charity to look after the chapel and two other buildings for future generations to enjoy.

Gardner said nobody has ever been able to say they have seen a building like Rosslyn Chapel (pictured) anywhere else because of its history and its architecture and he added: "Everywhere you look you can see the medieval stone carvings, the amount of work, the passion of the stonemasons which is on display here."

The chapel, he said, has welcomed people for generations and he revealed that before the Da Vinci Code book came out the

annual visitor numbers were around 30,000. It jumped to around 70,000 and after Hollywood superstar Tom Hanks visited to film scenes for the 2006 film directed by Ron Howard which was based on Brown's book.

Then the numbers shot up to around 100,000 and continued to grow until COVID-19 struck, but they are showing a welcome upward trend again and many people, he said, come because they visit places mentioned in books or on screen.

The trust, he added, work closely with VisitScotland and other tour operators to spread the word and concierges in major Edinburgh hotels know about the chapel which is easy to reach by public transport.

The No 37 bus comes direct from Edinburgh's city centre to Roslin and from there it is a two minute walk to the chapel. Gardner described it as a great service. It is every half hour into the village.

The trust also works with mini bus companies like Rabbie's who bring visitors out regularly and it is also easy to get to the chapel by car. The chapel has electric charging points, incidentally.

They have bike racks and there are a number of cycle routes from Edinburgh as well and Roslin is surrounded by good walks and there are other attractions in the area including the mining museum at Newtongrange and Arniston Hosue.

He added: "Over the years the building has attracted so many myths and legends, they are nice stories." They all help maintain the profile and currently the trust is asking visitors to book online.

They receive a 90 minute time slot which includes a 15-minute talk from one of the resident guides.

The trust also host corporate events and Midlothian and East

Lothian Chamber of Commerce, for example, hosted their annual meeting there in January, but it is the mysterious symbolism of the ornate stonework which continues to inspire and intrigue visitors along with the links to the Da Vinci Code.