

The Tiles & Architectural Ceramics Society

The national society responsible for the study and protection of tiles and architectural ceramics

TACS Data Sheet No. 1

Victorian Encaustic & Geometric Floor Tiles

Victorian encaustic and geometric floor tiles are usually made of fairly robust ceramic. The most common problems encountered are:

- *Dull, dirty appearance due to over a hundred years of wear and tear*
- *Paint spills and encrustations of other coatings*
- *Grease, oil or rust stains*
- *Ancient coatings of waxes and linseed oil which have absorbed into the body of the tiles and turned black*
- *Dirty and missing cement grouting*

Treatments

Remember that any cleaning treatment on old floors is **always** experimental and is not bound to work, so with that in mind never start the cleaning process in the middle of the floor, always find an unobtrusive corner in which to test your method or product. Where floors are in large open public buildings, with no other vulnerable building fabric in the vicinity, and all health and safety considerations have been taken into account, steam cleaning can sometimes be a useful first phase, especially if the floor is in particularly bad condition. In more usual domestic or ecclesiastical buildings the best method of cleaning is by hand

Recommended detergent products are 'Vulpex' spirit soap, available from conservation suppliers, 'HG Extra', 'HG grease remover' or 'BAL ceramic floor tile cleaner' available from good tile suppliers. All products are non ionic, 'Vulpex' is a mild soap, whilst 'HG Extra' is a stronger detergent which contains phosphoric acid, HG grease remover is an alkaline cleaner and BAL floor tile cleaner contains sulphamic acid. Whichever product is chosen it should be applied neat onto the surface of the tile and agitated manually, left for twenty minutes and then thoroughly rinsed off. Each tile should be given individual attention

To agitate the detergent use 'Scotchbrite' green pan scourers. These are made of a plastic material which is abrasive enough to work the liquid into the body of the tile, but will not scratch the surface. **Never** use wire wool or any hard abrasive material

Hardened substances which are on the surface of the tile, such as paint splashes may be removed using a 'Stanley' blade at a 45 degree angle, red plastic holders which hold the blade thus can be bought from hardware stores

When the tiles are cleaned, re grouting is often a good idea. Clean new grout will often give the tiles a visual lift, it will also protect the edges of the tiles in areas of heavy tread. Cement or lime mortar grout may be used depending on the environment of the rest of the building

To give the tiles a protective coating, repeated use of any non yellowing wax is all that is required. 'Renaissance' micro-crystalline wax is usually recommended. **Never** use any polymer or plastic sealant, neither use beeswax or linseed oil

Wearing of rubber gloves and eye protection are recommended against the effects of detergent splashes

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We do not accept responsibility for the results of any action taken following the use of these guidelines