

- Why Floors are Important
- Maintaining Historic Floors
- Repairing Historic Floors
- Making Changes to Historic Floors

The floor of a church building plays an important role in providing the background to its character. Keeping it clean and well maintained will ensure that it is safe to use for a long time. Sometimes however large repairs are needed.

Download our guidance



Tom Jones

Why Floors are Important

The floor of a church building plays an important role in providing the background to its character. It contributes to the overall appearance of the building. Some medieval churches may still have their original floor, but later floors may also be interesting and attractive additions that are worth keeping and are often a fundamental element in the overall architectural design.

Historic repairs to an existing floor can contribute to the floors interest and importance. With older floors the surface may have developed an attractive patina that speaks of the age of the building and cannot be replicated. Where floors are of considerable age they will have archaeological value, which needs to be fully understood.

Some floors contain ledger stones, memorials, and brasses, that need to be retained and protected. For more information see our detailed guidance on [monuments](#) and [brasses](#).

For a more detailed explanation of why floors are important see our [guidance note](#) on historic floors, written in conjunction with the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings ([SPAB](#)).

[Back to top](#)

Maintaining Historic Floors

The key to caring for your church floor in the most appropriate way is to first gain an understanding of its importance and its construction. Proper maintenance of historic church floors is essential and may avoid or reverse the need for replacement. In most cases a minimal maintenance regime consisting of regular (but not frequent) brushing is best. Household soaps, alkaline cleaners, bleach and abrasives will cause harm to historic surfaces and must be avoided. Our [guidance note](#) on historic floors provides detailed advice on the correct maintenance methods for different types of historic flooring including natural stone, marble, tiled, and brick floors.

[Back to top](#)

Repairing Historic Floors

Historic floors can make a major contribution to the significance of a historic building so the first step before contemplating any change to a church floor should be to understand the importance of the floor.

In many cases sensitive repair will be sufficient to ensure that the floor is safe and useable in the long term and is retained as part of the essential character of the building. If repairs are needed, it is important to establish the cause of the damage to avoid repeated decay and loss of original fabric. You should always consult your professional adviser about any suspected damage as they can best determine the cause and extent of the damage and advise you on suitable repair methods.

It is usually better to accept defects in a floor rather than disturb it as they speak of the buildings age and construction. Cracks can be repaired with a soft lime mortar where necessary. Introducing dense mortar pointing between flagstones or bricks where there has been none previously is not recommended as it may lead to the build-up of damp. Voids can often be filled with dry sands/aggregate or a weak lime-based grout.

If new flags, tiles or bricks are required to fill in gaps and are thought to be necessary, the replacements should be plain, of the same material and of similar density and porosity to the existing.

In some cases, there may be no alternative but to lift and re-lay an historic floor, though this should be the last option as the potential for damage to the floor surface and potential archaeological deposits is high. Great care is necessary as lifting slabs can cause them to crack and the pressure on adjacent slabs may cause them to fracture.

Detailed advice on the repair of historic floors can be found in the Historic Floors [guidance note](#).

[Back to top](#)

Making Changes to Historic Floors

Replacing the entire floor of a church is a major undertaking and will have a considerable impact on the fabric of the building as well as its special architectural or historic interest. Careful thought and attention should be given to the design and appearance of the new floor finishes as they can become the focal point of the building, affecting its character in a negative way.

Before any changes are made you will need to assess the significance of the floor using a [statement of significance](#). The first step in doing this is to investigate, analyse and record the existing situation. The Historic Floors [guidance note](#) lists the key questions that you should ask when doing this. Once you have uncovered all the available information about the floor an assessment needs to be made of its significance within the wider context of the church building. Assessing significance is not an easy task but the Historic Floors guidance note contains a list of headings to help you. Finally, you will need to set out the reasons why change is needed in a statement of needs. The replacement of an historic floor for purely aesthetic reasons is unlikely to be acceptable.

If a convincing argument can be made for a new floor then the specification in terms of the layout, materials and detailing needs to be carefully considered. The issue of replacing a floor often overlaps with the decision to make changes to the building services and especially the introduction of [underfloor heating systems](#).

If you are considering making changes to the floor of your church it is important to talk to your [DAC Secretary](#) early in the process. Works to historic floors will frequently have an impact on below ground [archaeology](#) and may impact [buried remains](#). When making changes to a historic floor it is important to consider issues associated with [accessibility](#) and to seek to improve accessibility wherever possible.

Also of interest

Making changes to your building

[Find out how to manage a building project](#)

Grants

See if you fit our eligibility

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/historic-floors>