

MARBLACK™ Slate Blacking 0216 012515

Instructions for use on Marble Clocks.

Black Marble Clocks became popular in the UK when Queen Victoria lost her husband. She and the country went into a prolonged state of mourning. Black cloths were draped across parlours, the Queen dressed in black like a Mediterranean widow, and her subjects did their bit by 'Buying all things black', and even painting ornaments black.

Generally known as Black Slate Clocks by the trade, the stone is in fact neither marble nor slate. It is a Belgian calcite with a slightly porous texture. Marble is a much harder, impervious stone, and these clocks were often inlaid with genuine marble to give them a little style and colour.

The normal place to put these clock was on the mantle piece, for several reasons:

- The clocks are delicate and a wobbly table will prevent them from working correctly.
- Being heavy, they needed some permanent place
- It is normally easily visible.

After spending decades on a warm shelf above a fire, many cases have become dull. Patches of greyness sometimes appear on the surface.

Marblack is a powerful black emulsified stain that blackens and polishes the surface of these clocks, as well as a host of other black items around the home.

Removing French movements

Although it is quite possible to restore one of these clocks with the movement in place, it makes the task much more difficult. No clock making skills are normally needed to remove a French movement from its marble case.

To remove the movement:

Remove the pendulum. You should do this anyway, as moving the clock with its pendulum fitted will almost certainly damage it.

The pendulum will have a small hook at the top. It either hangs on a thin strip of spring steel with a pin through it (the suspension) or it will hang on a piece of silk thread. Simply raise the pendulum enough to unhook it. Remove it from the clock. You may need to guide it through a slot in the arm that drives it.

French movements are usually held in place by being clamped to a back door or plate. If you open the back door you will see two screws going into two straps that are connected to the front of the circular movement. Before you undo them, remember that the movement might fall out when free to do so. If the clock is light, you can consider placing it face down on a cloth. If not, you will probably need someone to hold it for you.

When both screws have been removed, the back should lift away and the movement can be withdrawn from the front. Place the movement and the back, with the retaining screws, in a safe place.



Unhook and remove the pendulum



One of the screws holding the movement to the back.

Cleaning the case.

Using a kitchen scourer and a mild solution of warm water and washing up liquid, clean the surface of the clock. An old scourer will be best, as new scourers can be too coarse and may scratch the surface. The sponge side of the scourer is normally too gentle to remove the grime and polish. Keep the scourer wet at all times and **under no circumstances immerse the case in water**. These clocks are made with panels of stone held together with a white plaster and wires. **If the plaster gets damp, the case will probably fall apart or the top or sides may loosen.**



Washing with soap and a damp sponge

Never place the case in a tray while washing it as the water level will build up and loosen the joints of the case. Place it on a rack of some sort, or a ribbed kitchen drainer which will allow surplus water to run away.

Clean the clock case thoroughly, especially any areas of inlaid marble.

Don't attempt to clean any gilded engravings. There may be some recoverable gilding beneath the grime, so leave these lines alone.

Keep cleaning the clock until you are sure you have removed all grime, old polish etc. from the surface.

Immediately wipe all surfaces dry with an old cloth or paper towel and leave the case in a warm airy place to dry out. Dampness can loosen the joints of these clocks, so never leave the case damp for long periods.



Blotchy grey bare surface

Protecting the inlaid areas

When the case has thoroughly dried out, the surface may look dull and grey.

Some areas may be better than others, depending on the quality of the material and age of the clock.

Before applying Marblack, we need to protect any inlaid areas. Do this by carefully applying two coats of good beeswax furniture polish to the inlay. You must use an old fashioned wax, not a modern spray polish. Sprays are often water based silicone emulsions, in some ways similar to Marblack, and will provide no protection against the strong black pigments.



Wax the inlay carefully

Avoid getting any wax on the black areas.

Allow the coats to dry thoroughly

There is no need to buff the waxed parts, and doing this would probably spread the wax over black parts, which you do not want.

Applying Marblack

Now apply Marblack using a cloth and disposable gloves. Marblack is not harmful to the skin, but it can be hard to remove, and the black pigment has a tendency to spread from fingers to garments, and anything you subsequently touch.

Rub the Marblack liberally into the surface using a rag, carefully avoiding the



First coat in a circular motion

waxed inlays. Rub it in thoroughly, using a circular motion, to ensure some soaks into the surfaces.

Using an artist's paintbrush, make sure some Marblack runs into the cracks in the joints. This will run into the white plaster that holds the case together.



Run Marblack into the joints with a brush



Brush parts you cannot reach with a rag.

Avoid touching the inlays with Marblack, and where necessary use an artist's paintbrush to make sharp lines where the inlay meets the case.

When the Marblack has dried thoroughly (and overnight is best) apply a second coat. This time apply sparingly, and try to even out the surface. Wipe the sides in straight lines from front to back. Wipe the top from side to side etc. This thin coat will make a more even finish.

Allow to dry thoroughly.

Apply a coat of wax polish

When the Marblack has dried, buff it with a duster to check that the basic finish is even, and you have not missed any areas. Apply another thin coat as before if necessary.

Now apply two coats of good wax polish to the black areas. Avoid the inlays, because some black pigment is sure to come off the surface onto the rag and will spread. Avoid turning the rag, as this will limit the amount of pigment that comes back off.

Leave the wax polish to dry for as long as possible - overnight if convenient.

Polish the case

Now buff up the wax coating with a soft duster. You should find that although a little Marblack comes away, the majority will be sealed beneath the wax, and the case should have a good black shine to it.

You can polish the whole clock, including the inlays.

Don't be too heavy handed with these cases - they are not held together with modern adhesives, and the top can come away suddenly. **Never lift these clocks by the top.** Hold them like a baby!

At this stage any engravings will still be full of grime, marblack and polish.

Gilded engravings

In order to brighten up these sombre cases, the makers used to engrave and gild floral patters on the fronts. Over the years polish and grime will have filled the engravings, but there is a 50:50 chance that the gilding will still be intact beneath the grime.

Using a small clock pin in a pinvice, or even just a paperclip end, gently remove the grime in the lines. Do this carefully, avoiding scratching the main surface. You may reveal enough gilding to give an aged but satisfactory look. If insufficient has survived (as in these photos), you will need to re-gild the engravings.

Start by using the pin or paperclip to thoroughly clean the grooves etc. The deeper and cleaner you can



Second coat, in lines.



Some Marblack is bound to lift off onto the polishing rag.



Only a few areas of gilding remained when cleaned out

make them the easier they will be to work with.

To gild the lines, use a fine gilt lacquer such as Liberon's Chantilly. When they are all thoroughly clean, use the clock pin or paperclip end to apply a single drop to the larger parts such as circles etc. Start with hardly any lacquer on the pin. You will find with a little practice that you can apply a drop which will fill the circles etc. If you apply too much, gently remove the surplus with a cotton bud, but don't try too hard to remove all traces. You can do that later.

Use the pin to spread the lacquer wherever you can, but for the fine lines you will need a brush. Any cheap artist's brush will do, but generally it will have too many bristles for your purposes. With sharp scissors cut off some of the bristles, leaving a brush with just a few hairs. Carefully draw the bristles along the lines, to fill the grooves with lacquer.

If you haven't made a perfect job of this, don't worry. We can tidy it up later. If you waxed the clock well, the lacquer is not going to want to adhere to the black areas.

Leave the lacquer at least 4 hours to dry. If you have accidental surplus you need to remove, leave it longer.

To remove any surplus gilding, you will need some '0000' gauge wire wool. This wool is so fine it is used by cabinet makers to polish wood. Impregnate a small pad of 0000 wire wool with some wax polish. Gently rub over the gilded areas and it will lift off any surplus, leaving the inlaid gilding untouched.

Now buff up the whole clock case with a soft cloth and admire the result.

The bezel

Like any other restoration project, you will almost certainly find that when the case has been restored, the tarnished bezel and back may 'let the side down'.

To clean the bezel and its surround takes only a few minutes, and if you have a mechanical aptitude you can easily remove it from the movement, polish and refit it. However, if you are worried about damaging the delicate movement, take it to a specialist.

Around the outer edge of the bezel there will be a variety of screws. Two of them may hold the movement straps that held the clock in the case, and there may be more. Carefully remove these screws and withdraw the movement from the bezel and glass. Make a mental note of which holes lined up with which.

Do not touch or remove any tapered clock pins. These will be holding the clock together and you can hurt yourself and damage the clock by removing them if you do not know what you are doing.

When you have removed the screws, the movement should come away from the bezel. Using brass polish, or better still using a clockmakers cleaning fluid such as Horolene, clean the bezel. A light coat of clockmaker's lacquer will help prevent it from tarnishing later.

This is a good time to give the dial a wipe with a cotton wool pad moistened with some mild soapy water. Reassemble.



Apply a drop to each circle with a pin or paperclip



Using a brush with only a few hairs, draw the gilt varnish along the lines



The outer screws that hold the bezel



Don't touch the pins

The back

The back is often very tarnished and the silk that lined the inside may be shabby or missing. The door normally has perforations to allow the sound of the bell to come out, and to prevent dust from entering a thin piece of silk was stuck inside.

Clean the back using Horolene or brass polish. Before you polish vigorously, check that you won't remove some of the repairer's and retailer's notes scribed on the back. Lacquer with clockmaker's lacquer to help prevent it tarnishing.

Using a school compass, draw a circle on a piece of card and check that it fits comfortably inside the back. Now place the card on some thin silk material and using very sharp scissors cut out a circle of fabric.

Put some small spots of Copydex type upholstery glue on the inside of the back, and then place the fabric in position. The glue will spread when you place the fabric in position, so keep it away from the edge of the holes.

Press the fabric into position and allow to dry. Most upholsterers' glues dry clear, so don't worry if you can see some white glue from the outside.

Assembly

Reassemble the clock by fitting the movement back into the bezel and replacing the edge screws. Some clocks have a timekeeping adjuster protruding through the dial. Don't push hard, as the dial is probably enamel and can easily chip or crack.

Carefully fit it back into the case and secure the movement to the back. Make sure the figure 12 is at the top, but do not fully tighten the screws in the back. Don't refit the pendulum until the clock is back in its permanent position.

Setting in beat

With the pendulum refitted, wind the springs if necessary and start the clock. Check that the intervals between the ticks is equal. If not, you can rotate the whole movement very slightly until the ticks are even. Now tighten the screws on the back.

Health & Safety

Marblack is an environmentally friendly product. It has no known hazardous characteristics, and is water soluble. It is not inflammable.

Wear protective gloves in case of allergy and to avoid temporarily staining the skin. In case of contact with the skin, wash with warm soapy water.

Marblack contains Carbon Black, Silicone and surfactants. In the event of swallowing or eye contact, seek medical advice and show this page to your doctor.

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The back before cleaning



Spots of glue to hold the fabric



Press the fabric into position



The finished back