Balustrades

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When drying has led to a vertical split in a baluster this can be repaired by applying wood glue to the split and binding the two halves together with tape while drying takes place. Any excess glue should then be sanded off and the wood sanded. A horizontal break will need to be repaired by the insertion of a dowel to ensure structural strength is maintained. Where drying has led to a small split in a tread or riser this should not need any attention but should the split become larger and spread this will require the split element to be repaired as above or replaced.

Treads inevitably become worn over time and badly worn treads will need to be replaced as these can become a safety hazard. Where this is necessary it is best to consult an experienced tradesperson as replacing treads is a difficult operation to perform. Where a tread has to be replaced it is important to specify the style and the wood being used so it will match the originals as closely as possible.

If impact damage has only brought about a small scratch or gouge to the wood filler or a small wood indent can be used to affect a repair. If more serious damage occurs that affects the structural stability of the staircase then the damaged elements will need to be replaced and an experienced tradesperson consulted. Again, wood which will match the original as closely as possible should be used when carrying out any repair or replacement elements are being made.

Balustrades

Balustrades are made of several elements, all of which can become loose through repeated use. Particularly vulnerable parts are the finials on top of newel posts which are often constructed separately from the main body of the post and become loose through people resting on them as they reach the bottom of the stair. The balusters can also work loose over time, particularly if they are only secured using a nailed butt joint. Loose parts should be refixed using the original method as soon as any looseness is detected. This will ensure the important safety function which balustrades provide is maintained and prevent further damage to adjacent parts.

Where severe damage has occurred it may be necessary to replace some elements. These can be manufactured by a skilled joiner to be a replica of the existing balustrade. By having a replacement piece made which matches the original this will ensure the visual integrity of the staircase is maintained.

Balustrade of metal with wooden bannister
Introduction

When access is required to upper storeys of a building there will be a staircase of some description. In the majority of traditionally constructed buildings the staircase is constructed of timber. Staircases can be complex elements of a building, being made up of a number of parts and causing a number of repair and maintenance issues. This INFORM book explains building owners the construction of timber staircases and the issues associated with their repair and maintenance.

The construction of a timber staircase

A correct understanding of how the various elements which make up a timber stair fit together is vital to carrying out proper repair and maintenance. These parts are:

• Treads: The part of a stair on which the foot is placed.
• Risers: The upright element between the treads.
• Stringer: The structural side timber upon which the treads and risers are held securely in place.
• Balustres: The posts on the exposed side of a staircase for support, ornamentation. Rectangular blocks of wood are glued and occasionally screwed to the tread and provide extra stability.
• Newel posts: Located at the top and bottom of a staircase and are usually fixed to the top of the balustrade.
• Handrail: The part of the handrail which runs down and is securely fixed to the top of the balustrade.

Some of the parts of a timber staircase

Treads and risers are held in place in horizontal and vertical grooves cut into the stringer and are strengthened by the insertion of glued wooden wedges when they meet. The risers are set between consecutive treads and are usually fixed to the tread with a polished decorative hardwood makes up the surface which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into the course which is adjacent to a masonry wall as dampness can travel from the wall into...