

Restoration of Smalti Mosaic & Marble flooring, Project carried out at:-  
St Thomas Church Douglas Isle of Man. Grade 1 listed.

Our Co Heritage Tiling & Restoration were contacted by the Reverend Sid Mourant B.D. of St Thomas Church in the Diocese of Sodor & Man (I.O.M.)

The main focus of our restoration contract was the full size figure of St Thomas depicted holding the a representation of the church in his arms, the figures face had been obliterated , to stop further damage the face area had been filled in with car body filler , white plaster & poly-filler! unfortunately not one photograph of the saint could be found, I worked out the general look of the saints face based on the hundreds I had seen and depicted him as being somewhat mournful as that is the typical expression of most saints faces I have seen, not seen a happy or smiling one as yet !

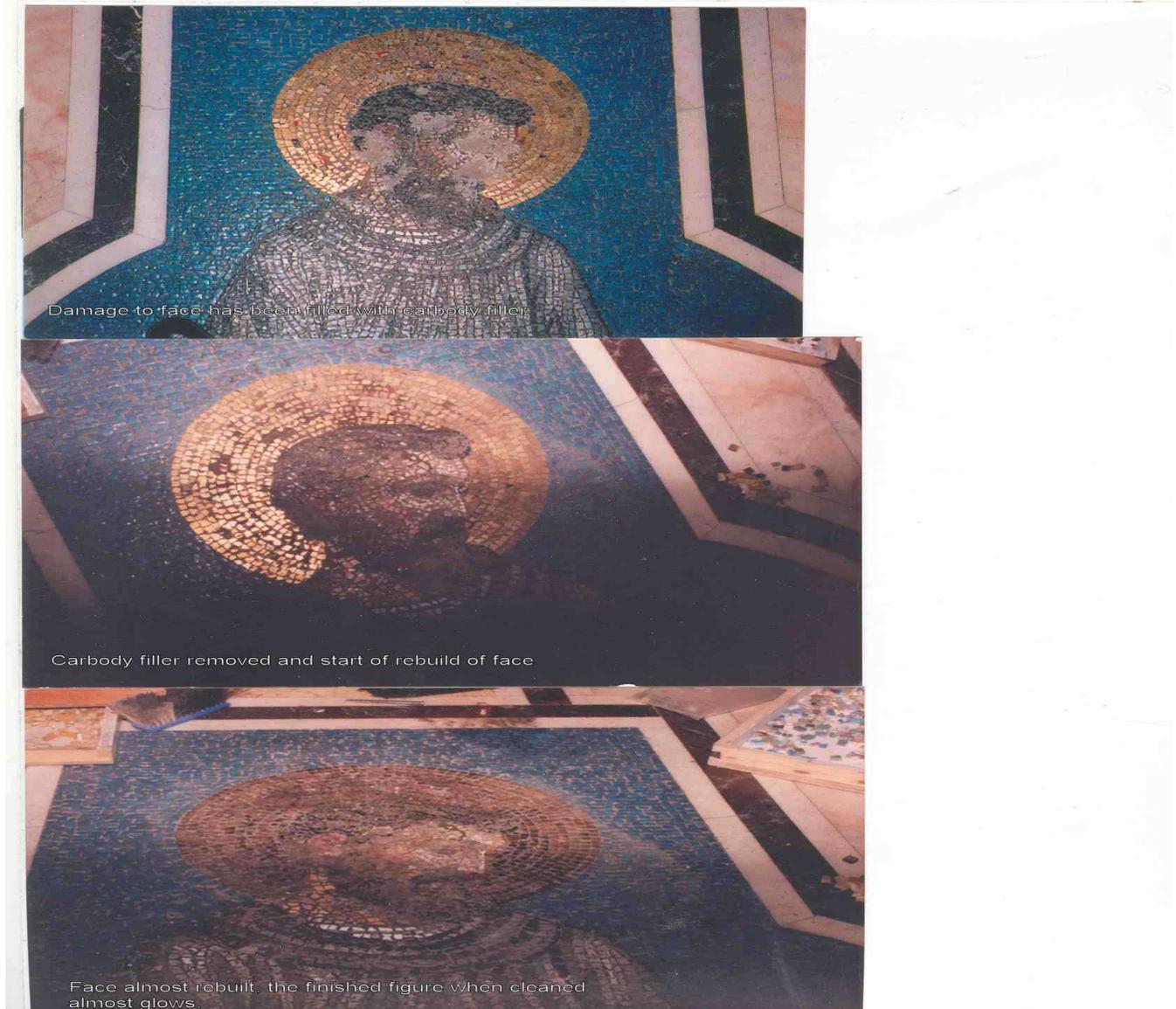


I obtained some of the replacement Smalti mosaic from Rob Riley a great mosaic artist in his own right and the rest was ordered via Edgar Udney & Co London UK, who stock a wide range of various mosaic materials & tools. The saint and other examples of mosaic were in the church chancel. The main pieces after the Saint are set square & spear, an Arab sailing boat, and the Alpha & Omega.

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The mosaic is Smalti mosaic sometimes called Byzantine because that era used more of this mosaic than anywhere else rising to a peak in Constantinople and possibly the best examples are at Hagia Sophia the seat of the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople. The other name is Venetian mosaic as the majority of this type of irregular Smalti mosaic is made there.

Because the mosaic is glass and therefore brittle it can be damaged easily once the substrate has shifted or the locking grout has been eroded, the glass chips & breaks and it can shatter with very little pressure. Because of its irregular sizing and wide colouration it can be more versatile than other types of mosaic and is often used for figure representation as the palette can cover most skin tones etc.

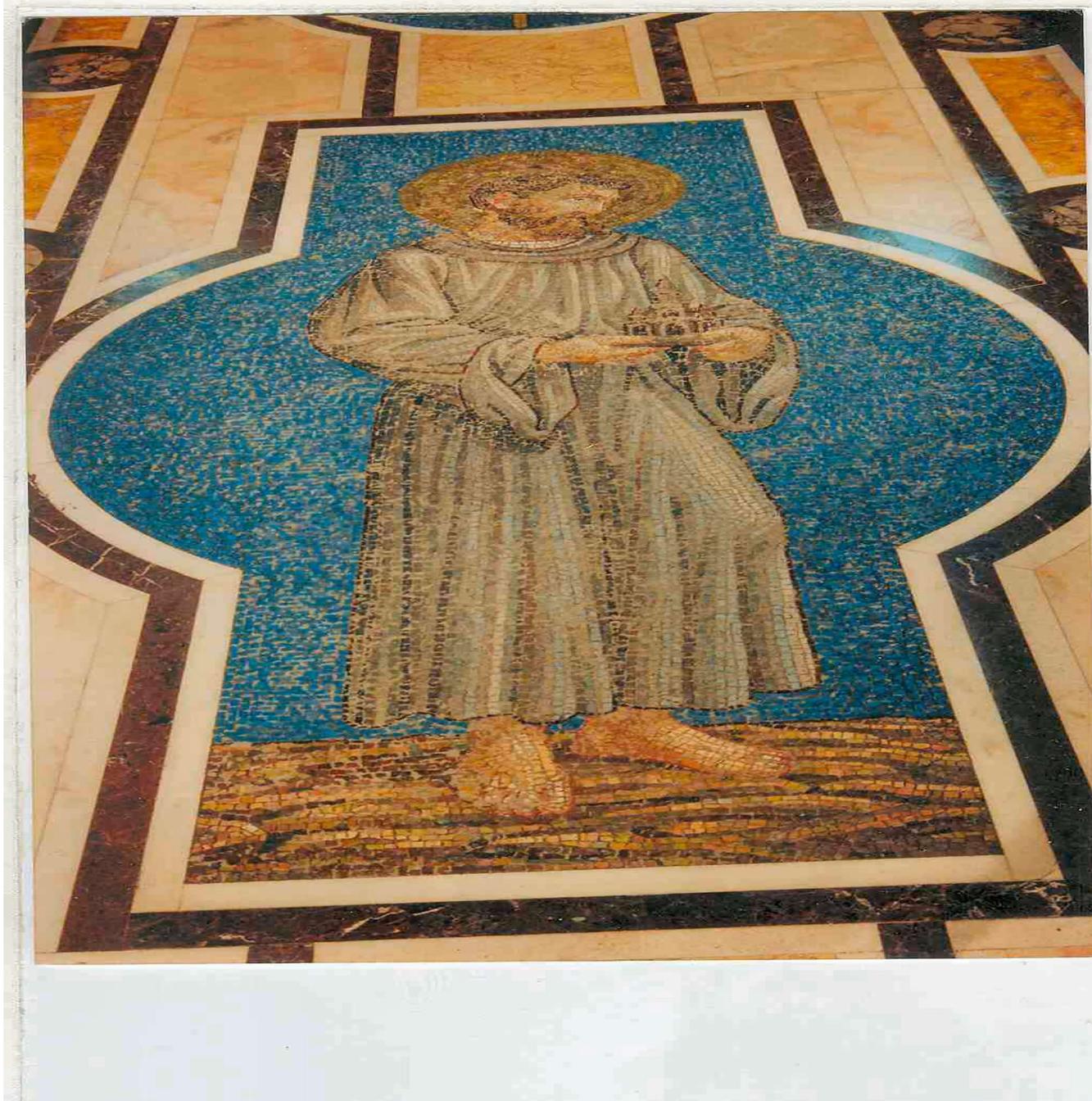


Restoration stages of the Saint's face.

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Our before /during & after pictures were shown to Peter Van Treek who heads a brilliant Mosaic tiling Co -Gustav Van Treek est.: 1887 and Peter was astonished that I had managed to carry out this intricate work in such a short space of time! Apparently his Co would have employed an artist to sketch up cartoons first.

The Saint's face and other damage took me approx 9 hours to complete and the damage to the other mosaic pictures took another day in total.



St Thomas Smalti Mosaic restored.

The Set Square & Spear mosaic roundel above St Thomas is of interest because the Set Square represents St Thomas as a builder of Churches and the Spear his martyrdom when he was killed with a spear in India.

There was damage to the gold leaf mosaic and other sections in this roundel.



Set Square & Spear mosaic shown here fully restored.

The Arab sailing ship represents St Thomas upon his journey's as a missionary the sail of the ship was very badly damaged and had lifted away from the bedding screed, the back ground was also loose and pieces missing from that also.

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The Arab ship is shown here as fully restored which involved cleaning with a low rpm cleaner and sealing over a whole day to allow the coats to dry properly and bond correctly to the preceding layer, more coats than usual were applied so that the mosaic would be able to withstand the rigours of daily foot traffic & cleaning etc.

I also used a flexible based adhesive & grout to give the mosaic a better chance of surviving another century.



Arab sailing ship Smalti mosaic fully restored.

The other roundels are the Alpha & Omega mosaic symbols the beginning & the end.

They had the least amount of damage but they had sustained some, the main floors that the figure & roundels are set into are fine Italian marble, the work was striking and I enjoyed being able to restore the Saint and the rest of the flooring it is always a pity when the craftsmanship of a long dead artisan is covered up with carpet, sadly even some of our projects have been covered with carpet not because our work wasn't good enough but to preserve the flooring! Personally I see little point in paying for work to be carried out and then pay again to cover it up.



Alpha Symbol fully restored.



Omega symbol fully restored.

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Apparently it took 3 years of fund-raising and various legacies and a Mhelliah which is almost confined to the IOM but used to be popular in all Celtic regions,

**Mhelliah** fairs are held traditionally at the end of summer or Harvest time at which all produce grown/made is sold to the highest bidder in Auction fashion. Dating back over a century, a *mhelliah* is thought to have originated in Celtic countries and is still a popular social occasion on the IOM where they are held traditionally in the September/October of each year.

The format, besides that of an auction of produce is sometimes accompanied by the singing of Harvest Festival hymns such as *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come* and *We Plough the Fields & Scatter* These events are usually held in aid of Charities but were originally a social gathering to celebrate the harvest and thank the Pagan Gods for a fruitful year.

My Original contract was for the restoration of the Saint figure and the roundels I extended the scope of the contract to include cleaning the Wheat Sheave & Grape & Vine mosaic around the Altar plus all of the marble in the aisles.

I also repaired all the chipped marble in the aisles. Two reasons for this one I had some spare time as the returning ferry to Liverpool was storm bound and because I knew the budget did not extend to the extra work and the contract would have looked un-finished if I hadn't restored the rest of the Church floors.

Revd Sid is a great guy as well and we enjoyed a few meals & had a pint together it was a pleasure to meet him.

I left a full schedule for the floor maintenance and have supplied the Church in the past with additional sealer.

It was an enjoyable contract and I got a lot of satisfaction out of it.

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Reference: St Thomas Church Douglas Isle of Man.

The Revd Sid Mourant B.D.  
**St Thomas's Vicarage**  
*(The United Benefice of All Saints & St Thomas)*  
Marathon Avenue  
DOUGLAS  
IM2 4JA

Phone (01624 611503)

Ref: The Restoration of the Mosaics in the parish Church of St Thomas, Douglas, Diocese of Sodor and Man (Isle of Man) by Mr Steve Sinnott of The Heritage Tiling and Restoration Co., Seaforth, Liverpool.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

In the Chancel of the Church are some very fine mosaics dating back to about 1930. These depict a full size mosaic of St Thomas holding the Church in his arms. Above him is a circular mosaic of the motif of St Thomas - the Set Square and Spear; in the lower one is another circular mosaic of an Arab Sailing Boat set upon the seas. To the right and left of the upper motif in the same size circles are the Alpha and Omega. The Mosaics are composed of tiny pieces of Venetian Glass. These mosaics are set in Italian Marble which continues in the aisles of the Church.

Over the years the Mosaics had been badly damaged, especially the figure of St Thomas, where the face had been completely destroyed. In various parts of the Church the marble had been damaged also having been chipped, and had lost its sheen.

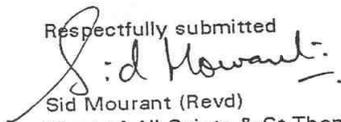
The Heritage Tiling and Restoration Co. were contracted to carry out the work of restoration of the mosaics. The nature of the work required great patience, as well as some artistic ability in restoring the face of St Thomas, for which no photographs had ever been preserved. This work was conscientiously carried out by Mr Steve Sinnott of the company. The result was a remarkable transformation of the Chancel of the Church as he went beyond the terms of the contract in restoring the marble in the Chancel, and cleaning the Mosaic of Grape Vines and Sheaves of Wheat around the Altar. A considerable amount of the chipped marble was also repaired in the Aisles.

The work was thorough and to a very high standard of excellence. Cleanliness and care were the hallmarks of all that was done. There was never any need to follow up and tidy anything at the end of each day. There was never any sign of irreverence for the Church which was in all respects considered as a place of worship.

Although working to an agreed contract Mr Sinnott saw his work as much more than that. He saw it as a labour of love for God's House, and this pervaded all his qualities of workmanship. Added to this he freely gave advice for the cleaning and preserving of the mosaics and marble.

We would have no hesitation in recommending him to others - he is a highly skilled craftsman devoted to a high degree of excellence in his work - and we would gladly employ his services again in the future. In fact we are intending to do this in the near future.

Respectfully submitted

  
Sid Mourant (Revd)  
Vicar of All Saints & St Thomas's Churches  
Douglas.

Article in Isle of Man Examiner.

# Isle of Man

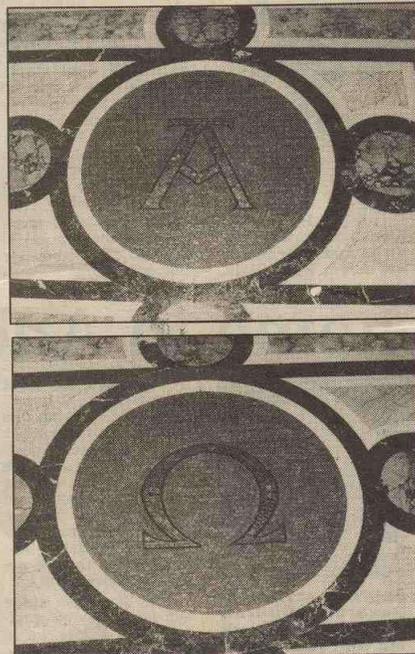
# Examiner

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Saintly saving: the restored mosaics (1095224)

## St Thomas the builder restored at church that bears his name

A LABOUR of love from a Liverpool firm has seen the restoration of mosaics of St Thomas in the Douglas church which carries his name.

Three years of fund raising enabled the church to commission the restoration by Heritage Tiling and Restoration Company. And not only did its team, led by Steve Sinoot, restore the St Thomas mosaics in the chancel, they also cleaned the mosaic around the altar and polished the marble between the aisles without being asked to!

Vicar of St Thomas's, the Reverend

Sid Mourant, is delighted with the end results. 'The mosaics were depicting St Thomas's life and the centrepiece showed St Thomas with the church in his hands,' he said.

'The face was completely removed and had been filled in with white plaster to try to protect it from further damage. St Thomas's cloak was also damaged.

'At the bottom of St Thomas was a circular mosaic representing his missionary journey. The sail of his ship was very badly damaged.

'At the top of the mosaic was the motif

of St Thomas which is in the form of a set square and a spear.'

The set square represents St Thomas as a builder of churches and the spear represents his martyrdom when he was killed by a spear in India.

'The set square and spear were not as badly damaged as other parts, but it had to be restored.'

The whole area has also been cleaned and re-grouted.

It was about three years ago when a special fund was set up for the restoration. Money was raised from legacies, collections and a mhelliah.