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## A to Z of Church Maintenance

### Cleaning

#### CLEANING OF CHURCH INTERIORS

Cleaning the interior of an historic church is a matter to be approached with care and caution if serious damage to the historic fabric is to be avoided. Excellent advice on cleaning can be found in the *National Trust Manual of Housekeeping* (NT, 1984). This brief note cannot hope to give details of cleaning every item. However, some of the most common questions are answered.

- General information

**DO NOT** attempt to clean objets d'art, wall plaques, alabaster monuments, ancient stained glass, memorial brasses, or other delicate items with anything other than a soft brush.

**DO NOT** attempt to clean hatchments, paintings, wallpaintings, gilding or textiles other than with a vacuum cleaner at its lowest power setting. The nozzle should be covered with gauze and should not be allowed to touch the surface being cleaned. **DO NOT** clean any of these objects if their surfaces are flaking or have loose threads, etc.

**DO NOT** allow cleaning materials to spread to adjoining materials or surfaces.

**USE** different brushes for different materials. Write the purpose of the brush clearly and boldly on its handle.

**DO NOT** use water or damp cloths to clean marble and stone surfaces. The acidity in the water will damage the surface of the stone and may lead to the formation of salts on it.

- Glass

**NEVER** wash stained glass. The paint may be loose and can easily be dislodged. Plain glass should be washed with clean water to which a few drops of methylated spirits have been added. Use a soft clean cloth. Dry and then polish with chamois leather. **DO NOT** use proprietary window cleaners as they leave powder traces along edges and corners.

- Timber

Painted timber can be washed with a mixture of water and detergent (see below for advice on detergent use).

Unpolished timber should be dusted with a soft dry duster or vacuumed at low power. Crevices and carved work should be brushed out at the same

time with a hogs hair or paperhanger's bush, depending on the scale of the carving, using brush in one hand and vacuum in the other. Damage to carved work can be avoided by wrapping a piece of foam rubber around the head of the crevice tool of the vacuum cleaner.

Polished wood should be dusted as described above occasionally buffing up the surface with a duster or chamois leather. Only apply polish once or twice a year very sparingly and evenly using a wax polish of the same or slightly lighter colour than the wood being polished. **NEVER** use polishes containing silicone or furniture cream or aerosol spray polish. **NEVER** polish near pieces of wood that are cracked or lifting as this could result in further damage and will make future repair more difficult.

- Metal

**NEVER** try to clean bronze statues or statuettes. **NEVER** wash bronze. Dust lightly once or twice a year and carefully remove dust trapped in tooling and crevices with a soft bristle brush.

Rub brass and copper with Goddards Long Term Silver Cloth; if it is highly tarnished then use Goddards Glow. Keep separate cloths for each type of metal being cleaned. **DO NOT** use these polishes on brass fittings on doors, furniture etc. In these cases use the same cleaner as is being used for the furniture.

Aluminium should be cleaned with warm soapy water applied with a cloth or leather and dried and polished with a soft dry cloth.

- Paintwork

Before cleaning paintwork it is wise to test a small area to ensure that the paint surface is not removed by the cleaning method. **NEVER** use proprietary cleaners or abrasive powders on any paint surface.

**DO NOT** wash limewash but brush with a soft broom or brush.

Wash other paintwork with water to which a small amount of detergent has been added.

- Bricks and tiles

Loose dirt and dust can be removed from fair-face brickwork with a dry bristle brush. **DO NOT** try and remove ingrained dirt with water as it will simply spread the problem.

Glazed bricks and tiles can be washed with a mop and water to which a small amount of detergent has been added. Wash off with clean water and polish with a soft cloth.

- Floors

The best way of reducing damage to floors is to provide a good length of doormat inside the entrance door.

Unpolished wood, stone, marble, terrazzo and tile floors should be mopped very occasionally with a damp mop rinsed in clear water and dried off with a dry mop. If soaked or left wet too long the surface of stone and marble floors may be damaged by harmful salts. Rough stone floors can be cleaned with a stiff brush after sprinkling the floor with damp sawdust to keep down the dust.

Polished wood floors should be dry polished from time to time. Do not let polisher brushes become impregnated with polish. A woollen cloth impregnated with a 50/50 mixture of paraffin and vinegar can be wrapped round a mop to collect dust and leave the floor shiny. Two or three times a year apply a thin coating of Johnson's Traffic Wax.

Linoleum, rubber and vinyl floors should be polished with a water/wax emulsion paste applied with a dry cloth and buffed with a polishing machine. Accumulations of polish can be removed with a detergent in hot water.

Ceramic tiles and mosaic floors should be lightly washed with clean water.

- Fabrics and textiles

**NEVER** attempt to wash or dry clean textiles of any historic interest. DO NOT attempt to clean textiles that are fragile, have beads, loose fringes etc.

Vacuum textiles at low power and cover the nozzle with a nylon gauze screen (for example, a pair of tights). Do not press down onto the textile with the vacuum head.

Carpets and rugs should be vacuumed frequently to prevent damage from dust and dirt.

Take care when dusting furniture that the duster does not come into contact with any textiles upholstery. Upholstery can be gently patted with a plastic fly swat before vacuuming to loosen dirt.

Clean leather with a small amount of saddle soap and a soft cloth. Test an area hidden from view before cleaning generally.

- Detergents

In the past, the National Trust recommended a neutral detergent. Unfortunately the recommended product is no longer available. The best option is to use Boots Sensitive Skin washing up liquid using no more than 1 drop per pint of water.

### **And finally**

This information can only be a general guide. If there is any doubt that a particular product or method of cleaning is suitable, discuss the matter with your DAC Secretary. The cost of a brief telephone call may be much cheaper than a hefty bill to put damage right.

*July 2001*