

# Alessio Erardi's Ceiling at Our Lady of Victory Church Revealed

After 25 years hidden by a temporary wooden floor, Alessio Erardi's painted ceiling (which dates back to 1716-1718) in the Church of Our Lady of Victory in Valletta has finally been revealed in all its glory. The conservation was carried out by Lisa Shekede and Stephen Rickerby, senior conservators from the Courtauld Institute of Art in London.

The delicate operation to remove the intermediary floor was carried out between 27 and 30 July. The floor was a temporary structure, built in 1996 to allow conservation work on the ceiling by conservators from the Courtauld Institute of Art. The dismantling work was carried out by Karmnu, Vince and David, provided by the Valletta Rehabilitation Project office, under the supervision of Valletta World Heritage Site manager, architect Mireille Fsadni, and with the coordination of Din l-Art Helwa council member Josie Ellul Mercer and the church custodian and visitors' manager Mario Sciberras. Each plank and iron beam was taken down with extreme care to avoid any chance of damaging the ceiling or the carved stonework below and the work was completed in time for the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Great Siege on 8 September.

The conservation treatment was commissioned by the VRP to the Courtauld Institute conservators, who carried out initial studies in 2004 and was continued by DLH when it was entrusted with the guardianship of Victory Church in 2011. This crucial part of the whole restoration project was made possible with the generous support of the HSBC Malta Foundation. The Alessio Erardi ceiling had suffered from neglect, pollution and water infiltration and the paintings were almost lost. Thanks to the hard work and support of so many, it can now be enjoyed after having been hidden for almost 20 years. DLH hopes to complete the illumination of the ceiling before the end of the year.

