

# HALL-MARKS

*Answers to a few Simple  
Questions about the  
British System of Hall-  
Marking the Precious  
Metals*



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Q. *What is a Hall-Mark?*

A. It is really a number of marks impressed by Assay Offices, authorized by Acts of Parliament, on articles made of Gold or Silver and proving that the precious metal used is of the legal standard of purity.

Q. *Which are the precious metals?*

A. Gold and Silver are the only metals so called. There are a number of expensive metals other than these two, some of which are called noble metals, but the only metals which can be Hall-Marked are Gold and Silver.

Q. *What is the significance of the individual marks?*

A. They show first the Standard of the metal, second the Town at which the metal was tested, then a letter which tells the date and finally a makers' mark. These marks occur in various orders.

Q. *Why does one see a crown on some gold articles, such as wedding rings, whilst on some others only the carat and decimal marks appear?*

A. The crown is the standard mark for 22 carat and 18 carat gold coupled with the quality mark, e.g., Crown and 22, Crown and 18. But on 9 carat and 14 carat articles the marks are 9 and .375, 14 and .585.

Q. *What is meant by 14 ct?*

A. It means that 14/24ths of the metal is fine gold and the remainder is alloy. This expressed decimally is .585. Pure gold would be 24 carat, but experience has shown that 22 carat is the highest quality of gold with wearing qualities, and for many things even that is too soft.

*Q. What is the significance of the anchor seen on so many Hall-Marked goods?*

A. The anchor is the Assay Office mark or Town Mark for Birmingham and denotes that the goods were Hall-Marked in Birmingham, which is one of the six Assay Offices functioning at present in Great Britain.

*Q. Where are these Assay Offices and what are their Town Marks?*

A. BIRMINGHAM—Anchor; SHEFFIELD—Crown for Silver, York Rose for Gold; LONDON—Leopard's Head; CHESTER—3 Sheaves and Dagger; EDINBURGH—Castle; GLASGOW—a combination of Tree, Bird, Bell, Fish and Ring.

*Q. Is there more than one legal standard for silver?*

A. Yes, there are two, but only one is much used. They are first, the Britannia Standard which can be expressed decimally as .9584, introduced in 1697 to prevent the melting of silver coinage for works in silver. Second the very ancient Sterling Standard .925 fine silver which was for centuries the only standard and was also the quality used in our silver coinage. The second, that is Sterling Standard, is the quality most often used to-day although both are legal.

*Q. What are the Standard Marks for Silver?*

A. FOR BIRMINGHAM, SHEFFIELD, LONDON AND CHESTER the Sterling Mark is the Lion Passant, whilst for EDINBURGH it is the Thistle and for GLASGOW a Thistle and Lion Rampant. For the standard known as Britannia sometimes called the new Sterling Standard which is 95.84% pure silver the mark is the figure of a woman "commonly called Britannia", something like the one on our penny.

Q. *What happens to articles presented for Hall-Marking which turn out to be below the required legal standard?*

A. Acts of Parliament dealing with Hall-Marking regulations require the Assay Masters to have them defaced by hammering or shearing and the maker can be fined.

Q. *Why is it that some gold and silver articles are not Hall-Marked?*

A. Certain gold and silver articles are exempt, e.g., signet rings, engagement rings, locket, and watch-chains, which used to be considered too frail for Hall-Marking. However, today, exempt articles can be Hall-Marked if so desired. Most signet rings are.

Q. *Besides the Town and Standard marks one sees two other marks. What are they?*

A. One is the letter of the alphabet called the date letter and denotes the year of Hall-Marking. The date letters are changed annually, and have been in use since 1478. By the character of this letter one can tell the approximate age of the article, the shape of the containing Shield being an important factor. The other mark is known as the makers' mark and consists of the initials of the manufacturer.

Q. *How does one know that the Hall-Mark is genuine?*

A. Cases of forgery are now extremely rare, and the penalties for infringing Hall-Marking Laws are very severe. Forgery is Felony and is punished by imprisonment.

*Q. What about goods made in foreign countries, and imported into Great Britain?*

A. All goods of gold and silver have to be Hall-Marked at a British Assay Office before they can be sold here, unless they are on the list of exempted articles. Recognition of foreign articles by their marks is easy because the Assay Town marks differ from those stamped on goods of British manufacture, e.g., BIRMINGHAM—Equilateral Triangle; SHEFFIELD—Sign of the constellation Libra; LONDON—Sign of the constellation Leo; CHESTER—Acorn and two leaves; EDINBURGH—St. Andrew's Cross; GLASGOW—Double block letter 'F' inverted.

*Q. One sometimes sees marks such as "22 ct." or "Sterling Silver" stamped on articles. What do they mean?*

A. They have no value whatever as they could be stamped by anybody on anything. **ONLY THE HALL-MARK IS A GUARANTEE OF PURITY.**

To sum up, Hall-Marks are there for the protection of the public and the goldsmith and silversmith alike. They provide a guarantee which no-one would question, in fact the word has passed into the English language as a synonym for genuine, authentic and scrupulous. Hall-Marks are part of a tradition which makes British Goldsmiths' and Silversmiths' work so much sought after the whole world over.

The subject of Hall-Marks is a fascinating one and for those who would like to know more about it the following works provide the key:—

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| "English Goldsmiths and their Marks"                                   | <i>Sir C. J. Jackson</i>  |
| "Guide to Marks of origin on Silver Plate"                             | <i>Frederick Bradbury</i> |
| "The Law and Practice of Hall-Marking<br>Gold and Silver Wares" ... .. | <i>J. Paul de Castro</i>  |
| "Chaffer's Handbook to Hall-Marks" ...                                 | <i>C. A. Markham</i>      |