

Mr. Brian Wiley, a member of St Padarn's Parochial Church Council, commenced this project to restore and repair the historic mosaic floor at St. Padarns Church in Llanbadarn Fawr, in 2016 following the Rev. Andrew Loat's request. It was sponsored in part by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and took many months of grant application work to secure the funding, as well as contracting the most suitable team to partake in the expert restoration work.

The stone church building at Llanbadarn Church dates from the late 12th century and is one of the oldest buildings still in use in Wales. It is also a Grade 1 Listed Building. In the early 1860's, the church building at Llanbadarn had fallen into serious disrepair and needed extensive work to be carried out. A London based architect John Pollard Seddon, was appointed to carry out the work. Seddon was well known for his love of Gothic design and he transformed the church interior to that effect. Part of the church plan was to install a mosaic floor in the crossing between the north and south transepts directly under the tower.

To carry this out he contracted a well-known designer of mosaic floors namely, Jesse Rust of Battersea, London. Rust was prolific in the mosaic world in the 19th century, completing works in the Victoria and Albert Museum and in many other notable buildings in the city and beyond. Most of his work was with floor and exterior mosaics, as a way to enhance the main building. Despite his rising success in the architectural and mosaic world, he was very modest in his work with a majority of his supervisors having to thrust him into the spotlight to gain notoriety. His work at St. Padarns church was one of his later works and incorporated images of saints, and other religious figures and icons, as well as flowers, which are all contained within a patterned border of tiny mosaic tesserae.

Beginning at the start of March in 2019, Brian Wiley and Jackie Jarocki took many photographs of the mosaic floor before the restoration team began their work. There were numerous but small areas of structural damage from years of wear and tear, lying beneath the rug. Additionally, several pieces of the small mosaic were missing all together. Some places had been previously repaired by inserting concrete in the gaps, that avoided further destruction, and solidified the remaining pieces. Over the recent years the mosaic was covered in carpet to preserve its ailing state. As they finished taking pictures of the damaged mosaics they discussed practicalities for the contractors to fully access the mosaic, as some of the pieces lay beneath the front of the many pews there.

The restoration team contracted by the church were The Mosaic Restoration Company, from Northampton who came and spent a week repairing the mosaic. They initially started by carrying out a deep hand clean of the whole floor using a mix of mild detergent and water that removed all the dirt, grease and dust that had become ingrained within the small mosaic pieces. This clean up helped in highlighting the damaged areas, and also brought out the vivid colours that were still evident in the mosaic surface. The next few days would be gruelling work for the team, carrying out the work on their hands and knees as they hand made new, matching pieces to fill in the remaining gaps within the mosaic patterns. Luckily, the church had retained some of the loosened original mosaic pieces over the past years, and these were colour matched and securely replaced within in the floor. The repaired floor was then re-grouted and after a number of water washes; the colours of the glass mosaic were restored to an exceptionally vivid and colourful state. Following the grouting, their final day was when they added a number of layers of preservative sealant to the whole floor.

Photographs taken by Brian Wiley, and Aberystwyth University student Jackie Jarocki, recorded the repair and restoration process, as can be seen. The pictures speak for themselves and show how much the work done by the Mosaic Restoration Company benefited this piece of artwork. Without the help of Brian Wiley, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Mosaic Restoration Company, another magnificent piece of mosaic art designed by Jesse Rust might have been lost forever. This project has no doubt helped to secure the heritage of this church and reclaim the story of its magnificent mosaic, something that will no doubt attract future visitors and groups to view and enjoy for many years to come.

Jackie Jarocki