



St. Thomas Cathedral

Fort, Mumbai

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About us:

Christianity is one the most widely celebrated religion of the world and holds a great historic significance for ancient India. The presence of historic churches all around India is a testimony to its proud legacy. Most churches have a deep historic importance and rich cultural heritage woven in it, known for its structural beauty, style and architecture.

St. Thomas Cathedral Church is one such exemplary religious structure, a magnanimously built heritage site with a glorious historical past of 300 years and a tradition that is vibrant, relevant and equally gracious even today. The idea of St. Thomas Cathedral building was conceived by Sir John Oxinden, the East India Company's first Governor of Bombay in 1668. He was an intensely religious man who foresaw the religious needs of his men and thought of building a church in Bombay. Gerald Aungier, who succeeded him in 1669, pursued Oxinden's wish.

Building Christian churches in India during the early 17th century was a great challenge for missionaries. More than style, it was a question of how identifiable churches should be in India's varied urban and rural landscapes. New churches had to be well built, the least expensive possible, beautiful, and appropriate to their liturgical use. Western techniques such as arches, vaults, foundations, full masonry walls, stone carving, timber trusses, high towers, stairs, etc. were to be almost unknown in India before 1800, except in the treatyports and major cities.

The foundation stone of the church was first laid in 1676, although the church was only finally consecrated for divine service in 1718 as the first Anglican church in Mumbai (then called Bombay), within the walls of the fortified British settlement. The Cathedral then led to the creation of the Cathedral & John Connon School in 1860, in order to provide choristers to the church. Today, the Cathedral stands as a landmark in South Mumbai and is one of the oldest churches in India. The name of nearby Church gate station refers to this church. One of the gates in the Fort which the East India Company had built to protect their settlement was the entrance to the St. Thomas Church. It was called Churchgate. Since then the entire area towards the West of the Church is called "Churchgate" even today. The street leading to the Church was originally called Churchgate Street and was later renamed like many streets in Bombay, and is now known as Veer Nariman Road.

With standing the test of time and climatic changes, church building began to show the signs of wear and tear which was spotted by the trust caretakers. 'Savani Heritage Conservation Private Limited' a prestigious name in heritage site restoration was given the task to resurrect the building whilst preserving its architectural and textural features. A dedicated team of experts from Savani Heritage Conservation Private Limited engaged in the task by employing skilled masons and labourers under the supervision of Engineers to execute the task. In the year 2003, the Phase-I of the restoration began under the leadership of the Principal Ar. Brinda Somaya of Somaya and Kalappa Consultants which focused on the Altar and the Ancillary structure. While, the Phase-II restoration and repairs were carried out as required under the Consultation of Conservation Architect, Ar. Sheetal Gandhi, who focused on the tower and the internal repairs. Generous donations were made from Philanthropist Mr. T. Thomas and Mrs. Meera Issacs that made the big task of restoration of Cathedral possible.

The herculean effort of restoration has paid rich dividends as the building is a proud recipient of UNESCO Asia Pacific Award noted for its Conservation, Restoration and Repairs. The Cathedral is back to its best, restored completely and upholds its cherished legacy of grace, beauty and serenity.

After



The cathedral tower has highly complex features, one of them being the architectural element & length of the cathedral that rises up to a height to serve the purpose of a belfry and a clock tower. The tower has a clock on all its faces of the wall and is big enough to be spotted easily from a distance. It also has the house bells which are no longer in use but these vintage bells holdsignificance as it has been there since the year 1798. A turret was built over the tower to house a belfry the bell was never put up. The tower displays fabulous architectural elements such as moulding, rose windows and pointed arches. The Rose window at the first level has been surrounded by spires that leads upto the clock.

With the passage of time, the entire structure of tower (its total length) got contaminated by biodeteriogens which resulted in algal growth and the plaster appeared flaked or faded giving a dull appearance. The dampness was the chief reason of deterioration as the damp patchesshowed prominently on surface of the tower and on its windows. After taking cognizance of the cause and effect, thoughtful measures were taken for conservation, restoration and repair work. All the flaws were eliminated from the structure of the tower which has been duly justified by the pre and post photograph of the site.

Before



With standing the wear and tear of time, the piers of the church structure that supports the vault of the parapet and its wall looked pale and weak. Years of raining on the structure had led to proliferation of biodeteriogens that caused blackish layer over the stone surface. The enlarged black stains not only led to the further deterioration of the stone but also adversely affected its appearance.

The surface was gently cleaned and treated with water jet mist technique; re-pointing was executed with lime wherever required. The band of the parapet was re-plastered again using white paint and a layer of waterproofing was also meticulously executed to avoid any clack staining in future.

Before



After





Before

In the year 1920, the original sloping roof of the structure was replaced by a reinforced cement concrete (RCC) flat roof. Back then, it was widely used for concrete construction in the city of Mumbai. But by the year 1990, the RCC Roof deteriorated heavily causing waterleakage that flooded the vaults and damaged the carved details of the limestone.

A huge amount of restoration was diligently executed that included the replacing of the deteriorated RCC flat slab with a sloping roof reminiscent to its original structure built in 1865. Due restoration work was also applied over the altar and the organ room besides executing necessary masonry and paintwork.



After

The stone surface around the clerestory of the east end left side appeared in distress with visible flaking of the plaster and vertical stone members of the clerestory arches were found absent. These were later retrofitted with the similar stones as present in original version. The exposed stone surface led to dampness due to water seepages and the pointing work which was missing, was re-done at certain places.

The floral band running under the parapet appeared stained due to algal colonization, the missing stone pieces of the band were retrofitted and the dust accumulation was cleaned thoroughly.

The cleaning work of the black stains was carefully executed after applying pressurized water jet cleaning that helped the stone surface to regain its shape and sheen.





Before

The flying buttress serve the purpose of transferring the lateral forces across the span of the flyer. The flyer arch is thus segmental and rests on a heavy stone pier. These flying buttresses with its small point of contact have made way for the large windows, besides reducing the excess load on the load bearing walls.

The cathedral apse is surrounded by seven flying buttresses at the east end of the apse. The soiled buttresses were meticulously cleaned, re-pointed and applied with a coat of waterproofing layer to avoid staining and algal growth in future. In this way, the buttresses which are an important Gothic element were successfully restored.



After

The rose window is one of the most standard gothic architectural features of a cathedral. This design is rare as the window is divided into segments with mullions and tracery. The spokes of the rose windows radiate from its center when exposed to light, the structure is similar to a wheel and hence it is also known as 'wheel window'. The rose windows on all the four sides of the tower allow diffused light at the upper level of the belfry, where the bells are placed.

The walls near the windows appeared shabby and distressed due to flaking of its plaster and looked damp at certain places. This is now corrected with due re-plastering and repainting work to protect from dampness in future.

Before

After



The presence of Venetian louvered windows on the walls of the north and the south aisles are thoughtfully designed keeping in mind the humid climate of Mumbai. The louvered shutters serve the dual purpose of ventilation and of keeping out monsoon rains through its glass panes. These double layered windows take care of the changing weather and facilitate necessary comfort.

With passage of time, the timber window frame appeared decayed and deteriorated badly. The frames had layers of worn out paint, which had to be scraped off and the frames were treated with anti-termite and French polishing to give a tidy look.

Before

After



After

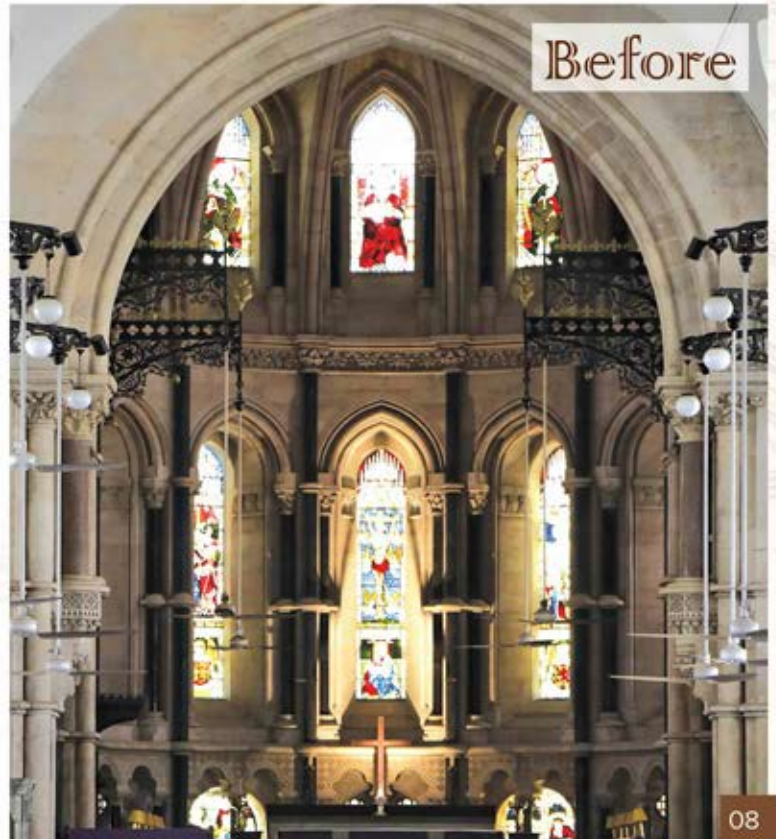


The vaulted nave is a unique structural design that leads up to the altar through a series of benches on either side. The altar and the nave are divided by a small space called as chancel. This chancel which (presbytery) consists of a space is meant for an organ and choir that ultimately leads up to the altar. The altar is beautifully adorned with panels of translucent stained glasses embedded in a lancet window. These stained-glass windows are a typical feature of the gothic architecture and are arranged as clerestory windows, divided by the ribs of the conical roof of the apse. The upper lancet windows portray Christ in Glory, centrally flanked by two archangels on either lancet panel installed in the memory of merchant Michael Scott.

The below clerestory windows denote Mother Mary with Baby Jesus, to its right the Jesus ascending with banner holding angels in bottom half, while the left window represents St. Thomas listening to people's confessions. The semi-circular clerestory arrangements end with lancet windows that are adorned with kaleidoscopic patterns.

Below the lancet windows are the series of the semi-circular windows, which are also in the stained glasses form.

Before



Before



The perspective of the cathedral is to offer an architecture of symmetry that facilitates an ambience of harmony and tranquility for its visitors. The nave of the cathedral has aisles on the north and the south side which runs along the memorials on the walls. It is also in line with columns on either side holding the vault roof and benches arranged in between the columns.

After



The vault arrangement forms an air-chamber to serve the purpose of air ventilation. This had developed intensive dampness due to flaked plaster. A considerable interior restoration and repair works of different kinds were executed to restore the structure. Moreover, the structure was applied with warm shades of illumination, which brought back the grandeur of the cathedral.

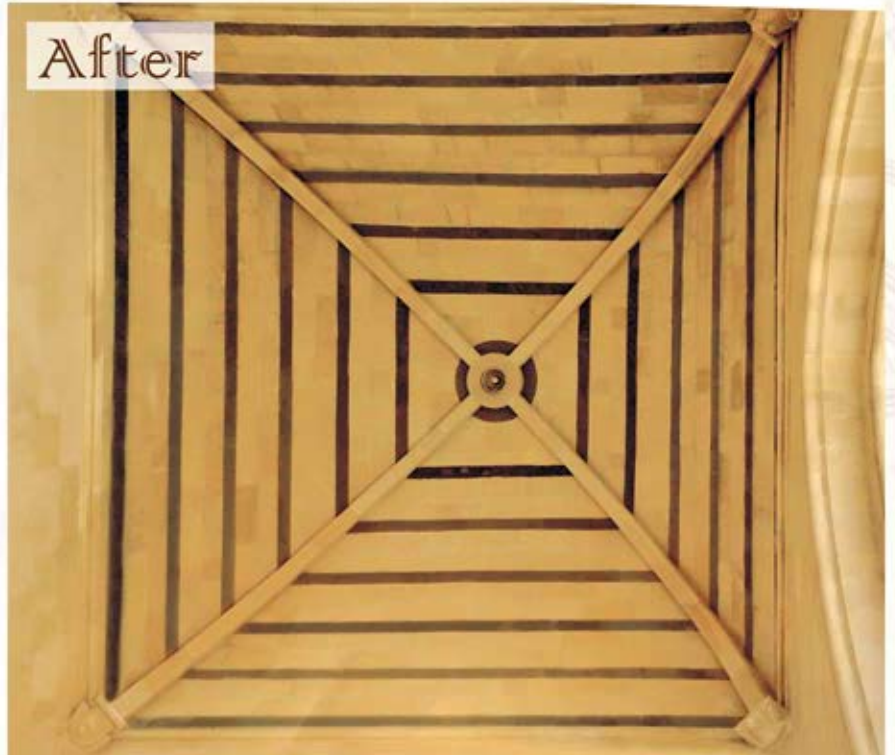
The ribbed vault roof in the chancel area of the cathedral is a typical roof setting of gothic style of architecture. An alternating band of stone strips in a darker shade is used to create a floral pattern in the vault. The vault was given minor repairs in terms of fabric and with respect to its joinery and stone surface.

A new light fixture was replaced at the center that lights up the space below at the chancel, another typical feature of the cathedral apart from the floral art work on the exterior face. These characteristic features of the Gothic Architecture Cathedral were meticulously revisited to give a tidy look.

Before



After



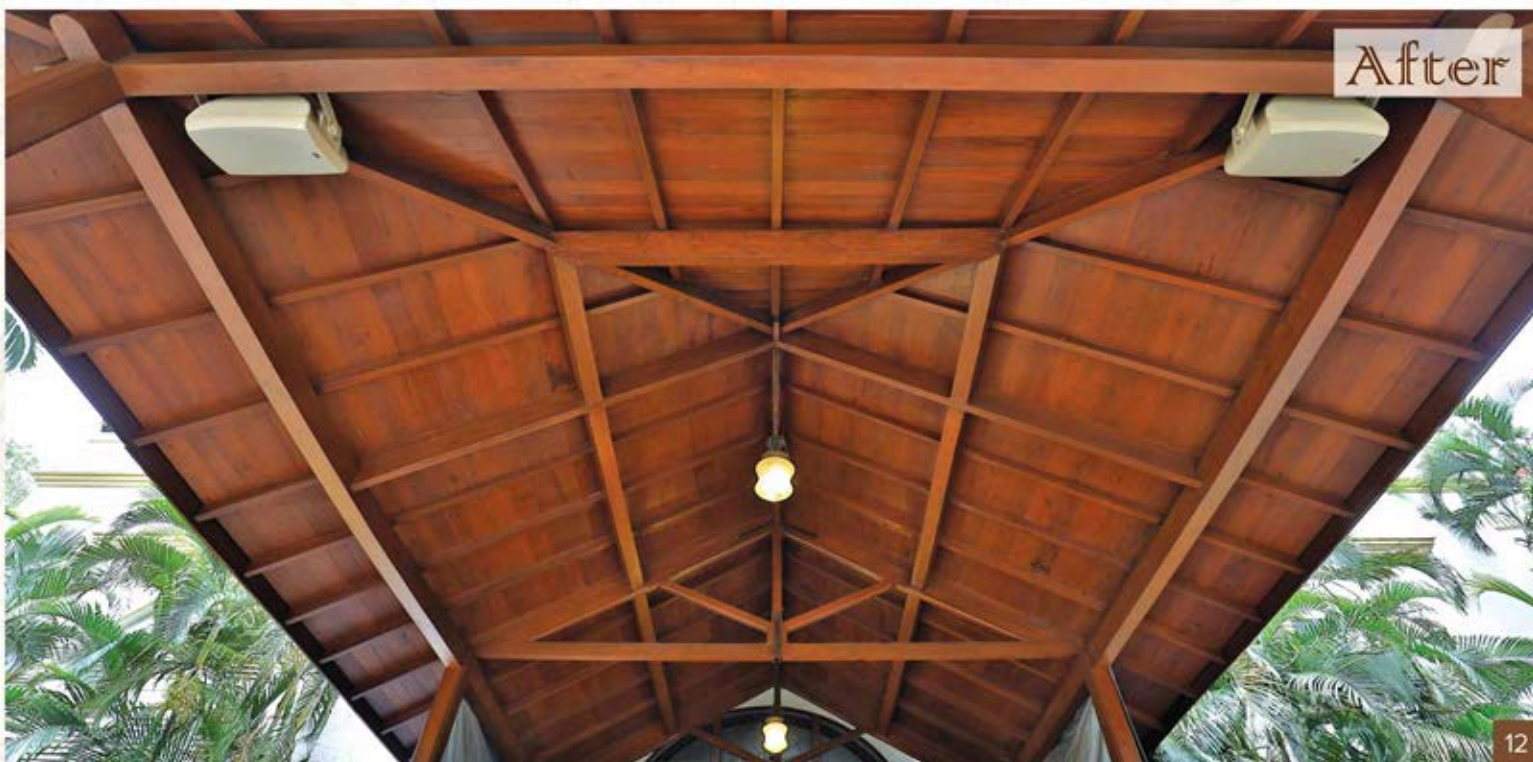


Before

The timber porch at entrance of the cathedral is symbolic and meant to welcome the visitors. Due to the placement of Mangalore tiles directly over the purlins caused leakages.

In order to correct the damage caused by the leakages, the porch was treated with zero puncture system, a methodology developed by Savani Heritage Constervation Pvt. Ltd. This system involves sandwiched layers of aluminum and glass wool in between the purlins and the rafters, which is topped with Mangalore tiles.

The porch is now watertight and deftly restored after applying inner layer of boards to safeguard from the damages caused by the falling tree branches.



After



The stone plaque adorns the interior walls of the cathedral which have been put up in the memory of the personnel who had served the British Govt. during the colonial rule in India. The plaques are not just a mere representation of the records but forms an integral part of the cathedral fabric.

The black granite plaque which was broken into fragments had to be dismantled from its base. Before fixing it back, it was meticulously stitched and cleaned with the help of steam. Necessary repainting and polishing works were extended to uphold its respectful appearance.

The missing arched frame made out of marble was re-fixed from the leftover marked evidences and placed back on the wall.





A fountain that stands at the entrance of the cathedral was donated by Sir Cowasjee Jehangir which is also a symbolic element of the gothic architecture.

The elegant fountain was designed and executed by Ar. Gilbert Scott where the pipes are well concealed. But with passage of time, the fountain developed severe damages and leakages and wore a stained look due to algal growth.

The fountain was cleaned, plastered and brought back into working condition.



Before



After

The Baptismal Font at the St. Thomas Cathedral was meant to be for Baptism. The font is an important element of a cathedral and stands on a pedestal holding water. The font is placed near the entrance of the Cathedral. This Baptismal Font is beautifully carved out giving away the glimpse of its overall structural beauty.

The cathedral has a sculpture installed with a bird like creature. The sculpture looked completely distressed and damaged. A special procedure of plastic repairs was executed for its repairing.

The broken wings, head, torso and legs were mended meticulously. A special base pedestal was created to help the sculpture stand firmly.

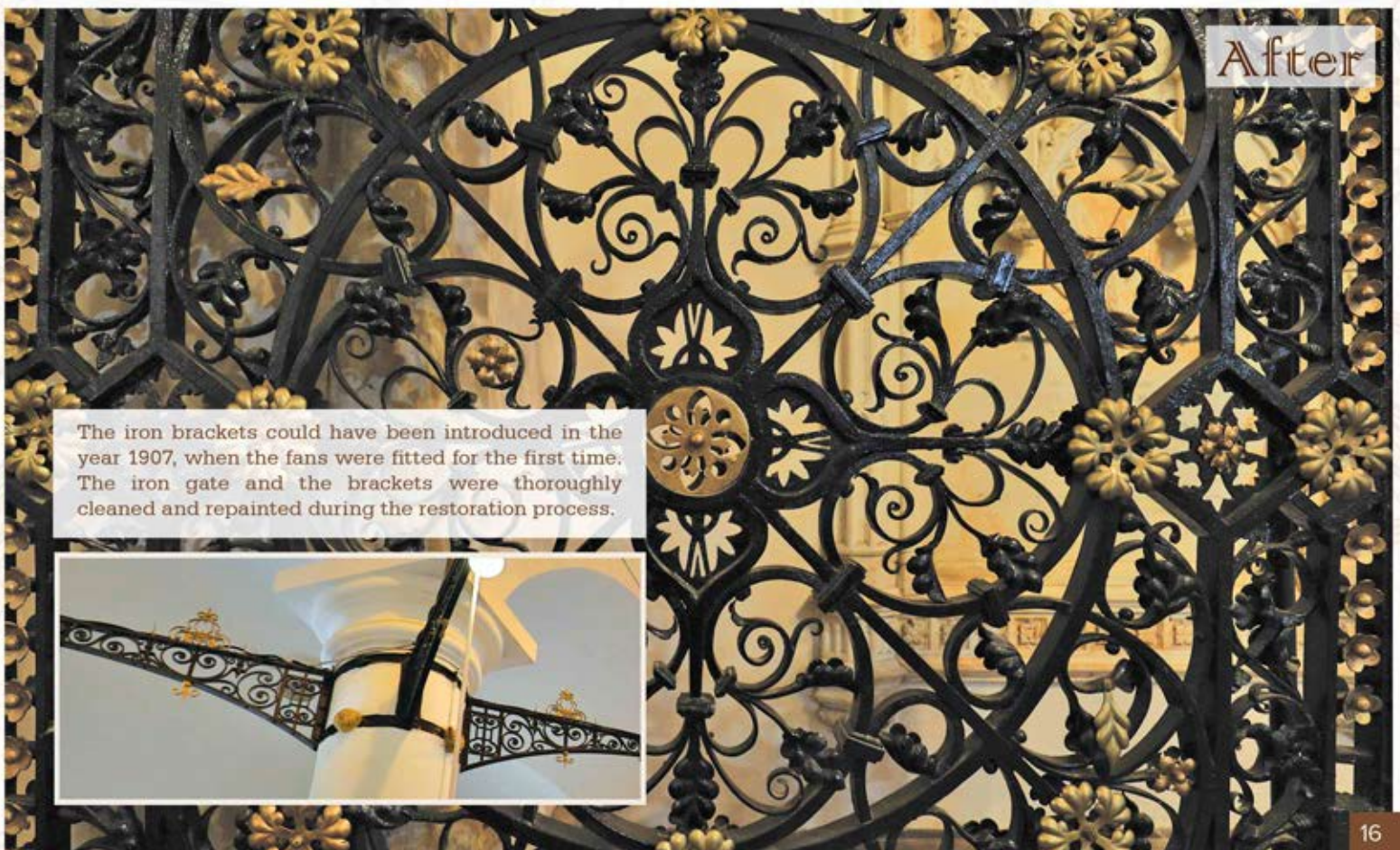




The cathedral is situated along the East- West Axis with its entrance facing the west side. The St. Thomas Cathedral is considered as a zero point or the city center. The major roads were measured from this point. In total, 16 milestones were commissioned, which were measured considering Cathedral as central point.

The Wrought iron Gate was installed in the year 1865 at the internal entrance of the prayer hall. The gate is an example of art work in metal with its intricate carved detailing.

This detailing is based on the floral theme painted in the various combination of black and golden color with its loose elements being riveted. The detail is typical of the gothic tracery and known as patera with flowers, creepers and leaves.



The iron brackets could have been introduced in the year 1907, when the fans were fitted for the first time. The iron gate and the brackets were thoroughly cleaned and repainted during the restoration process.

After



After





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