

CLEANING YOUR METALS

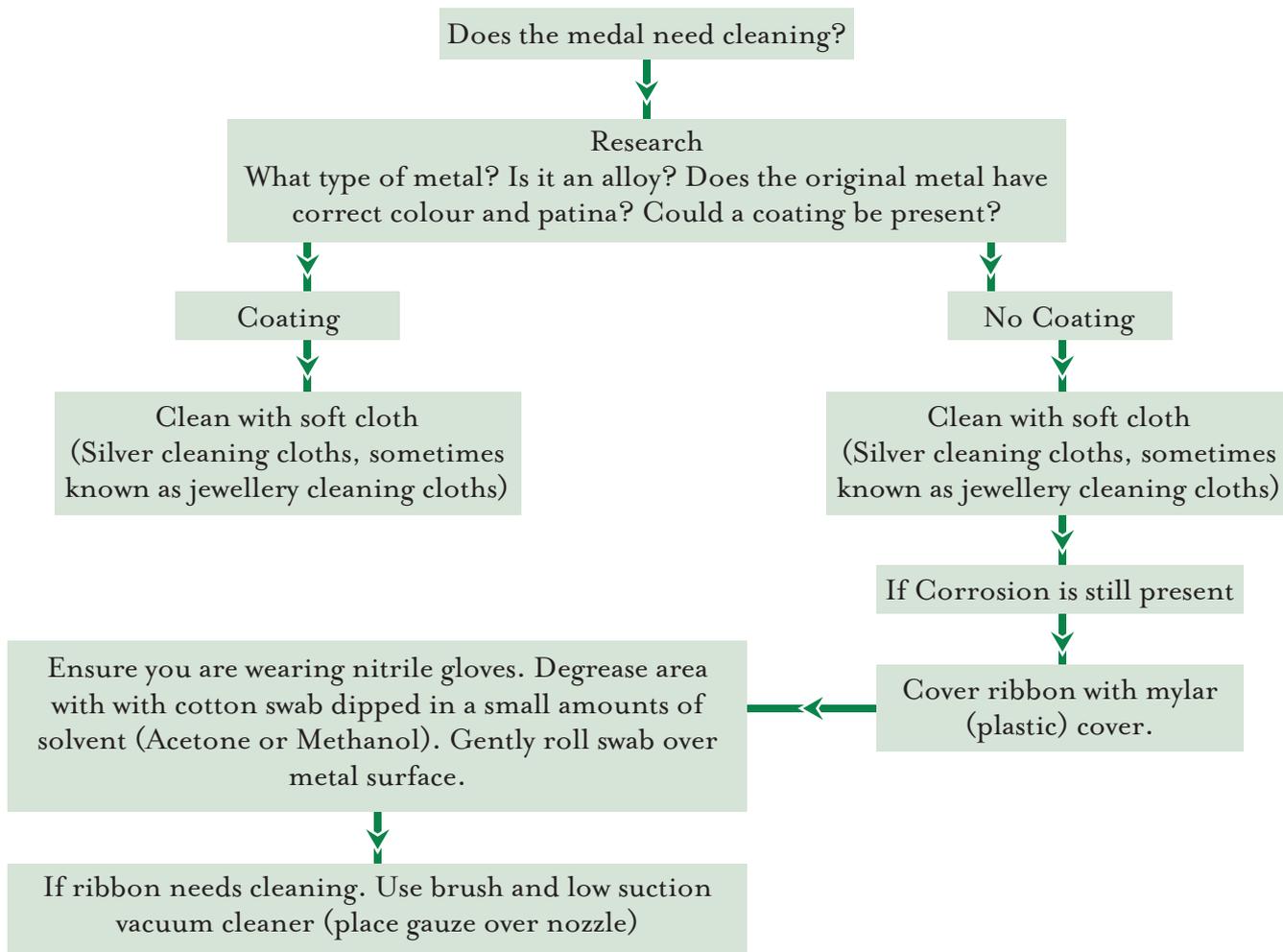
Medals and medallions are commonly made from copper, brass, bronze, pewter, iron or steel and occasionally aluminium, silver or gold. Brass and copper tarnish easily if they are not coated. It is important to note that any cleaning with an abrasive will remove some metal from the surface, so this should be done sparingly and with some consideration. Like iron and steel objects, brass and copper can be protected with a thin coating of microcrystalline wax, if they are not already coated. This coating will not last forever, however, so the items may need to be periodically re-coated.

Cleaning Materials to be avoided

Commercial cleaning products such as Silvo™, Brasso™, chrome polishes or bicarbonate of soda based cleaners are very abrasive and are difficult to control upon application. They contain ammonia and abrasives, which can clean too aggressively, causing irreversible damage to the surface of your metal artefacts if not used correctly. They should be avoided for cleaning wartime memorabilia – gentler, less aggressive forms of cleaning should be used instead, such as jewellery cleaning cloths.

Case study: Cleaning a medal

A medal represents a good case study because it is a composite item, it is made up of both metal and textile. In some cases you might consider cleaning or polishing your medals, due to unacceptable levels of tarnish or darkening of the surface, when inscriptions are obscured or the surface is unevenly coloured. Wear cotton or nitrile gloves when handling medals, to prevent the acids and oils from your fingers damaging the metal and textile surfaces. Please refer to the flow chart for the medal cleaning instructions.



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Summary of Metal Cleaning

- Metals should be cleaned with a soft cloth.
- Metals that you suspect might have a coating should not be cleaned with a solvent, instead use a soft cloth.
- If using solvents always wear nitrile gloves and conduct cleaning in a well-ventilated area.
- To prevent loss of a protective coating, always test the cleaning method on a small area first (spot test) before cleaning the entire arefact.
- Commercial cleaning and polishing products such as Brasso™ polish and Silvo™ polish should be avoided.

More information

For more information on cleaning your metals, please see the following resources:

CCI Notes: <http://canada.pch.gc.ca/eng/1439925167385>

reCollections: <https://aicm.org.au/conservation/collection-care>

Summary of Ribbon Brush Clean

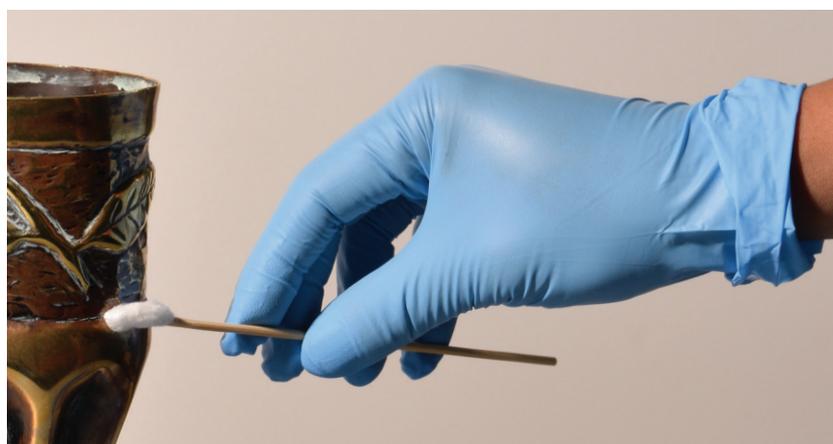
- Soft brush and a low-suction vacuum cleaner.
- Set the vacuum to its lowest setting. Cover the smallest nozzle of the vacuum with a piece of open-weave gauze fabric or netting. For more information, refer to the 'Brush Vacuuming Techniques' fact sheet.
- Do not wash the ribbon. Consult a professional conservator if in doubt.
- Replacement ribbon lengths can be obtained from medal dealers, and these are listed in the Yellow Pages or on internet based phone directories.
- Never use staples or sticky tape to hold ribbons together or to hold ribbons to medals.



White residue from improper metal cleaning using Brasso™



Cleaning a metal object using a soft cloth



Using a swab and nitrile glove to clean a metal object's surface