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## Restoring early electrical appliances

### General points

Restoring old electrical gadgets falls somewhere between car maintenance and model engineering, involving the grime and effort of the former and the precision and care of the latter.

Some appliances are found in immaculate condition, complete with accessories, packaging, receipt and leaflet; these are a prize and always worth buying – they have lasted in this state for several decades, now you have the opportunity to make sure this continues. Always leave these untouched, save perhaps for a wipe over with a clean, dry, soft duster.

Other products have to be weighed up on-the-spot to see whether they are worth buying or not. Don't be put off by dull metals, dirt and grime, this leaflet tells you how to remove all that. A small appliance, such as an iron or toaster, that is badly corroded is often not worth the effort as you may have to live with a disfigured appearance. A product with a major external component missing, such as the original bag on an upright vacuum cleaner, is also cause to think again, unless it is extremely rare and you know you will never see another again! Think twice about products that have obviously been repainted by a past owner – removing the paint, if at all possible, may permanently mar the original surface underneath, if the paint has not already done so.

The chief point to remember about early electrical appliances is that, apart from the odd exception, they will have taken some heavy use over several decades. This means that some components may be frail and on the verge of breaking. Take care at all times and avoid brute force in dismantling. Rusted or seized parts should be left soaking in easing oil before force is applied.

Appliances that have electric motors, especially vacuum cleaners, stand a good chance of still being in good running order, owing to the high standard of build and the fact that they may well have been regularly serviced over the years (unlike modern appliances). If this is the case, it is best to leave the motor alone. Only attempt to repair a non-functioning electric motor if you really know what

you are doing or have some comprehensive instructions.

Appliances that contain a heating element (hair dryers, irons, toasters, heaters) are less likely to be working as the element is often the most fragile part of the object and therefore the first to break. Spare parts for almost all early appliances are an impossibility; usually some kind of make-do-and-mend is inevitable.

Above all, it is important to keep an appliance as close to its original appearance as possible. If possible, remove replacement modern plastic flex and wire on some early rubber, cotton-bound flex and a period plug.

If you are going to use an appliance or want to test it out, make sure that the metal components are properly earthed. You may need to obtain some technical advice on this. If you simply *must* try an appliance after purchase, check the wiring and the plug first, plug in and switch on and off from the socket, not the appliance – and stand well back!

For other materials not mentioned in this book, such as wood and precious metals, refer to a household manual or antiques restoration guide. For further information on plastics, the title *Early Plastics* by Sylvia Katz (published by Shire) is excellent.

The restoration methods and materials recommended in this leaflet are based on 15 years of restoring early electrical appliances. The author can accept no liability for any damage on the basis of following these instructions. If in any doubt about a cleaning/polishing product, experiment on a small, unseen area first and always follow the manufacturers instructions.

Restoring yesterday's discarded appliances is immensely rewarding, as you are able to peel back the years of decay to see the original product gleaming underneath as on the day it left the factory.

Have fun!



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## Restoring early electrical appliances

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# vacuum cleaners

## General points

Vacuum cleaners are usually found in a quite disgusting state, as decades of housework have taken their toll. The beauty of these old machines is, however, that even the worst example can be restored to a magnificent condition and this really is worth the effort. Allow at least a whole day or several evenings. Take some general and detail photographs of your machine before you start: these are useful when reassembling as well as for comparison 'before and after'.

- Strip the machine down to individual components, as far as you are able.
- Don't dismantle the motor, unless you have experience with electric motors.
- The golden rule is to label **everything**. Push every screw through a sheet of card and write next to it where it comes from. Some projects have to be spread over a long period and memories can be short: never presume that you will be able to remember where everything goes.

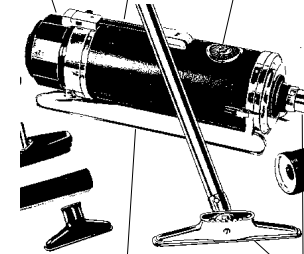
## Leather

- If any stitching has split, get this repaired at a good shoe repair shop or try it yourself with the proper needle and thread.
- If the leather is very dry, polish with a leather-enriching cream.
- If the leather is simply dirty, wipe over with warm soapy water and polish with the appropriate colour of *Kiwi* shoe polish.
- Buff with a soft shoe brush.

## Leatherette

- Carefully remove as many components as possible (watch for bolts through to motor compartment – they may be difficult to get back).
- Repair rips and tears where possible with any household adhesive (*UHU* is ideal).
- Wipe over with warm soapy water.
- Dry off with a soft towel as soon as possible.
- Polish with a little *Kiwi* neutral colour shoe polish (block) on a soft duster and then buff to shine.

**Bakelite**  
See hair dryers



**Bakelite**  
See hair dryers

**Nickel-plated steel**  
See irons

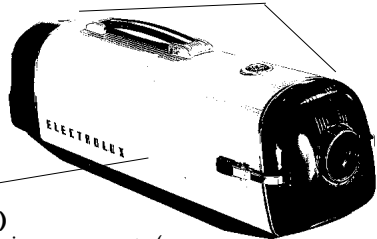
**Polished, cast aluminium**  
See upright cleaners

## Cotton-bound hose

- If very worn, can be difficult to repair without serious disfiguring (e.g. using insulation tape).
- Stray threads can be trimmed with scissors.
- Brush down outside with a stiff hand brush.
- Connect one end to the hose of a modern cleaner to remove loose dust, etc.

## Vinyl (PVC)

After removing components (see above), scrub/wipe with warm soapy water and dry off with a soft towel. Cannot be polished – has its own natural sheen.



# vacuum cleaners

## Polished aluminium casting

Contrary to opinion, these corrode on the surface and a 60-year-old casting may be, at best, dull or matt and at worst can be very weathered and pitted. The large alloy castings on early vacuum cleaners take a lot of work and elbow grease. A powered buffing machine is an advantage at the later stages.

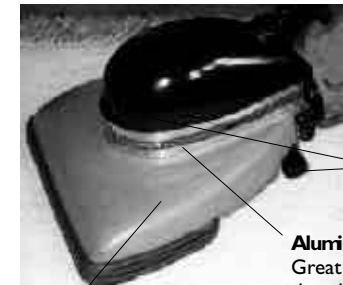
- Give all the dismembered castings a good wash and scrub in hot, soapy water. Use a coarse cloth and a toothbrush to clean out inaccessible crevices. Never use scourers or immerse the motor in water.
- Rinse off the soapy water with clear water.
- Dry with a soft towel and leave in a warm place to thoroughly dry off. Leave in the airing cupboard overnight or in a warm oven for a few minutes. A hair dryer is useful for drying out awkward crevices.
- If your castings are really green and pitted, start off with wet-and-dry sandpaper, 1000-grade. Using the paper wet is quicker, but more messy. Keep sanding until the surface of the casting is smooth and pit-free.
- The next stage, or if your castings are just dull and matt, is to use *Autosol* chrome cleaner. Work in sections, working the cream until it turns black, when it reaches maximum effectiveness. Keep polishing until the blackened cream has disappeared and then buff over with a separate cloth. You may need to do this two or three times before a mirror-like shine appears. Try using *Brasso* (liquid) at the later stages.
- Wipe the castings over with methylated spirit or surgical spirit to remove all trace of the polish.



**Nickel-plated steel**  
See irons

## Rubber

- Wipe over with warm soapy water.
- Dry off with a soft towel as soon as possible.
- Polish with a little *Kiwi* shoe polish (block) in the appropriate colour on a soft duster and then buff to shine.



**Bakelite**  
See hair dryers

## Aluminium strip with graphics

Great care is required here in polishing so that the print is not worn away. Use *Goddards* silver polish with a cotton bud and then finally buff over with a soft duster.

## Stove-enamelling Hammerite finish Aluminium-paint

These are a lot less hard work than earlier polished aluminium castings. Follow the procedure for aluminium castings for the first three points.

- For textured stove-enamelling, polish with neutral shoe polish *Kiwi* (block) and buff with a clean duster or soft, clean shoe brush.
- For smooth stove-enamelling/Hammerite/metal paint, polish gently with a very small amount of *Brasso* (liquid) and then buff with a clean duster.

## Cloth dust bag

A really nasty job, but essential unless you want to keep decades-old decomposing house-dust. Wear overalls or old clothes! Never hand-wash old cleaner bags or put them in the washing machine.

- Seal off the orifice that fits on to the exhaust of the cleaner, hold the bag upside-down and shake the bag contents down to the top clip.
- Slide off clip: this may be rusted on so ease off carefully with a blunt knife or screw driver.
- Empty bag contents outdoors into a dust bin.
- Whilst outdoors, carefully turn the bag inside-out. Take care with graphics printed on the bag. This is a fiddly and messy operation.
- Brush off loose dust into the dustbin.
- Using the small upholstery nozzle of a vacuum cleaner, vacuum the inside of the bag until it is dust-free. This is easier when the bag is laid on a flat surface, cleaning each side at a time.
- Turn the bag the right way round and again vacuum the outside of the bag.
- If your cleaner is working, switch it on with the bag in place and brush over with a soft floor brush.

## hair dryers and razors

### General points

- These are easier to dismantle, but make a note how the internal components are arranged
- watch for the position of internal wiring, proximity to fan, motor, heat element, etc.
- label small components
- watch varying screw lengths through the casing
- wipe carbon dust and grease from inside before cleaning
- Razors: a soft toothbrush dipped in methylated spirit is excellent for cleaning the cutting head.



**Chromium/nickel-plated steel**  
See toasters

**Painted wood**  
See irons



### Bakelite

Trade name for thermoset plastic/phenol formaldehyde/urea formaldehyde. Early plastics can be brittle, so take care and don't over tighten screws.

- Wash separated mouldings in warm soapy water, using a soft toothbrush and dishcloth to clean out all the crevices.
- Rinse in clear water.
- Dry with soft towel.
- Polish with a clean dry duster
- For an extra shine, polish with a little shoe polish (*Kiwi* block - use the correct colour, or neutral) and buff thoroughly.
- Use a soft toothbrush to work polish into detailed areas
- Use a soft shoe brush to lightly buff detailed areas.



## kettles and small cooking appliances

### Bakelite

See hair dryers

### Painted wood

See irons



**Nickel/chromium-plated steel**  
See toasters

### Copper

Polishing with *Brasso* (liquid) always gives the best results

### Stove-enamelled steel sheet

- Wipe over with warm soapy water and dry thoroughly with a soft towel. Leave in a warm place to dry off.
- Buffing over with a soft duster is usually enough, but try a very small amount of *Kiwi* shoe polish before a final buff.



### Cast iron

- If rusty, brush off the loose rust with steel wool, a *Brillo* pad or stiff nylon suede brush (depending on severity).
- Wipe over with turps or white spirit
- Spray on or paint on *Waxoyl* to protect.
- If a black appearance is required, use *Zebco* (cream) and follow the instructions.

### Vitreous-enamelled steel

- Wipe over with warm soapy water and dry thoroughly with a soft towel. Leave in a warm place to dry off.
- Buffing over with a soft duster is usually enough, but try a very small amount of *Brasso* (liquid) before a final buff.

## irons

### General points

Standard, non-automatic irons are probably the easiest of all appliances to repair because all the components disassemble in a logical order. This is usually worth doing because the iron weight inside will be quite rusty. Even so, remember to label small parts. Unscrewing the top two nuts gives access to the internal components. Use easing oil if they are rusted rather than damage them by force.

Later, automatic irons are trickier to take apart and there is greater variation between makes.

### Bakelite

See hair dryers

### Chromium/nickel-plated steel

See toasters

### Chromium/nickel-plated cast iron

See toasters

### Painted wood

- Wipe over with warm soapy water and dry.
- Don't repaint unless very little of the original paint is left: instead, try polishing with a little *Kiwi* shoe polish (in the appropriate colour). This minimises the effect of the worn areas.

### Brass

Polish with *Brasso* (liquid) using a clean duster. This may take some effort, so be careful not to polish away the information on the plate

### Cast iron (inside)

See small cooking appliances

### Bakelite

See hair dryers

### Chromium-plated steel

See toasters

### Chromium-plated steel

See toasters

### Vitreous-enamelled steel/porcelain

See small cooking appliances

### Polished aluminium casting

See vacuum cleaners



## toasters

### General points

These are often found in bad condition with rotting breadcrumbs creating pockets of rust around the base. This can all be cleaned out with a combination of (depending on severity) small screw driver or small blunt knife for loosening, a half-inch paint brush, a stiff toothbrush or nylon suede brush and the crevice attachment connected to a vacuum cleaner. Once the loose rust is removed, touch up with *Waxoyl*.

Dismantling of turn-over toasters is not advised due to their folded steel construction. It is also generally unnecessary as all the components are easy to get at. The bases of early pop-up toasters can be unscrewed for cleaning.

Oil all hinges and springs with thin household lubricant (e.g. *3-in-1*)



### Chromium/nickel-plated steel

Appliances from about 1935 may be either chromium or nickel-plated; before that they are usually nickel-plated only. Chromium plate is thinner, but has a brighter, cleaner appearance, whereas nickel plate is slightly yellow and duller. The cleaning procedure for either is similar.

If your appliance has a lot of rust showing through the chromium plate, you have several options.

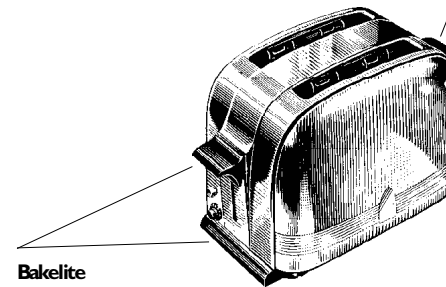
- Get it re-chromed professionally (not advised)
- Touch up with an enamel/cellulose metal paint (only advised for small, discreet areas)
- Live with it!
- Wait until you see a better version of the appliance.

Tiny pinprick marks of corrosion disappear when the chrome is polished.

If the chromium plate is in mint condition, just wipe over with a clean, soft duster. If not, use the following procedure.

- Wipe of the worst dirt and dust with a warm, soapy cloth.
- Dry immediately with a soft towel.
- If, at this stage the chromium plate just needs buffing up, use *Solvol Autochrome* liquid chromium polish, which is gentle and effective. Follow the instructions on the tin.
- If the chromium-plate needs more work, use a little of either *Brasso* (liquid) or *Autosol* chrome cleaner (cream) and follow the instructions.
- Wipe over with methylated spirit to clean off polish marks.

**Note**: smaller chrome-plated objects can be soaked overnight in a water with a little bicarbonate of soda.



### Bakelite

See hair dryers