

ASSAY OFFICE report

Robert Organ



Ian Raymond played a key role in the refurbishment



The new public foyer

ACTIVITY

Hallmarking was badly affected over the last year by the downturn in the general economy. During 2008, 18.9 million articles were marked by all of the United Kingdom offices, a decrease of 25.4% compared with 2007. All metals showed a decrease, but the more expensive metals fared worse: gold dropped by 34.8%; platinum by 18.7%; and silver by 9.4%. The number of articles hallmarked by London was 4.1 million: 32.9% fewer than last year.

The situation at London would have been far worse had its Heathrow Airport sub-office not been opened in the early part of the year. This exciting new facility allowed retention of key accounts and attracted a major UK importer. In its first year of operation, 665,821 articles were marked which was an encouraging performance in the present difficult trading conditions. The Greville Street sub-office continued to trade successfully, and 155,597 articles were marked there.

A major event of the year was the complete refurbishment of the main office at the Hall. All areas experienced a makeover. Hallmarking continued without interruption throughout the programme which was a testament to the combination of fine project management by Ian Raymond and the huge flexibility and patience of the staff. The upshot of its completion is that the Assay Office can now boast a modern, professional work environment with the latest equipment and techniques across all of its operating sites.

This year the Office introduced a range of new services, including a valuation service, provided in co-operation with the Guild of Valuers and Jewellers, a nickel-release testing service and a platinum smelting service. A number of successful valuation days were held in the public rooms of the Hall and these have now become a regular entry in the Hall diary.

The Assay Office exhibited at *International Jewellery London* at Earls Court in the autumn for the first time in its own right. The stand was well attended, helped not least by the offer of a free glass of champagne! Another first was the introduction of Hallmarking Information Days for the trade which have proved to be very popular.



Sampling and marking room

ANTIQUe PLATE COMMITTEE

A total of 164 pieces was examined, of which 67 conformed to the Hallmarking Act. The remainder comprised 11 with alterations and additions, 46 with transposed marks, 25 with counterfeit marks and 15 outside the Committee's jurisdiction. Of those submitted, 107 were related to the collection of boson's calls which are discussed in more detail in Charles Truman's article.

The expert evidence gathered by the Assay Office on behalf of the Antique Plate Committee played a critical role in the successful prosecution of Mr Peter Ashley-Russell by the Metropolitan Police Specialist Crime Operations Team. Mr Ashley-Russell was jailed for three years for forging eighteenth-century spoons and other items of cutlery. The case, which was regarded as one of the most significant since that of Lyon and Twinam in the Victorian era, brought a considerable amount of welcome publicity and helped to show that considerable penalties are applicable for those who flout hallmarking regulations.

Two Fakes and Forgeries Seminars were held — one at the Hall, the other during the 18th Annual Decorative Arts Symposium at the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada.

SUSPECTED OFFENCES

Sixteen suspected offences against the Hallmarking Act were reported to the Office by Local Authority Trading Standards Officers, which resulted in four prosecutions.

The Assay Office provided one seminar on behalf of the Trading Standards Institute. Additionally some small training sessions were held for London-based Trading Standards Authorities. Assay Office staff assisted in several raids and were required to provide expert evidence in court proceedings.

STANDARDS COMMITTEES

The standards outlined in last year's report are now in place. No new work items are currently planned.

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON HALLMARKS AND INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ASSAY OFFICES

Key topics which have dominated proceedings in the Hallmarking Convention and International Association of Assay Offices (IAAO) have been with regard to how the European Union Services Directive and the European Union Mutual Recognition Regulation will affect hallmarking. Slovenia ratified the Hallmarking Convention in 2008 while assay offices within France, Croatia, China, Mauritius, Moldova, Romania, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Macedonia signed the Memorandum of Understanding of the IAAO.



The newly refurbished staff rest room

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Steven Collins,
Sales and Business
Development Manager

MARTIN STEWART

CHANGES TO THE HALLMARKING ACT

The incorporation of palladium, as a metal which requires hallmarking, into the Hallmarking Act was delayed. The amendment is now expected to be published in July 2009 with the requirement for the compulsory hallmarking of palladium beginning on 1 January 2010.

Hallmarking will be regarded as a prior authorisation under the European Union Mutual Recognition Regulation. This means that the need for items to be hallmarked in the UK will remain. However, there will be some minor modifications required to current procedures concerning the way with which articles, which fail assay, are dealt. The Government is still deciding whether hallmarking is indeed a service which would apply under the new European Union Services Directive or whether it is an activity of state authority. The outcome of this decision will have a considerable impact on whether UK assay offices can open sub-offices in other EU countries.

STAFF

Terry Dack received his long service award. A consequence of the downturn in business was that a reduction in the number of staff employed in the Assay Office had to be made during the year. This was achieved through a combination of retirement and voluntary redundancy. Whilst everyone who left volunteered to be considered for compulsory redundancy, which made the process slightly less painful, many years of experience were nevertheless lost.

The year saw the death in service of Richard Hinson at the tender age of 23. The bravery he showed in his long battle with cancer was inspirational. He will be much missed, not least by his father and brother who also work for the Office.

Mr Steve Collins, formerly of Asprey, was appointed to the new position of Sales and Business Development Manager in December 2008.

WORK DEALT WITH BY ASSAY OFFICE LONDON FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 2008 NUMBER OF ARTICLES																	
	GOLD							SILVER					PLATINUM				
	999	990	916 22 carat	750 18 carat	585 14 carat	375 9 carat	TOTAL	800	925 sterling	958 Britannia	999	TOTAL	850	900	950	999	TOTAL
BRITISH	186	1	127,683	360,707	15,265	1,181,906	1,685,748	49	585,125	2,103	3,426	590,703	2	72	78,736	62	78,872
FOREIGN	160	9	72,908	242,846	12,033	611,252	939,208	99	744,483	375	296	745,253	54	6	40,702	4	40,766
TOTAL	364	10	200,591	603,553	27,298	1,793,158	2,624,956	148	1,329,608	2,478	3,722	1,335,956	56	78	119,438	66	119,638

WEIGHT OF ARTICLES																	
	GOLD (grams)							SILVER (kilograms)					PLATINUM (grams)				
	999	990	916 22 carat	750 18 carat	585 14 carat	375 9 carat	TOTAL	800	925 sterling	958 Britannia	999	TOTAL	850	900	950	999	TOTAL
BRITISH	3,507	3	1,117,106	2,253,909	85,927	4,906,637	8,367,089	5	14,595	175	459	15,234	7	674	730,296	473	731,450
FOREIGN	1,214	182	802,662	1,413,953	70,473	2,452,326	4,740,810	5	20,619	9	8	20,642	270	77	299,495	0	299,842
TOTAL	4,721	185	1,919,768	3,667,862	156,400	7,358,963	13,107,899	10	35,214	184	467	35,876	277	751	1,029,791	473	1,031,292