



PROJECT PRESS RELEASE

Jackfield encaustic floor completes Arts and Crafts church restoration project

The demise of The Catholic Apostolic Church built 1873-1876 in New Town, Edinburgh and once known as, “Edinburgh’s Sistine Chapel” was rapid. In less than 20 years it went from a stunning church, celebrated for its architecture and unique series of Arts and Crafts murals painted by Phoebe Anna Traquair, to a neglected derelict with water pouring down the walls, a warehouse in the nave and a night club beneath.

The Mansfield Traquair Trust had little time to spare when they formed in 1993 to take on the daunting task of preserving the building and its murals. Some £6.3 million pounds later and the final stage of the project has recently been completed: the restoration of the encaustic and geometric tiled floor featuring tiles all hand-made by Craven Dunnill Jackfield.

Dr. Duncan Thomson, Chairman of the Mansfield Traquair Trust reveals how the Trust was as interested in restoring the floor to its former glory as it was in encouraging the survival of the traditional skills involved in encaustic tile-making: “The Trust is delighted with the results and is proud that not only has the setting of the murals been enhanced but that the skills for the manufacture and laying of traditional encaustic tiles will be maintained.”

It was the Trust’s architects, Simpson & Brown of Edinburgh, who researched the options available to restore the decorative encaustic and geometric tiled floor, which had been damaged when stalls and the organ had been ripped out and concrete screed coarsely applied to fill the holes. The ornate tiles run throughout the original chancel and chancel aisles, and there were

five large areas requiring replacement tiles to match the existing originals, the latter dating back to when the church was built in the 1870's. In the late 19th century there were numerous encaustic and geometric floor tile manufacturers, including distinguished names such as Maw & Co and Minton & Co. However, it was the lesser known Godwins of Hereford which made the original tiles for this church, having established a reputation for its medieval-styled inlaid tiles.

The tiled floor design combines popular motifs of the era, such as fleur de Lys and scrolls plus the symbolic Celtic Knot, which is found in the connecting areas. To restore the floor more than 1,000 encaustic tiles were made by Craven Dunnill Jackfield in seven different designs, and four colours: buff, red, green and black. The tiles feature an unusual glazed, textured finish, which is achieved using a special technique of hand-dipping the tiles. In addition, glazed green and black slip tiles and over five square metres of red, geometric tiles were made.

The patterns repeat in both the borders and as panels, and therefore it was crucial these matched up with the existing tiles when inserted - not an easy task when each encaustic tile shrinks 7% in the kiln. To avoid any discrepancy, each section was laid out at the Jackfield works to ensure the dimensions were exact. The colours were crucial too; today, visitors to the Mansfield Traquair Centre need to look carefully to see the difference.

In the mid 19th century encaustic tiles were made using plaster moulds impressing a pattern into plastic clay, and then filling the indentations with liquid clay in contrasting colours: this is the same process used by Craven Dunnill Jackfield today. In skilfully applying these same techniques and using traditional equipment, Jackfield ensures it produces tiles the exact same thickness, dimensions and pattern proportions, as the original tiles.

The Mansfield Traquair Trust was delighted to find Craven Dunnill Jackfield: the company is now the one remaining manufacturer of traditionally styled, encaustic tiles in the UK. Established in 2000 on the site of an original Victorian tile works in Jackfield, Shropshire, and close to the River Severn, the company is dedicated to making encaustic, geometric and decorative wall tiles to the highest standards, using traditional techniques and materials.

Headed up by Adrian Blundell, Production Director, the company has successfully completed many prestigious commissions, including The Church of St. Thomas of Canterbury, and other architectural, national treasures including Keble College, the London Underground and Leeds Library.

The company's approach to successfully undertaking such projects is a team affair involving a project manager, expert in CAD and design, the floor tile manager, who has hands-on responsibility for making the tiles, and a glaze expert. The team liaises closely with conservation companies, Architects and flooring contractors working on the job, and follows the project through from beginning to end. In this way, Craven Dunnill Jackfield has established a reputation for quality and authenticity, and is recognised for its work by Architects specialising in the listed building sector and public bodies including English Heritage and The National Trust. The company has won many awards for its work and Adrian Blundell attributes this to the Jackfield workforce: "It is their skills and passion for their work which is the life-blood of this company".

Additional information

The Mansfield Traquair Centre is open to the public on Open Days and is used for functions. The church was designed by Robert Rowand Anderson, acclaimed for his prestigious commissions including the University of Edinburgh Medical School and The Scottish National Portrait Gallery and Mount Stewart. Mural painting played a significant part in Anderson's work and examples still survive at McEwan Hall and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

In 1889 William Morris addressed an Arts and Crafts congress in Edinburgh advocating that painting and sculpture were meaningless unless they formed part of the architecture: Phoebe Anna Traquair's (1852-1936) murals at The Catholic Apostolic Church realised Morris's democratic ideals. She was the leading artist of the Arts and Crafts movement in Edinburgh at that time, earning an international reputation for her work. The vast mural painting cycle at the church is today considered to be unique and a national treasure to be preserved.

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Architects: Simpson & Brown TL 0131 555 4678 www.simpsonandbrown.co.uk

The End

Images: a selection of high resolution images of the completed tiled floor at Mansfield Traquair and the tiles being made at the Craven Dunnill Jackfield works is available on request

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