to avoid knocks and brushing against painted surfaces. Nails or screws should not be fixed through a historic surface and the installation of services, where they are likely to affect a decorative painted surface, should be carefully considered.

Conservation and repair
Good conservation practice can be exercised by minimising works which may affect painted finishes and by choosing materials that match, or are compatible with, original materials.

A condition survey of historic decorative paint finishes should record and assess the condition of the materials, and make recommendations for immediate treatment and future care. If the surface of the painted substrate is sound, simple remedial treatments can be carried out to clean, consolidate flaking pigments and repair small areas of damage. All treatments should be reversible and leave no harmful residues.

It is generally not difficult to entirely uncover a decorative scheme that has been covered with many later layers of paint, even if it is likely that large areas of the early scheme survive underneath. It may be more feasible to reveal just a section as an example of the decoration, and to incorporate this fragment into a new or reproduced scheme. A glass or plastic panel should not be used to do this, as this could encourage condensation and damage rather than protect the surface.

Modern recommendations for preparation before repainting advise that all previous layers of paint should be stripped off. If a decorative paint scheme is in poor condition, or only survives in fragments, a conservator may advise that the original finish is consolidated and protected before a new finish is applied. It is preferable to leave a historic painted finish in its original position with a good record made of it, in order to create a new scheme on top.

Reproducing a historic decorative paint finish
Uncovered areas of historic graining or marbling of a sufficient size can provide an indication of the original patterning and colour of the scheme, so that the scheme can be reproduced over a larger area. Although lead-based paints were once commonly used, these are now regarded as a health hazard and can only be used on Category A listed buildings with permission from Historic Scotland. It is possible to obtain traditional paints that are very similar to the composition, colour and performance of those that were used in the past. The choice of paint should be discussed with the conservator or decorator, who should be able to advise on an appropriate choice for the circumstances. To avoid unnecessary damage, all adjacent historic surfaces should be carefully protected prior to and during any repainting works.

Further information


Decorative Paint Finishes: Graining and Marbling
Identifying a historic decorative paint finish

The common use of graining and marbling in many C17 and C18 properties suggests that decorative finishes were an important feature of rooms and buildings. Early examples are often found beneath layers of paint and wallpapers. Paint and paper were not always stripped before redecoration and historic paint schemes may have been over-painted many times. An existing graining scheme could be a relatively modern and needs to be checked in documentation to prove provenance.

Graining and marbling may remain under later layers of paint schemes or wallpaper. Identifying, protecting and reinstating historic grained or marbled finishes.

This INFORM aims to assist in transparent mediums.

Marbling is the simulation of natural materials such as wood and marbles were also artists, who employed considerable technical skill and knowledge of their trade as apprentices, developing their freedom of expression in their work.

Historically, decorators would have learnt techniques through observation and experience. Their skills would represent a polished marble.

Marbling employed on a fireplace

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