

Edinburgh Late Victorian Stone built mansion, Encaustic & Geometric Restoration.

The client Gavin & Lynne Neilson had a hell of a job restoring this Edinburgh townhouse a Grade B listed building the floor had been covered in cement based levelling screed and during renovation work some brick acid had been spilt which etched through showing the tiled floor underneath.

The previous owners had been a Scottish bank group that had cut through in two areas to provide electrical ducting and central heating pipes, this had happened before it became a criminal offence to do such damage to listed buildings.

My guess the floor had been covered with a levelling compound and then carpeted.

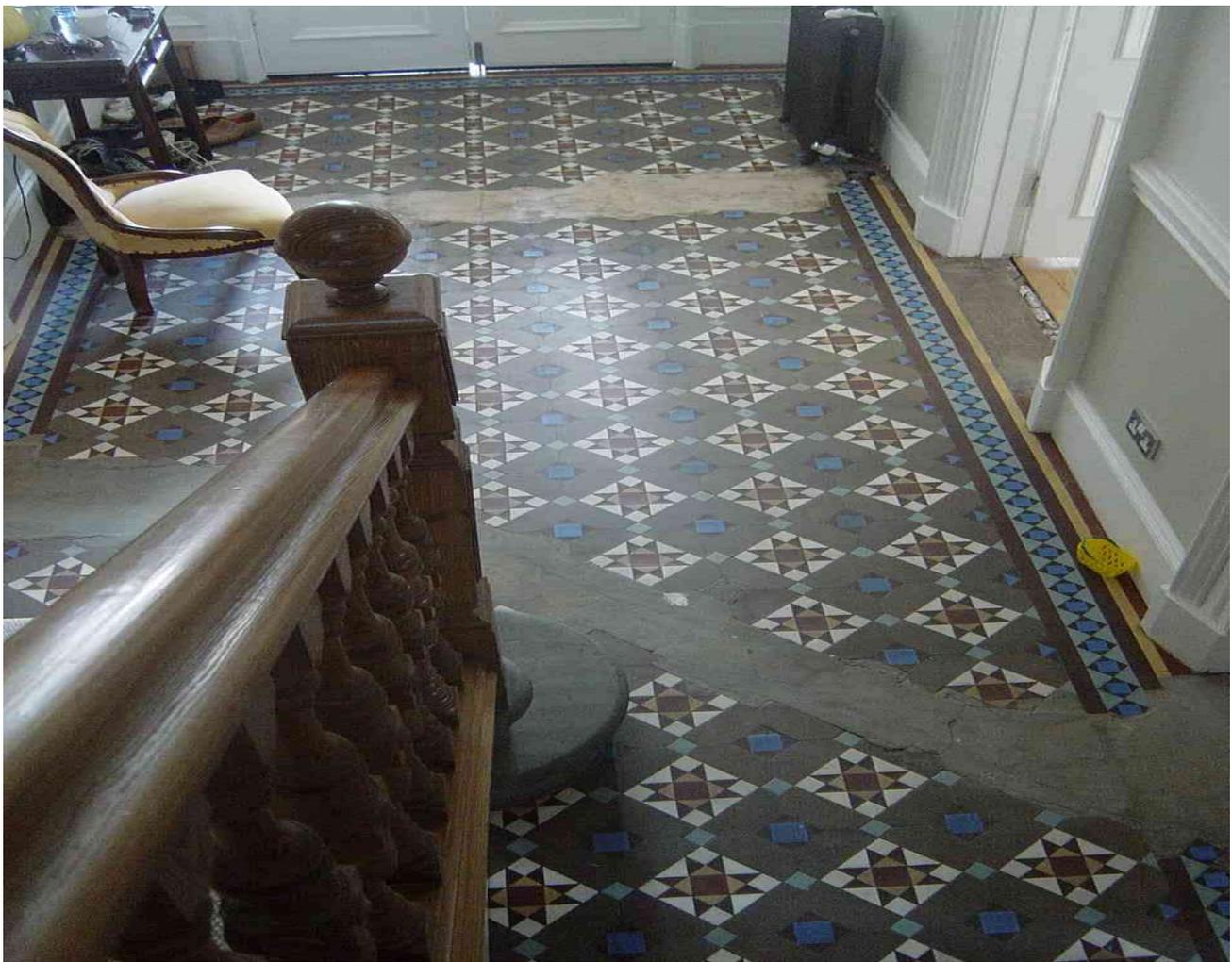


Floor showing grey levelling compound.

The house had stood empty for a good number of years & the clients had to undertake a massive amount of work to bring it back to be a family home, A new roof, new services & a damp-proof course removal of trees which had encroached.

Removal of a 1960's style canteen to name a few, the clients had removed the levelling compound which came up without damage to the underlying geometric tiled floor, the porch floor is made up of encaustic tiles as well as geometric tiles.

P2.



GN floor showing trench infill & missing thresholds.



Close up of the damaged caused by the in-fill trench.
P3.

this is typical damage sustained by Victorian tiled floors all over the UK in the scramble to provide central heating from the 1960's onwards until people came to their senses then it was commonly accepted that these beautiful floor's would be sacrificed to facilitate runs of copper piping, possibly in some cases the plumber/gas-fitter may have had some conscience and fitted the pipes in a manner that didn't mean chopping the floor up! However we as a restoration co obviously do not see those floors.



Showing the trench nearest the porch door re-tiled.

The first important step is the removal of the concrete in-fill and as is often the case this is a laborious process as taking out the in-fill can cause other sections of the tiles to jar loose.

However we are able to limit this problem by the use of Exakt saws (a Scottish invention) we use these precise cutting saws with a diamond blade to remove damaged tiles and to cut a perimeter line around the trenched areas.

This line cuts into the screed and prevents the percussion from the hammer & chisel causing any tiles to jump loose.

P4.

The original Victorian tiles are beaten into a slurry bed over a previously laid deeper screed which is allowed to cure slightly = still green, however this method and the very fine joints mean that in the past taking up even one tile carefully could cause clusters of tiles both near the intended tiles to be lifted and much further away to lift from the floor.

The use of specialised tools such as the Exakt saw have been invaluable to our restoration work and we would not be without them, we also use Fein Super Cut usually the rasp attachments = the triangular rasp & the finger rasps. We use some of the other diamond attachments as well and the wood cut attachments are handy to undercut at the bottom of architraves etc.

Another handy tool is the Arbortech chisel designed for use on wood this is a handy tool to get into awkward sections that a hammer & chisel can't be swung.

This particular infill was extremely hard and burnt two diamond blades out plus we had to cut in tandem as the concrete had been mixed with granite chippings (a common addition to the screeds in parts of Scotland) which meant the saws heated up quickly given the granite is only a 1.5 below diamond on the Mohs scale.

After the in-fill had been removed a glass fibre rich screed was used to fill to fill the trenches back up to a level that was low enough to use a latex self-leveller to provide the final base for the new & re-claimed tiles to be fitted, the final screed finished just below the bed of the in-situ original tiles this is to allow for a bed of flexible adhesive to fix the replacement tiles.

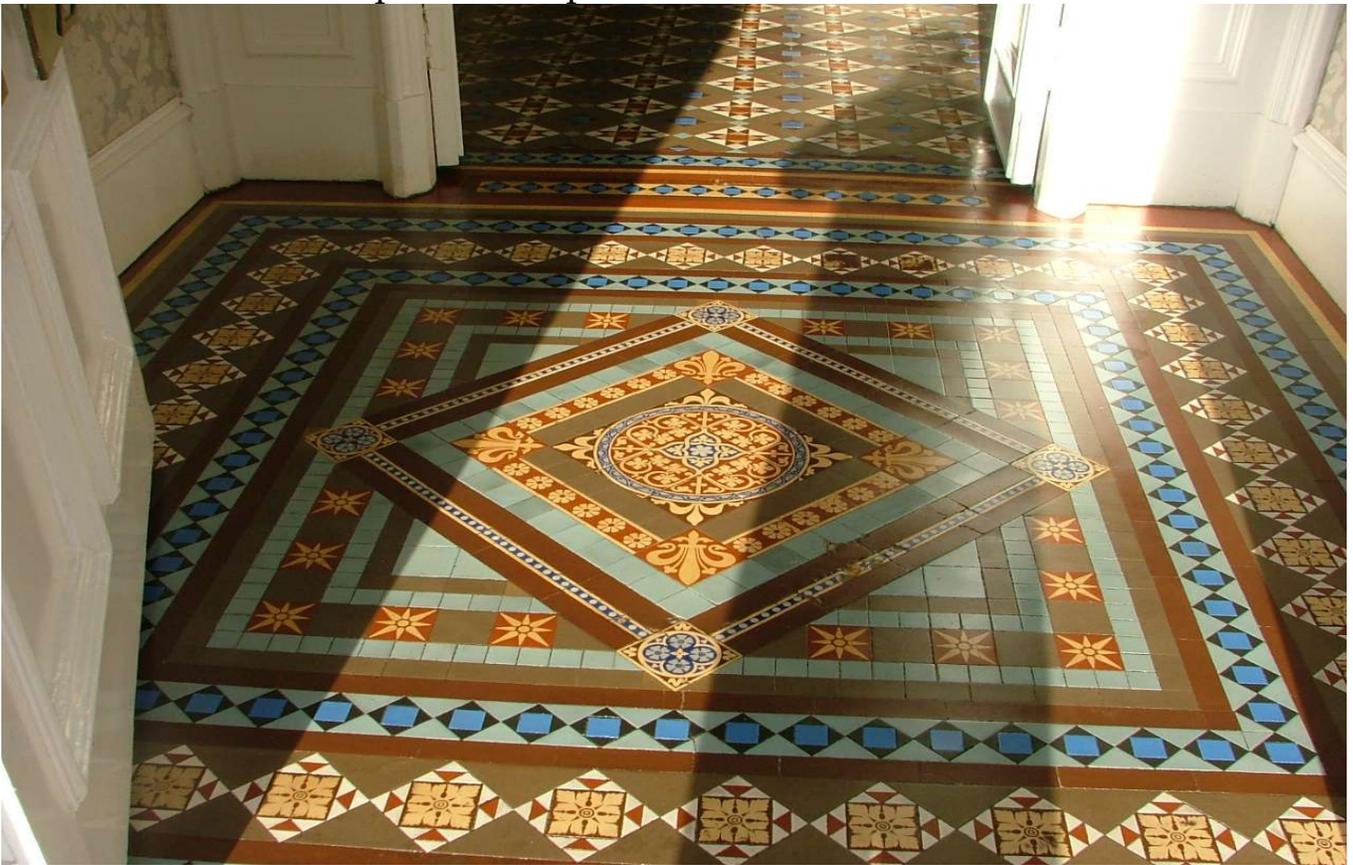
The replacement tiles came from our stock of collected tiles we also used new tiles obtained from Craven Dunnill the only manufacturer that produces square finish tiles suitable for tile restoration.

New patterns were cut for the missing threshold tiles and after all the missing or loose tiles were fixed replaced the whole floor was cleaned with a low 200 rpm scrubbing machine fitted with a black pad, the floor was cleaned 6 times with various cleaning fluids.

It was then sealed two days later with a sealer from British Nova.



GN detailed encaustic porch floor prior to restoration.



GN elaborate Victorian tiled porch floor restored.

P6.



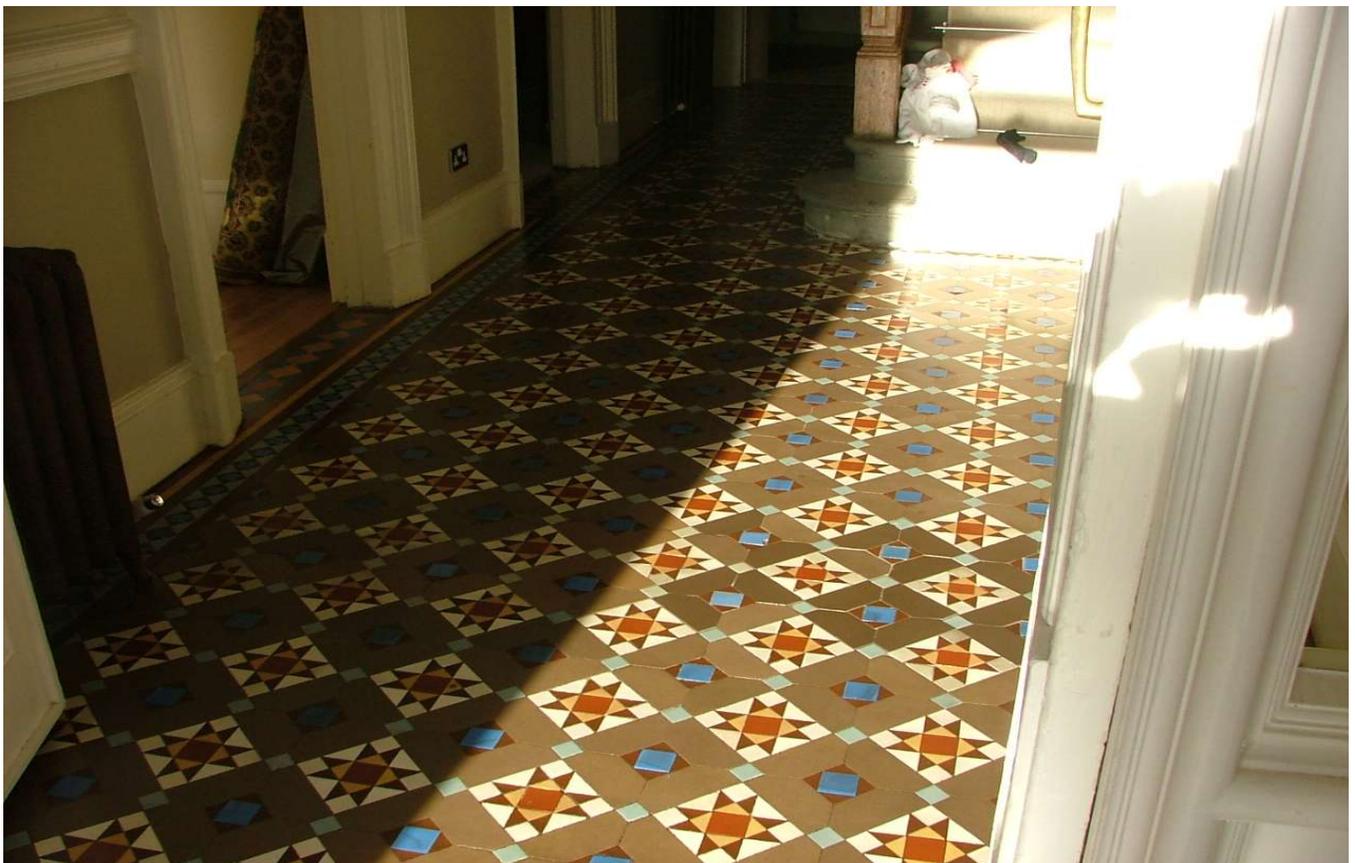
GN side of stairs before restoration.



GN side of stairs restored.

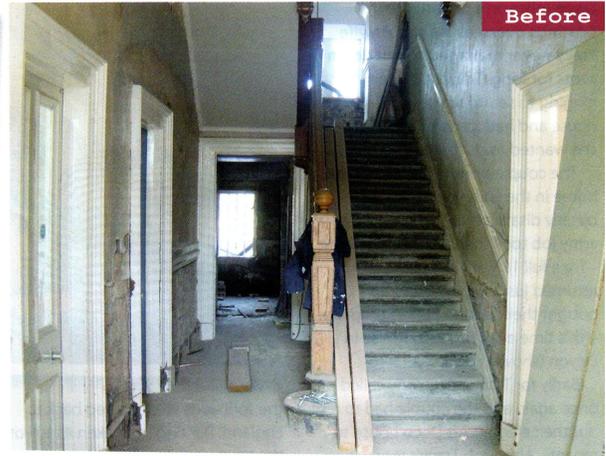


GN floor before restoration.



GN Floor restored.

Gavin and Lynne's story 'Acid spilled on our concrete hall floor revealed a Victorian tile mosaic'



Before

A renovation accident led to a surprise architectural discovery at Gavin and Lynne Neilson's Scottish home.

It's a tale to turn many renovators green with envy – how a chance spill led to the discovery of a stunning Victorian mosaic floor, which lay hidden under a layer of concrete for years. 'Acid dropped onto the concrete floor while we were working in the hall and burnt right through the screed,' says Gavin. Through the hole the couple could just spy the tiled floor. They removed the screed – a painstaking job in itself – then discovered two concrete channels running through their lovely floor.

Luckily, Steve Sinnott of Heritage Tiling was able to patch it up. 'He owns a huge amount of reclaimed tiles,' says Lynne, 'so he matched up as best he could from his stock and finished the rest with modern tiles.'

The Victorian townhouse had stood empty for three years before Gavin and Lynne took possession. A monumental amount of work was required before it became a home. Its last owner, a Scottish bank, used the building as a training centre, but when

the company departed, the lovely property fell into disrepair. 'It needed a replacement roof, new services, a damp-proof course, and a 1960s canteen removed. And trees were growing through the cornicing!' remembers Gavin. 'The estate agent told us hundreds of people had come to view the place, but it seemed that nobody could face doing the work.'

Gavin works in London so it was left to Lynne to manage things while he offered advice from the end of a phone. No easy task on a renovation of this scale. 'One weekend we had 20 contractors in at the same time,' says Lynne.

As with the majority of renovations, work soon fell behind schedule, but the couple remained pragmatic. 'I'm a management consultant and I always preach that you can only have one imperative at a time,' says Gavin. 'When we first started out that imperative was cost, but as we fell behind it switched to time. You can't do something cheaply when you're trying to do it quickly, so don't ask me how much over budget we went. But, yes, it's all been well worth it.'



After

ABOVE Geometric tiles are usually unglazed, with straight-edged shapes, such as triangles and lozenges, in natural clay colours ranging from off-white through to red brown to a blue-black TOP The house still has one exciting question left: what other gems are hidden just waiting to be discovered?



EXPERT TIPS FOR RESTORING A TILED FLOOR

- 1. How easy or difficult the job will be depends on the type of floor tile required.** The most common is the geometric tile, made from dust-pressed clay with dye added for colour – for example cobalt for blue. The colour runs through the entire depth of the tile. An encaustic tile has a design incised into the face; this is filled with liquid clays in different colours, which are revealed when the tile is fired.
- 2. If you discover a floor in need of restoration, consult your conservation officer, who may be able to suggest a suitable restoration company.** There aren't many specialists, so the work could take time.

- 3. The floor could be ruined if you don't hire a specialist.** Always ask for references and 'before' and 'after' photographs. Hire a company that owns a collection of old tiles but note that restoration consists of mixing old and new tiles.
- 4. Clean the floor thoroughly and use a suitable seal.** It doesn't have to have a royal seal but Heritage Tiling uses a water-based seal used at Buckingham Palace.
- 5. Ask your floor specialist for cleaning tips.** Don't use a detergent-based cleaner on old tiles.
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To Whom It May Concern:

I write with reference to Mr Steve Sinnott, who undertook the restoration of the Victorian mosaic floor tiling in our vestibule and hallway.

Mr Sinnott was recommended to us by local architectural salvage dealers and following telephone discussions and email communication, Mr Sinnott and his team came to our home in October of this year. They undertook the digging out of two large concrete channels running across our hallway, levelled the floor and laid down matching tiles.

The entire floor was also cleaned and later sealed. The end result is fantastic – Mr Sinnott has achieved an excellent match in colour and pattern and we are absolutely delighted with it.

Mr Sinnott was most reliable. He arrived at the pre-arranged times and his attention to detail in carrying out the work was second to none. We were particularly pleased with the renovations carried out on the threshold areas – being transformed from rubble which we were careful to step over, to beautiful patterned and even areas that we can now glide over! Mr Sinnott used a selection of tiles to achieve the best match, many of which had to be hand cut to fit the imperial sizes of the intricate pattern.

I have no hesitation in recommending Mr Sinnott as a superb craftsman and take the opportunity to thank him once again for doing such an excellent job

Yours sincerely

Lynne Neilson