

## Dragons in a Twist: Apprentice Pillar

### What and where?

There are eight dragons carved around the base of the famous 'Apprentice Pillar'. Each dragon is twisted back on itself, entwined with a dragon in front of it and another dragon behind it. The dragons are biting or chewing on cords that come down from the pillar. The pillar is at the southeast corner of the Chapel.

### How?

The dragons are carvings, made by stone carvers out of sandstone. The stone carvers used tools such as chisels and a mallet. They would start with a large block of stone and would remove chunks of stone to get the general form they were looking for. Then they would use fine tools to make the detail, carefully chipping and sanding the stone away bit by bit. The quality of the carvings on the Apprentice Pillar is very sophisticated.

### When?

The pillar was carved in the 15th century, some time between 1446 when the Chapel was founded and 1484 when building work stopped.



### Why?

The pillar is said to represent the Tree of Life, and the cords the dragons are chewing are its roots. There is an old Norse legend that an evil dragon called Niðhöggr lived at the bottom of the tree of life, trying to destroy the world by gnawing through its roots. The pillar refers to this story. The dragons may also be a nod to the Scandinavian roots of Sir William Sinclair, the founder of the Chapel.

## Dragons in a Twist: The Two Dragons



### What?

These two dragons can be found at the top of a pillar on the west interior wall of the Chapel, near the door to the Baptistry. They are twisted around each other with their mouths open showing lots of teeth. They are said to represent the two dragons fighting in the story of the vision of Merlin, the great wizard of Arthurian legend (Arthurian legends are the stories about King Arthur). Merlin had a vision in which he saw a red dragon fighting a white one. The white dragon won the fight. He interpreted the vision this way: the red dragon represented the Britons, and the white one was the invading Saxons. In this way he predicted the victory of the Saxons over the Britons.

### How?

Like the dragons at the base of the Apprentice Pillar, these are carvings, made by stone carvers out of sandstone. They may have originally been painted in colours, but we are not entirely sure as any paint is long gone.

### When and why?

These dragons were also carved in the 15th century, between 1465 and 1484. There aren't many references to Arthurian legend in the Chapel carvings, but the Arthurian legends were very popular in the late medieval period, so most people worshipping in the Chapel at the time would have known the story and recognised the two dragons. However we don't know if there was any special significance in their being included here in the decoration of Rosslyn Chapel.

