

Cleaning Bannister Ropes

The materials used for making our banister ropes can be safely washed using normal detergents used for washing clothes. However they cannot be safely put in a washing machine since the brackets are attached to the rope and cannot be removed. It is also not desirable to subject the ropes to severe rubbing as this will raise the fibres on the surface and make the ropes look unduly hairy. This is particularly so in the case of natural flax ropes*.

A further complication is caused by the brass brackets which will tarnish if wetted with detergent solution.

If you do decide to clean the ropes then we suggest you proceed as follows:

- a. Remove all the cross screws from the brackets.
- b. Remove the bracket fastening screws (4 per bracket) so that the banister is no longer fixed to the wall. It is a good idea to mark the rope so that you know which end is at the top of the stairs (and which the bottom) so that the brackets will be refitted in the same position on the wall.
- c. Slide all the brackets to one end of the rope.
- d. Soak the 'free' end of the rope in warm soapy (detergent) water, preferably overnight. It will help if the rope is swished about in the soapy water from time to time.
- e. After soaking rinse thoroughly to remove any detergent.
- f. If necessary the process can be repeated for the other end of the rope but often this will not be necessary since the ends of the rope do not get much use.
- g. Allow the rope to dry thoroughly before refitting to the wall, spacing the brackets to locate with the screw holes in the wall or wooden mounts.
- h. Refit the cross screws through the rope using a knitting needle or similar object to make a path through the rope.

You may wish to polish the brackets whilst they are loose. This can be done with a propriety brass cleaner. The rope can be protected during this operation by sliding some thin card, bent to form a tube, inside the bracket, making sure that it extends on either side of the bracket for a few inches (or, say, 10cm).

Once cleaned the brackets will retain their shine for much longer if sprayed with a protective lacquer. We have found Dampstart (as used to spray on the ignition leads of a car) to be very effective.

Please do not expect the result to be 'as good as new' but it should remove the worst of the grime.

*Flax ropes. If your banister rope is made of flax and the washing treatment does make the rope look too hairy it is possible to slick down the hairs by giving the rope a wipe with a cloth that has been dipped in a dilute solution of wallpaper paste or starch solution. This was a standard treatment in many ropewalks when flax and hemp ropes were made.