

Cleaning brass and nickel silver.

Bob Alderman © July 2010

Handling brass and nickel silver tarnishes it from the acids in perspiration, flux residues after soldering can be even worse. To get paint onto the surface it must be clean. Simple washing under the tap even with detergent is not good enough. Indeed a detergent with lanolin will leave the lanolin on the surface and create a barrier to the paint.

My cleaning regime uses Viakal limescale remover and/or an abrasive cleaner called Bar Keepers Friend. If the surface is really tarnished then a direct application of neat Viakal will rapidly remove the tarnish. Alternatively the model can be left in warm water with Viakal added, for a normal full washing up bowl then a tablespoonful of Viakal added will do the job in about half an hour.

For a model with no significant tarnish, Bar Keepers Friend is sufficient. Simply wet the model, sprinkle on the powder and then scrub the resulting paste over the model with a toothbrush. Generally the bristles will reach into most corners. This will find out poorly soldered items so keep a bowl under the model for those parts that may get dislodged!

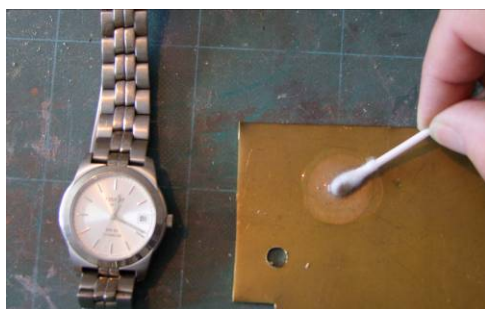
The following pictures show each product being used on a badly tarnished piece of brass sheet.



Brass from the store, fingers for scale.



Viakal applied to the surface. Watch to show elapsed time for cleaning. It is quick.



Cotton bud to accelerate the process and provide light abrading. Not always possible especially where there is lots of surface detail on a model; the fibres catch.



About four minutes later a bright surface. Note that Viakal leaves a coppery colour



Bar Keepers Friend on the surface.



Some water added to make a paste. If the model is wetted first then the powder added then it sticks to the 3D shape better.



Working up the paste. Old (or new) toothbrushes are useful, as are stiff bristled paint brushes.

Gently scrub the surface using a circular action where possible. Some model shapes won't allow this so simple back and forth will suffice.



After a short time the brass begins to brighten.



Cleaned off both surfaces compared.

The Viakal surface remains as the original surface.

Bar Keepers Friend leaves a matt finish due to the fine abrasive particles. I am of the view that this will assist with the adhesion of paint.

Both cleaners can be readily removed in warm water with NO residues left.



Both products were purchased from the cleaning shelves in my local Asda store.