

Fact Sheet

Green Man

What?

This is the most famous carving of a 'green man' face at Rosslyn Chapel. There are over 100 green men faces carved on the Chapel building.

A green man face is recognisable because he will be surrounded by leaves, and may have tendrils of plants or leaves sprouting out of his mouth and growing on his face, as this one does.

The green man is a legendary figure associated with nature, especially spring. He appears on many medieval buildings, especially churches.

How and where?

This green man is carved from sandstone, on a protruding boss that sticks out prominently from the background. Some of the other green men, however, are very discreet and are hidden amongst other carvings. This particular green man is in the Lady Chapel at the east end of the building, very close to the carving showing Christ's Nativity.

When?

All the green men are part of the original decorative scheme of the Chapel, created between 1446 and 1484. However this particular green man is in part of the Chapel that received a lot of restoration by the Victorians and so he may have been redefined or sharpened.

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Why?

The green man is an important part of the message told in the Chapel's carvings. The building celebrates the natural living world, with the interior being covered in leaves and flowers. The famous Apprentice Pillar is said to represent the Tree of Life itself. The green men symbolise the rebirth of nature – ie the coming to life after death. This particular green man is given a very important position in the Chapel because he is right next to the carving of the Nativity, witnessing the birth of baby Jesus. The Chapel is a Christian church, and the medieval creators of the Chapel were making a deliberate connection between the central Christian story of Jesus rising alive after dying on the cross and the natural life cycle with the rebirth of spring after the death of winter.