

Conservation Cleaning

Hints and Tips



Introduction

The interior of your Place of Worship is a historic artefact in its own right, so any intervention needs to be with a conservation mindset: preventing further deterioration rather than attempting the restoration of an effect or finish that has been lost. The key to effective maintenance is minimal intervention, understanding of the environmental conditions, understanding what you have, their materials and what has happened to them. What you have is referred to as your collection.

All artefacts and materials will deteriorate over time and the rate of deterioration is hastened by various risk factors. In a place of worship there will be particular factors: heating, humidity, lack of time or people who can do the work of cleaning. The effect of these risk factors can be lessened by practical measures which identify and reduce the rate of decay. In turn these preventive measures will enable you to more effectively manage your place of worship and effectively use your limited resources.

Any cleaning or polishing materials used need to be of the simplest chemical composition with acceptable known aging effects and known constituents (not proprietary brands as the ingredients change).

Key points to consider.

- Never undertake any work without first understanding what you have in your place of worship and what it is made of.
- Take time to know and understand the environment around your place of worship and the environmental factors inside your place of worship.
- Never undertake any work on significant, complex, vulnerable & venerable objects without professional advice.
- Always work carefully, observe and record your work. If in doubt, stop.
- Put your safety and that of others first.

These are only guidelines. If in doubt ask for help from the property section of your own denomination e.g. Diocesan Building Officer (Church of England); District Property Secretary (Methodist); Advisory Committee on Property (Quakers) etc or a qualified conservator (see ICON in contacts section at end). A conservator is a professional experienced in the repair and preservation of items of cultural or artistic interest, such as buildings or works of art.

General Conservation Cleaning Guidelines

All materials will change with time. Some of these changes are welcomed as signs of age, darkening of pews, wear on stone floors or patination of some metals. Some changes are not, such as dirt, dust, insect damage and you may decide that they need to be cleaned or maintained. Keeping the authenticity of age may mean though that some dirt, stains and deterioration are left.

Before you start work make sure you have the right equipment and materials and know how they work. Always test equipment and carry out test cleans on small out-of-the-way areas first.

Always start with a dry process that captures as much dust and dirt as possible and doesn't redistribute it. Don't rub or brush too hard as you may destroy a surface finish. Any action that dissolves (in water or any other solvent) or melts the contamination will potentially drive the contamination further into a porous material, so is best avoided if possible except on more robust surfaces.



Be aware that rubbing with a dirty cloth or using a brush with stiff bristles could scratch the surface you are attempting to clean. The ferrule, the metal section on the brush that holds the bristles onto the handle can also scratch so best to tape over it with insulation tape or gaffer tape. Also take care with the vacuum cleaner nozzle as these can scratch too.

Acceptable cleaning techniques

Dusting with a lint-free and snag-free cloth – for robust smooth surfaces only, e.g. floor tiles, flat bits of pew, accessible window cills, straight mouldings, lower sections of wall with a light covering of dust. Gently wipe the dirt into the cloth and capture it rather than flicking it around. Shake the cloth outside once you have used all clean surfaces and start again. Microfibre dusters are best; old cotton sheets are good too. Orange cloth dusters are not as good except on smooth surfaces as these snag and leave behind little bits of orange fluff.

Dusting using a soft paint brush and a vacuum cleaner – use an elastic band to secure a piece of netting over the vacuum cleaner nozzle, turn the suction down to low in case a piece of what ever you are dusting is sucked or knocked off: the net stops it being sucked up into the vacuum cleaner and lost. Use the brush to brush dust out of crevices towards the nozzle holding the nozzle with one hand and the brush with the other. This technique is appropriate to carved areas of woodwork.

Using a vacuum cleaner on robust textiles – an upholstery brush fitting for a vacuum cleaner is a good way to remove dust from robust textiles used regularly such as padded chairs, kneelers, book rests and upholstery on pews.

Using a vacuum cleaner and netting on less robust textiles

If the textile is less robust, especially in areas with beading or embroidery, it is possible to lay the textile flat, reduce suction on the vacuum cleaner to minimum and vacuum through a piece of netting placed on top of the textile. If threads or beading is loose, contact a professional conservator.

Cobweb capturing – a microfibre cloth tied around a feather duster is probably the best way to capture cobwebs. Extreme care is needed around monuments as sections may be loose.

Wax removal – use a plastic spatula or wooden modelling tool to scrape off as much as possible manually. Do not use a wax remover or an iron without specialist guidance.

What to do with

Wood Furniture, pews, carvings, misericords, panelling etc.

Dust with soft brush into the nozzle of the vacuum at low power. Use an elastic band to secure a piece of netting over the vacuum cleaner nozzle. Take care not to damage carvings with edge of nozzle.

Polished wood should be dusted occasionally. Use a cloth on flat areas, use a soft brush and vacuum cleaner with netting over the nozzle on carved bits. Polishing is not necessary, but if desired, use a very small amount of good quality beeswax polish only (not Pledge or any other proprietary polish with colour and fragrance). Buff up surface with a lint free cloth.

Floorboards and Pew Platforms

Polished wood should be brushed with soft brush; use vacuum cleaner for edges. Dry buff with soft cloth. Do not re-wax without taking advice.

Pew platform and other areas of bare wooden floor - finish off with a barely damp mop with a small amount of neutral detergent in the water and then a second pass with clean water only. Soak up any excess with a dry mop.



Metal: brass, bronze

Dust with soft brush to remove loose dust. Buff with a lint free cloth to remove tarnish; DO NOT USE Brasso. Take advice before trying to remove ingrained old polish deposits, although the white and green remains of old Brasso will probably lift out with buffing and could be encouraged out a little further using a toothbrush. Once shiny apply a very small amount of microcrystalline wax as a thin coat with a lint-free cloth and buff to a shine.

Iron, steel

Dust with soft brush. Protect with microcrystalline wax as above. Do not attempt to remove any corrosion without taking advice.

Stone

Flooring, marble, terrazzo, stone, can be cleaned with slightly damp soft cloth with a neutral detergent. Dry with soft cloth.

Memorials marble, alabaster

Careful dusting with soft brush into vacuum cleaner with the nozzle protected with netting. If there is **any** hint of decoration, paint, or gilding then take specialist advice. Do not use water on alabaster as it will dissolve.

Glass

Plain glass can be washed with slightly damp cloth and neutral detergent if the dirt is difficult to remove. Dust can be removed with soft brush or microfiber cloth.

Stained glass can be gently brushed. Do not wash. If there are flaky areas or damage to lead comes, take advice from a conservator.

Ceramics

Floor and wall tiles. Brush with soft brush to remove loose dirt. Difficult to remove dirt can be cleaned using a barely wet mop with Ecover washing-up liquid to mop over these and then a second mop with just plain water; finish off with a clean dry mop to soak up any remaining liquid. Loose dirt can be removed from brick work or terracotta with a hog's hair brush.

Paint

Walls. Before any cleaning, test small area to see if paint is well attached. Clean with soft brush. Do not wash.

Wall paintings, other paintings

In the first instance take advice as care of these types of objects is a specialist area.

Textiles

More delicate textiles should be assessed by a conservator although more robust textiles can be cleaned with soft brush into a low-power vacuum cleaner with a covered nozzle as described above.

Carpets, rugs

Clean using low-power vacuum cleaner.

Hymn books and prayer books – On a dry day take them outside, hold the books firmly closed in one hand, use a brush to brush the dust off the pages working away from the spine. If it is not a dry day, brush dust into vacuum cleaner

Leather

Take advice. Do not use commercial leather cleaners or saddle soap. Clean using a brush and vacuum.

If in doubt – don't



Organising and planning your collection care and maintenance

A Collections Care Plan will contain:

1. Inventory of all the objects that you will cover in the plan. Provide a good description of the object, condition, location and potential risks.
2. A basic risk assessment of the potential problems, dirt, dust, pests and environmental problems.
3. Condition of the objects.
4. Plan of action and priority, time frame and costs if appropriate.

Inventory

- You will need a plan of the place of worship.
- You need to know what you have got, where it is, what it is and the materials involved.
- Record the collection using the inventory sheet. This will give you a record of the collection and enable you to formulate a plan of action. Record which of them are the most significant.
- Using an electronic format will give you more flexibility in organisation.
- It is a good idea to take good quality photographs of the collection

Risk assessment

- Risk is the possibility of something adverse happening to your place of worship. This may be the result of fire, flood, vandalism, pests or other factors. As you will be a group who knows the place of worship, its environment, and the surrounding countryside you will be aware of potential risks.
- Write down any possible risks. Order the list and put the risks into categories, high, medium low. Is there anything you can do to lessen the risks?

Possible causes of damage and risk factors

Ten agents of deterioration are recognised by conservators as the causes of damage to all types of heritage objects (including buildings).

Physical forces the most frequent damage to objects is caused by poor handling, bumping or hitting with another object or tool, accidental dropping or failure of supports (e.g. fixings, hooks and fastenings).

Theft and vandalism this can cause complete loss or significant damage.

Fire from a lightning strike, electrical fault, knocked over candle or deliberate act can destroy or seriously damage objects or indeed the entire building – your fire risk assessment should identify steps to minimise the risk of fire.

Water floods, leaks, spills and condensation will damage both objects and the fabric of the building, the baseline survey will identify possible sources of water ingress.

Pests and biological damage can include insects, rodents and fungal damage. Clothes moths and woolly bears (larval stage of carpet beetles) will damage carpets, textiles, books and any animal skins or taxidermy. Woodworm (furniture beetle) and deathwatch beetle can damage wood fittings and structures. Checking edges of spaces, behind furniture and damp places in conjunction with monitoring with pest traps will avoid more costly treatments.

Dust, dirt and other contaminants. If loose dust and dirt are removed on a regular basis there will be a low risk of damage. Once the dirt has become bonded to the surface cleaning will be more of a problem. Objects that are moved or touched as part of their use they can become damaged. Inappropriate materials for storage, eg old cardboard and inappropriate proprietary cleaning products will also introduce contaminants and cause problems.

Light will fade and weaken the structure of textiles, carpets, standards, banners, wall hangings, upholstery, books, and furniture. Ultra Violet (UV) light, mainly from sunlight and visible light, will cause damage.

Vulnerable objects can be removed from direct light, covered up or put into storage when not in use. Large windows with clear glass may be covered with UV film. Stained glass should not be treated with filters without advice.

Incorrect humidity is likely to be a major problem in a lot of places of worship. Humidity is the amount of moisture in the air. It is also referred to as relative humidity RH% which is the relationship between temperature and moisture. When the air gets damp - over 65% RH - there will be problems with mould growth on fittings, furniture, textiles and books which will cause staining. A very dry environment will cause wood, furniture, frames to shrink, crack and warp. It is not easy to control or reduce humidity in a place of worship especially if there are problems with the construction. Humidity is affected by the weather, heating in the place of worship, congregations, boiling water etc. Changes and fluctuations in humidity will result in warping, movement and cracking of wood which can damage paint surfaces, gilding etc.

Custodial neglect failure to have in place and follow guidelines and policies over the care and management of your place of worship will result in neglect.

Recommended reading

- **National Trust Manual of Housekeeping.** Excellent book that covers all areas of heritage housekeeping in depth. You should be able to find it for about 40 pounds.
- **Re-collections** Excellent free on line book covering basics of conservation and heritage management. The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials
https://aiccm.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/reCollections/4_managing_collections.pdf

Further Contacts and useful reading

- ICON Conservation register. This will give you the contacts for accredited conservators.
<http://www.conservationregister.com/>
- The Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) <https://www.spab.org.uk/>
- English Heritage. Drawing up a collections management plan
<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/content/learn/conservation/2543455/2543024/drawing-up-collections-management-plan.pdf>
- INFORM guides produced by Historic Environment Scotland covering range of conservation subjects and free to download <http://conservation.historic-scotland.gov.uk/home/publications.htm?callback=1&searchterm=&system.customproperties.pt5=on&submit=Search>
- Preservation Equipment Conservation supplier <https://www.preservationequipment.com>
- Conservation by Design conservation supplier <http://www.conservation-by-design.com>
- Screw Fix has a lot of useful equipment <http://www.screwfix.com>
- Building Conservation. com <http://www.buildingconservation.com/>
- The Collections Trust is a very useful site with lots of information. Some of this is quite technical and focused on museum standards. The booklet on the care of textiles is very handy and provides an in-depth but understandable guide for your place of worship textiles. <http://www.collectionstrust.org.uk/>
<http://www.collectionstrust.org.uk/media/documents/c1/a88/f6/000134.pdf>
- For useful information regarding pest management and supplies of traps contact Bob Child
<http://www.historyonics.com/>

Suggested supplies

Neutral or anionic detergent – Boots sell a Neutral detergent, Ecover washing up liquid is also a suitable anionic detergent

Microcrystalline wax – Renaissance Wax is the most commonly used conservation grade microcrystalline wax

