

# REFURBISHMENT PROJECTS

— THE JOURNAL OF REPAIR, REPLACEMENT AND MAINTENANCE —  
FEBRUARY 1994



Pilkington Glass. The inspiration for imagination.



# Scagliola restoration at the Athenaeum



The restored round and square columns and pilasters in the entrance hall of the Athenaeum

**S**CAGLIOLA, an intricate process replicating beautiful rare marbles and stones, has its origins in antiquity. Mainly employed by the most important architects and designers of the time, it achieved wide approval in England in the 18th and 19th century. Consequently, it has been used in the most important buildings in Europe and England such as, Buckingham Palace, The Spencer House, Syon House, Lancaster House, etc, as well as many London private clubs, such as The Institute of Directors, the Reform Club, The Athenaeum and others.

In this latter club, The Athenaeum, The Scagliola Company was asked to carry out extensive restoration on some sixteen full size, round and square Scagliola columns and pilasters, situated in the entrance hall.

This Scagliola work although original, had been covered with numerous layers of oil-based paint, the last one being a gloomy dark green.

As the club is closed to its members only for three weeks in the year, the restoration work had to be planned and programmed as accurately as possible; it involved two stages:

1. the stripping of the layers of paint, and
2. the bringing back of the original surface.

Stage one took place during the three weeks in the summer of 1991. A compatible stripping system was used which, from one hand would penetrate deep into the layers

of oil paint and remove them in one action, but on the other would not harm the plaster-based surface of the Scagliola material. Paint samples and core samples were taken.

At the end of this process and after the paints films were successfully cleared away, we were able to expose an area of original Scagliola and see for the first time the colour and pattern of the original work, which in this case was of a subtle carrara-white type. Stage two took place twelve months later, during the three weeks of summer.

This stage was the most difficult and laborious as it involved an average of twelve people working every day (including weekends) for ten hours; mechanical tools were hardly used.

During this stage any trace chemicals (although neutralized) left from stage one, were washed and poulticed out of the surface of the Scagliola. Then the rough and uneven surface of the columns was eventually smoothed down by hand finished processes. During this stage, as various areas were getting smoother and visually clearer, various stains were beginning to emerge; these were tackled individually with poultices and other agents according to their severity. This erratic staining was due partly to external pollution factors, but mostly due to decades of smoking. This was more visually evident of course, as the columns were white!

After easing most of the stains off, the usual fillings of



gaps and tiny air-holes took place, with plaster slips of similar colour, followed by sanding of the surface with a suitable sandpaper and water. Eventually, we were able to obtain a smooth and hard surface, which was left to dry, ready for the polishing. This was done by rubbing on the surface consecutive layers of oil, specially

suitable for 'whitework', which is a slightly different oil used for the polishing of highly coloured Scagliola. The work was eventually buffed to a shine, revealing all the subtle veining, colours and pattern of the original work as the artisan would have constructed in his workshop many decades ago.

**Enquiry No. 66**