

Restoration of the fine Victorian encaustic & geometric tiles at the Church of St Thomas the Apostle Penkhull Stoke-on-Trent. Grade 2 listed.

The Church was built to the design of Sir Gilbert Scott and was built by the Minton family = Rev Thomas Webb Minton & his brother Herbert sons of the founder of the Minton Tile & Pottery Co, the first Vicar was the Rev Samuel Minton son of Rev Thomas .

The Church is full of exquisite features and has had money & the best craftsmen of the time lavished upon it. The roof carpentry is excellent and of course there are very fine examples of encaustic & geometric tiles that the Minton Co is rightly famous for.

In fact some of the tiles are exclusive to this church floor having been made just for this Church. In particular the encaustic panels depicting the Lamb of God carrying a banner this piece is a brilliant work of art and true craftsmanship having made encaustic tiles myself a long time ago (I wasn't suited to the loss rate) I can recognise the hard work that went into making the many fine tiles within the Church floors.

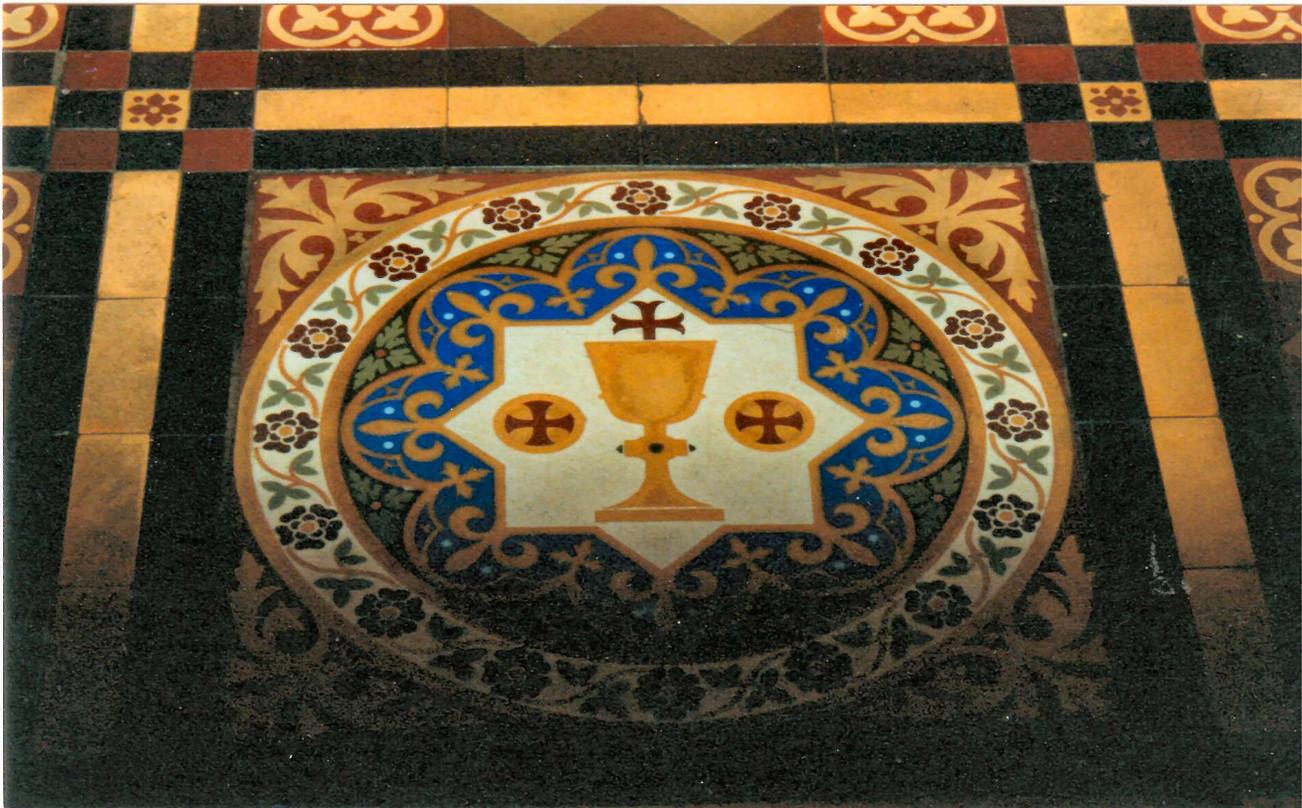
In Latin this panel is called "Agnus Dei" meaning Lamb of God an allusion to Jesus Christ as the Paschal Lamb and with reference to the Passover or to Easter although this Church was Anglican many of the symbols are of Early Christian meaning especially as these symbols can be traced back to times when only very few could read or write it was important to have a focus on symbols or pictures which could evoke ideas or concepts for those people.

Another panel depicts a Stork this Early Christian symbol represents the coming of spring Stork's are also eaters of snakes (often snakes are misrepresented as evil - Garden of Eden etc) the Stork is also stands for Holiness & Vigilance and is symbolic of the Annunciation to Mary that she would bear the Christ child, hence the origin of a Stork bearing or bringing a baby to a family.

Last the large ten inch x ten inch spectacular tile depicting a Chalice this tile is possibly the most important single tile in the whole floor and is a stupendous achievement for the tile maker being one of the very rare 6 colour encaustic tiles I have ever seen in more than 40 years.

The rest of the floor has many examples of stunning encaustics on a religious theme. This project was visited by the Professor who headed up the Minton Museum in Stoke-on Trent she was very interested in the tiles & panels and admired our finished restoration of these beautiful tiles.

Most of the work we carried out was based around the Choir area and in the Sanctuary especially behind and in front of the Altar itself. The Chalice tile was positioned exactly where the Reverend would stand and had become loose after near 150 years of being stood on. Some thought had gone into making this tile as it was 3 inches in thickness we sacrificed one of the more common red geometrics to allow a space to tease the tile out of its position because although it was rocking and obviously loose it was still held in place by the tight jointing.



Unusual Chalice encaustic tile.

Quite large areas of tiles had become loose possibly because the heating system had been improved and the Church had extensive works carried out to improve conditions.

Often after a heating system has been upgraded the floor tends to dry out and this causes the tiles to lose cohesiveness with the underlying lime screed into which they were beaten during the tiling process.

In this respect the tiled floor here at St Thomas Penkhull was unusual not just for the preponderance of the excellent quality encaustic tiles but the fact that although the tiles were loose only a few had broken or cracked.

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we were able to lift and ease most of the tiles up then we set about grinding the lime screed down, at the time we had to rely on grinding down by hand with a carborundum block or small pieces of one plus the edge of a small diamond angle-grinder plus chipping with a small cold chisel.

This took a lot longer than nowadays when we use an Exakt saw to cut the tiles out a Fein Super-cut to grind down and an Arbortech power chisel for fiddly areas. Plus a cupped diamond grinder with a vacuum attachment, all this speeds the work up and what took 2 or 3 weeks can be done in half that time.



Beautiful Lamb of God encaustic Minton tile panel restored.

The above panel had a number of loose tiles which were carefully removed and fitted back into place we used a numbering system and a schematic to place the tiles back into the same position.

Below the Stork encaustic tiled panel, another example of the excellent work Minton produced.

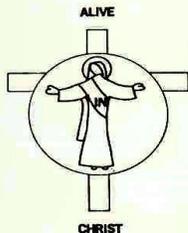


Stork encaustic tiled Minton panel.

The tiled floors in this small church can rival some of the larger churches for the richness of the encaustic designs & panels in the 40 years of plying my trade I can say that this Church had more encaustics of different designs than any other I have worked in.

I have been very lucky to be able to work within so many varied buildings and have met so many different people the Rev Ito is a character given to wearing splendid dramatic capes and ornate priestly clothing, he is also a Cordon Bleu Chef we enjoyed many examples of his food expertise, a great character.

Reference: From Rev Ito Maitin for St Thomas Church Penkhull.



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Penkhull Church was built in 1842 by the Minton family. They were responsible for providing the colourful symbolic tiles around the choir and in the sanctuary. These needed restoration after a century and a half and, because of the great value we attach to them, we made extensive enquiries and finally decided to have S. J. S. Restoration Tiling of Liverpool to do the work. This they have done very satisfactorily and with great care producing an effect very pleasing to the eye, bringing out the original beauty of the floor and its colours, without detracting from its 150 years' history.



Vicar of Penkhull.