OULAP HALL (originally the church school) renovation 2022 – 2025

This building was used as a school from when it was built in the 1880s, until 1983 when Die Bron Primary School was built in the area known as 'Die Skema'.

Despite the 'apartheid' history of South Africa and the St Thomas Church Complex situated in a 'White area', the Coloured community continued to use the church as their place of worship, and the Oulap School for their children's first 2 – 3 years of education.

The school was fondly known as the 'Oulap' School, as the children had to pay a penny (an 'oulap') to go to school. The penny was wrapped in an old piece of cloth (also an 'ou lap') or handkerchief to make sure the penny did not get lost on the way to school!



Picture taken September 2022



Note the decay of the thatch roof, and the outer sandstone damaged by irrigation onto the wall instead of away from the wall.

The white building on the left is/was the ablution facilities insensitively added in the 1970s. The face brick wall (also a 1970 addition) was painted white in the 1990s and completely dominates the beautiful front façade.



In August 2022, *Henry Gibson*, church warden and lay preacher of St Thomas Anglican Church, contacted *Bea Whittaker* from Stanford Conservation to ask whether Stanford Conservation could assist in raising funds to replace the thatch roofs on both the Oulap Hall and the St Thomas Church. The reason why Stanford Conservation was approached is because, in 2012, this community organisation also raised funds from the *Roland and Leta Hill Trust* to patch the roof on the church and restore the outer sandstone that was insensitively (and incorrectly) patched with mortar to prevent the sandstone from further erosion.

In January 2023, a small steering committee was formed to investigate the restoration. Members included Henry Gibson, Bea Whittaker, *Keith Brown* (member of Stanford Heritage) and *Mike* and *Minette Munnik*. (Mike is an engineer who specialises in green building and Minette a heritage

architect. They have a special kinship with the church as they got married in St Thomas in December 2022.)

The result was a proposed extensive restoration project for the entire church complex, as well the upgrade of the gardens and a new ablution facility.

By August 2025 (when this bottle was placed under the new floor of the Oulap Hall) no landscaping had commenced, and funds still needed to be raised for the new ablution facilities.



2023

The roof of the Oulap was the first major work to be done as part of the St Thomas Church Complex restoration project.

Work started in April 2023 and was only completed in August 2023 because of a very wet and rainy winter. Cost to replace roof: R130 000.

Once the roof was done, it was time to put in the lighting – just to find out the electricity was totally uncompliant, and a fire hazard.

An unexpected R60 000 later, the entire building was re-wired, a new distribution board was installed, the lights were in, the wall plugs were mounted, and provision was made for a kitchenette at the far side of the hall.

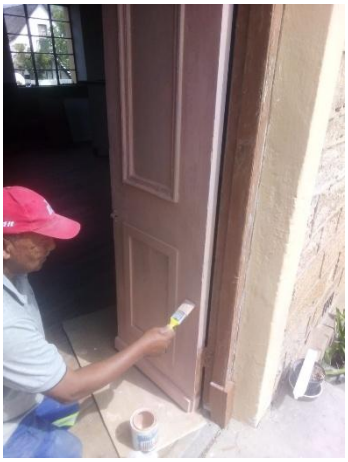


The interior was then repainted, and minor work was done on the old, but weather-damaged doors.









Henry Gibson, carpenter, church warden and passionate about St Thomas, at work



By February 2024 the work on the Oulap Hall had been completed, and the hall could be used by the congregation – and rented out to the community so the congregation could receive a steady income stream for future maintenance of the buildings. Total cost: approx. R375 000.

2025

With some restoration funds still available, approval was eventually obtained from the Diocese to replace the Oregon pine wooden floor, riddled with borer beetle and dangerously worn in certain areas. Unfortunately, it could not be replaced with Oregon but was replaced with treated pine and stained to achieve the rich brown Oregon colour. Cost: R80 000 excluding donations of labour and varnish.







