HALLMARKING
AN INTRODUCTION

In the UK, hallmarking has a long history, dating back nearly 700 years, and representing the earliest form of consumer protection. The consumer benefits in many ways.

Hallmarks are small markings stamped on gold, silver and platinum articles. A hallmark means that the article has been independently tested and guarantees that it conforms to all legal standards of purity (fineness). These tests are carried out only by an Assay Office, of which there are four in the UK - London, Birmingham, Sheffield and Edinburgh.

The Hallmarking Act 1973 changed on 1 January 1999 and allows articles of higher and lower standards of fineness to be sold. This brings UK law into line with European law. Consumers may now choose from a much wider range of goods but continue to benefit from the same level of protection.

It is illegal for any trader to sell or describe a precious metal article as gold, silver or platinum unless it is hallmarked. Gold articles weighing less than 1 gram, silver articles weighing less than 7.78 grams and platinum articles weighing less than half a gram are exempt from hallmarking.
CURRENT UK HALLMARKS

Below are some examples of the types of marks which are being stamped on articles of gold, silver and platinum in the UK.

- **Sponsor's or Maker's Mark**: The registered mark of the sponsor or maker of the piece.
- **Metal and Purity Mark**: A millesimal number which indicates the precious metal content. The shape of the shield identifies the metal as gold, silver or platinum.
- **Common Control Mark**: A mark applied by countries which are signatories to the International Convention on Hallmarking.
- **Traditional Purity Mark**: A traditional symbol denoting one of the older precious metal finenesses.
- **Assay Office Mark**: The mark of the Assay Office where the piece was tested.
- **Date Mark**: A letter representing the year in which the piece was hallmarked.
- **Commemorative Mark**: Struck on the occasion of a special event.
CURRENT UK HALLMARKS

COMPULSORY MARKS

Modifications to the Hallmarking Act, effective from 1 January 1999, have changed the way articles made of precious metal are hallmarked. The UK Hallmark now comprises a minimum of three compulsory symbols.

SPONSOR’S OR MAKER’S MARK
Indicates the maker or sponsor of the article. In Britain, this mark consists of at least two letters within a shield, and no two marks are the same.

METAL AND FINENESS (PURITY) MARK
Indicates the precious metal content of the article, and that it is not less than the fineness indicated. Since 1999, all finenesses are indicated by a millesimal number (eg 375 is 9ct). This number is contained in a shield depicting the precious metal.

ASSAY OFFICE MARK
Indicates the particular Assay Office at which the article was tested and marked. There are now four British Assay Offices - London, Birmingham, Sheffield and Edinburgh. There were other Assay Offices in former times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPONSOR’S OR MAKER’S MARK</th>
<th>METAL AND FINENESS (PURITY) MARK</th>
<th>ASSAY OFFICE MARK</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Silver 925</td>
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<tr>
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</table>

*The Hallmark guarantees that the purity of the metal is at least that indicated by the Fineness Number.
CURRENT UK HALLMARKS

VOLUNTARY MARKS

TRADITIONAL FINENESS (PURITY) MARK
Prior to 1999, silver and platinum finenesses were indicated by symbols (see pages 10 and 11).

DATE MARK
Until 1999, a date letter indicating the year of hallmarking was compulsory. This is no longer so, but it can be applied voluntarily in addition to the compulsory marks (see pages 12 to 16).

COMMON CONTROL MARK
This is a mark used by countries which are signatories to the International Convention on Hallmarks (see pages 6 and 7).

COMMEMORATIVE MARK
One example is the Millennium Mark which will be applied to precious metals by the four UK Assay Offices during 1999 and 2000 (see page 17).
CURRENT INTERNATIONAL HALLMARKS

CONVENTION MARKS

The United Kingdom has been a signatory to the International Convention on Hallmarks since 1972. This means that UK Assay Offices can strike the Convention Hallmark which will then be recognised by all member countries in the International Convention. Conversely, Convention Hallmarks from other member countries are legally recognised in the UK. Articles bearing the Convention Hallmark do not have to be re-hallmarked in the UK.

An example of a Convention Hallmark:

\[ \text{A B} \quad \text{925} \quad 925 \quad \text{ASSAY OFFICE MARK} \]

SPONSOR’S OR MAKER’S MARK  COMMON CONTROL MARK  FINENESS (PURITY) MARK

The Assay Office marks of member countries of the Convention are illustrated opposite. The shield design around the Assay Office mark sometimes varies according to whether the article is gold, silver or platinum. The key mark to look for is the Common Control Mark. The three other marks must also be present.
## CURRENT INTERNATIONAL HALLMARKS

### CONVENTION MARKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPONSOR'S OR MAKER'S MARK</th>
<th>COMMON CONTROL MARK</th>
<th>FINENESS (PURITY) MARK*</th>
<th>ASSAY OFFICE MARK</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Silver</td>
<td>Platinum</td>
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*The Hallmark guarantees that the purity of the metal is at least that indicated by the Finesness Number.*
CURRENT INTERNATIONAL HALLMARKS

MARKING IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Since 1st January 1999 following a ruling of the European Court of Justice, the UK is required to accept (and not re-hallmark) other European national hallmarks which provide an equivalent guarantee to consumers. It is the opinion of the British Hallmarking Council that such hallmarks must contain a Sponsor's or Maker's Mark, a Fineness (Purity) Mark and an Assay Office Mark. For example:

![Mark Example]

The complete hallmark must guarantee that the purity of the metal is at least that indicated by the Fineness Number.

Some European national hallmarks incorporate the Fineness (Purity) Mark in the Assay Office Mark. For example:

![Mark Example]

Using these criteria, the national hallmarks of Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Portugal and Switzerland, without the Common Control Mark, are acceptable in the UK.

Some European hallmarking countries are not members of the International Convention.

Spain has a dual system of Assay Office hallmarking and licensed manufacturers' marking. The only Spanish hallmarks which conform to the British Hallmarking Council criteria are:

A1
V1
M1

Andalucía Valencia Madrid

In the opinion of the British Hallmarking Council, the national laws of Belgium and France do not presently provide an equivalent guarantee. Some European hallmarking countries are in the process of amending national laws in the light of the European Court of Justice ruling or are in the process of joining the International Convention (ie France). Consequently, the list of acceptable Assay Office marks is likely to be extended according to these developments.

Italy, Germany, Greece and Luxembourg do not have independent systems of guarantee. Articles from these countries must be hallmarked in the UK or Convention hallmarked in one of the Convention countries.

National hallmarks of countries outside the European Economic Area are not legal in the UK. Articles from these countries must be hallmarked in the UK or Convention hallmarked in one of the Convention countries.
HISTORIC UK HALLMARKS

In 1238, Henry III commanded the Mayor of London to appoint six faithful and discreet goldsmiths who would be responsible for ensuring standards for gold and silver articles. Later, Edward I passed a statute requiring not only that all silver articles were to be of sterling standard, the same as coinage, but also that they were to be assayed by the Wardens of the Goldsmiths' Guild and marked with a leopard's head.

In 1327 the Goldsmiths' Guild received its first Royal Charter from Edward III which confirmed its responsibility for assaying and marking. The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, as the guild was later called, is still responsible for the London Assay Office.

Under another statute in 1363, makers were ordered to stamp their own distinguishing marks alongside the leopard's head. Originally, the maker's mark took the form of a device, such as a cross or a fish; later, it became the practice to use the initials of the worker or firm.

In December 1478, the company appointed a salaried Assayer and compelled makers to bring their completed silverwares to Goldsmiths' Hall to be assayed and marked before they were offered for sale. This practice has continued to the present day and is the origin of the word 'hallmark'.

In the same year, an additional mark - the date letter - was introduced by the Company. This consisted of a letter of the alphabet which was changed annually. When one alphabet cycle was completed, the style of the letter or its surrounding shield was altered.

Hallmarking continued during succeeding centuries at Goldsmiths' Hall and at the Assay Offices which later opened in other towns, such as Newcastle, Exeter and York, where there were working goldsmiths and silversmiths. In Scotland, there were goldsmiths working at a date as early as in England. The earliest records pertain to the goldsmiths of Edinburgh. An Act of Parliament was passed in 1773 establishing Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield.

Several of the provincial offices have now closed - Newcastle, Exeter and York in the 19th century, Chester in 1962 and Glasgow in 1964. The Dublin Assay Office, whose origins date from the early 17th century, continues to operate in Ireland.
# Historic UK Hallmarks

**From 1975 - 1998 (31.12.98)**

### Assay Office Mark

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<td>Birmingham</td>
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<td>Sheffield</td>
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<td>Edinburgh</td>
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*Image references for marks:*
- Lion: [Link to London mark image]
- Anchor: [Link to Birmingham mark image]
- Crown: [Link to Sheffield mark image]
- Castle: [Link to Edinburgh mark image]
- 9 Carat: [Link to 9 Carat mark image]
- 18 Carat: [Link to 18 Carat mark image]
- 22 Carat: [Link to 22 Carat mark image]

*Note:* The images are placeholders and should be replaced with actual images for clarity.
# Historic UK Hallmarks

## Prior to 1975

### Assay Office Mark

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<td>🎥 &amp; 🇬🇧</td>
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<tr>
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<td>🏴</td>
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### Fineness (Purity) Mark

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<td>🇬🇧</td>
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- **Gold**
  - 9 Carat: 🎥 375
  - 14 Carat: 🎥 585
  - 18 Carat: 🎥 750
  - 22 Carat: 🎥 916
  - 23 Carat: 🎥 925

- **Silver**
  - Marked in England: 🏴
  - Marked in Scotland: 🏴
## Historic Hallmarks

### London from 1678-1974

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Note: The marks represent the hallmarks used in London from 1678 to 1974.
## Historic Hallmarks

**Birmingham: From 1773-1974**

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Additional columns for years 1727 to 1974 are not visible in the image.
OTHER HISTORIC HALLMARKS

FORMER ASSAY OFFICE MARKS
Several of the larger provincial cities had Assay Offices which are now closed. Each had its distinctive mark, some of the more important of which are shown below.

CHESTER - CLOSED 1962
EXETER - CLOSED 1883
GLASGOW - CLOSED 1964
NEWCASTLE - CLOSED 1884

There is also an Assay Office in Dublin and marks struck there before 1st April 1923 are recognised as approved British hallmarks. The Dublin mark is a figure of Hibernia.

ASSAY OFFICE MARK
From 1975 all United Kingdom Assay Offices used a common Date Letter as shown below.

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OTHER HISTORIC HALLMARKS

DUTY MARKS
Between 1784 and 1890 an excise duty on gold and silver articles was collected by the Assay Offices and a mark depicting the Sovereign's head was struck to show that it had been paid. These are two examples.

COMMENORATIVE MARKS
There are 4 other marks to commemorate special events: the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary in 1935, the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, her Silver Jubilee in 1977, and the new Millennium.

GEORGE III  VICTORIA  CORONATION 1953  SILVER JUBILEE 1935
SILVER JUBILEE 1977  MILLENNIUM MARK
CHECKLIST

When checking Hallmarks remember that the Hallmark should indicate:

**WHO?**
Is there a Sponsor's or Maker's Mark?

**WHAT?**
Is the metal and fineness indicated?

**WHERE?**
Is there an Assay Office Mark?

If the answer is 'yes' to these three questions, three further questions arise:

1. Is it a UK Hallmark (see pages 4 and 5)?
2. If not, is it a Convention Hallmark - look for the Common Control Mark (CCM) (see pages 6 and 7)?
3. If not, check if the Assay Office Mark is one which the British Hallmarking Council recommends as equivalent (see pages 7 and 8).

Note: The question as to whether European national hallmarks provide an equivalent guarantee to UK hallmarks or Convention hallmarks can only be decided by the individual national courts. This booklet has been produced based on information available at July 1996.
Further Reading
A study of hallmarks can become fascinating and rewarding. For anyone who wishes to learn more about hallmarks the publications listed below are recommended. Your local library should be able to provide books on the subject.

Bradbury's Book of Hallmarks
Published by J.W. Northend Ltd., Sheffield
(A handy pocket reference book)

Jackson's Silver & Gold Marks of England Scotland & Ireland
Edited by Ian Pickford. Published by Antique Collectors' Club
(Also Jackson's Hallmarks, pocket edition)

The Directory of Gold & Silversmiths, 1838-1914
From the London Assay Office Registers, by John Culme
Published by Antique Collectors' Club
This booklet is published by The Assay Offices of Great Britain, who would be pleased to respond to any enquiry.

LONDON
The Assay Office
Goldsmiths' Hall
Gutter Lane
London
EC2V 8AQ

BIRMINGHAM
The Assay Office
Newall Street
Birmingham
B3 1SB

SHEFFIELD
The Assay Office
137 Portobello Street
Sheffield
S1 4DR

EDINBURGH
The Assay Office
Goldsmiths’ Hall
24 Broughton Street
Edinburgh
EH1 3RH

Further Information may be obtained from

The British Hallmarking Council
PO Box 18133
London
EC2V 8JY

The Convention’s Secretariat
9-11 rue de Varembe
211 Geneva
Switzerland