

Hallmarking

Guidance Notes

Practical guidance in relation to the Hallmarking Act 1973



375

925

950

950

Information from the Assay Offices of Great Britain



London



Birmingham



Sheffield



Edinburgh

GUARANTEEING THE
QUALITY OF PRECIOUS
METALS SINCE 1327

The Purpose of these Guidance Notes

The purpose of these notes is to give practical guidance in relation to the Hallmarking Act 1973 and subsequent amendments. No reliance must be placed on the document for a legal interpretation. The UK Assay Offices are happy to answer questions arising from these guidance notes and on any articles or other issues not specifically mentioned.

Why are precious metal articles hallmarked?

Gold, silver, platinum and palladium are rarely used in their purest form but instead they are normally alloyed with lesser metals in order to achieve a desired strength, durability, colour etc.

It is not possible to detect by sight or by touch the gold, silver, platinum or palladium content of an item. It is therefore a legal requirement to hallmark all articles consisting of gold, silver, platinum or palladium (subject to certain exemptions) if they are to be described as such.

The main offence under the UK Hallmarking Act 1973 is based on description. It is an offence for any person in the course of trade or business to:

- Describe an un-hallmarked article as being wholly or partly made of gold, silver, platinum or palladium
- Supply or offer to supply un-hallmarked articles to which such a description is applied.

What needs to be hallmarked?

Any article described as being wholly or partly made of gold, silver, platinum or palladium that is not covered under exempt articles.

Main Exemptions:

Articles below a certain weight are exempt from hallmarking. The exemption weight is based on the precious metal content only, excluding, for example, weight of diamonds, stones etc, except in the case of articles consisting of precious metal and base metal in which case the exemption weight is based on the total metal weight:

- Platinum 0.5 grams
- Gold 1.0 gram
- Palladium 1.0 gram
- Silver 7.78 grams

Any pre-1950 item may now be described and sold as precious metal without a hallmark, **if the seller can prove that it is of minimum fineness and was manufactured before 1950.**

Other Exempt Articles

A full list of exemptions can be found at the end of these Guidance Notes.

What are the precious metal standards for hallmarking?

The precious metal fineness standard for UK hallmarking (expressed in parts per thousand) for each precious metal, along with the standard of solder permitted to be used, for each individual fineness, is listed below. Permitted solders for the hallmarking standards available under the International Hallmarking Convention (common control mark) are also listed.

Please note: Gold and silver can only be soldered with the same metal. Platinum and palladium can be soldered with one or a combination of all four precious metals as long as the total precious metal (PM) fineness is as indicated below

Alloy	UK Fineness (ppt)	Permitted Solder (ppt)	Convention Permitted Solder (ppt)
Gold	999	750	750
Gold	990 (Convention not allowed)	750	Not available
Gold	916.6	750	750
Gold	750	750	750
Gold	750 Filigree or watch case	740	740
Gold	750 White	500	585
Gold	585 Yellow, Red	585	585
Gold	585 White	500	585
Gold	375	375	375
Silver	999	650	650
Silver	958.4 (Convention not allowed)	650	Not available
Silver	925	650	650
Silver	800	650	550
Platinum	999	Minimum PM fineness 999	Minimum PM fineness 800
Platinum	950	Minimum PM fineness 950	
Platinum	900	Minimum PM fineness 900	
Platinum	850	Minimum PM fineness 850	
Palladium	999	Minimum PM fineness 700	Minimum PM fineness 700
Palladium	950		
Palladium	500	Minimum PM fineness 500	

What does a Hallmark look like?

A Hallmark is made up of
3 compulsory symbols:



1. The Sponsor's or Maker's Mark

This indicates the maker or sponsor of the article. In the UK this mark consists of at least two letters within a shield. No two marks are the same.



2. Metal and fineness (purity) Mark

Indicates the precious metal content of the article and that it is not less than the fineness of the article indicated. The fineness is indicated by a millesimal number (parts per thousand) and the metal type is indicated by the shape of the surround.

Silver	Palladium	Gold	Platinum
800	2009 500	375 9 carat	850
925 Sterling	950	585 14 carat	900
958 Britannia	999	750 18 carat	950
999	2010 500	916 22 carat	999
	950	990	
	999	999	

3. Assay Office Mark

Indicates the particular Assay Office at which the article was tested and marked. There are now 4 Assay Offices in the UK - London, Edinburgh, Birmingham and Sheffield.



London



Edinburgh



Birmingham



Sheffield

There is also a range of optional marks that can be applied alongside the Hallmark if requested. These are:

Traditional Fineness Symbols – optional



Sterling Silver



Sterling Silver
Scotland



Britannia
Silver



Palladium



Gold



Platinum

The Date Letter – optional

Until 1999 the date letter was compulsory. This is no longer the case, but it can be applied voluntarily in addition to the compulsory marks. The date letter changes once a year on January 1st.



2008



2009



2010



2011



2012



2013

Alternatively...

The Common Control Mark and Convention Marks

The UK 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.



Silver



Palladium



Gold



Platinum

Finenesses recognised under the Convention are:

Silver: 800, 925, 999

Palladium: 500, 950, 999

Gold: 375, 585, 750, 916, 990, 999

Platinum: 850, 900, 950, 999

A Convention Hallmark consists of four marks:



Sponsor



Common
Control Mark

925

Fineness
(Purity) Mark



Assay
Office Mark

Can I use more than one precious metal in one article?

Articles consisting of more than one precious metal can be hallmarked, subject to the following conditions:

- The item can only be marked if, in the opinion of the Assay Office, an ordinary person will be able to determine which part is which precious metal.
- Each precious metal component must be at least the minimum legal fineness for that metal i.e. Gold 375, Silver 800, Platinum 850, Palladium 500 (parts per thousand).
- The full Hallmark (Assay Office and fineness mark) struck will be that of the least precious metal, in order, silver, palladium, gold and platinum. This will normally be struck on the appropriate metal.
- The minor (fineness) mark will be stamped on the “higher” precious metals.

Anomalies

Where small components are used, the above may not be possible. In these circumstances the following rules apply:

1. If it is not practical to stamp the fineness marks on the “higher” precious metals, they may be stamped on the lower precious metals.
2. If this is not practical then the fineness marks can be stamped on another precious metal part.
3. If neither of these options are practical, then the full (Assay Office and least precious metal fineness) mark will be applied on the least precious metal part and all other marks omitted.
4. When a platinum article has small component parts consisting of gold and the gold parts are of a fineness of 750 parts per thousand or higher, then the article may be hallmarked with a platinum full mark and the appropriate gold fineness mark. This will not apply if the gold components are 585 or 375ppt. The gold fineness mark can be applied anywhere on the article.



Can I use non-precious metals in combination with precious metals?

Articles made of precious metals and other materials can be hallmarked, subject to the following conditions:

A mixed precious metal and base metal article, or an article of mixed precious metal and other materials, can only be hallmarked if any precious metal component is at least the minimum legal fineness for that metal i.e. Gold 375, Silver 800, Platinum 850, Palladium 500 (parts per thousand).

If an article includes base metal parts then:

- Those base metal parts must be clearly distinguishable from precious metal parts by colour and/or texture and must be clearly visible by their extent.
- The word + METAL must be applied next to the Hallmark on the precious metal part.
- Whenever practical the word METAL or the name of the metal should also be struck on the base metal part/s (brass, stainless steel, titanium etc), in a manner which complies with any Regulation made by The British Hallmarking Council.
- The Hallmark can only be applied to the precious metal component. Sufficient space must also be available adjacent to the Hallmark for the addition of the "+METAL" mark.

If an article does not include base metal parts, but other materials, then:

- The other materials must be clearly distinguishable from any precious metal part.
- The non-precious metal part must not be plated to resemble any precious metal.
- The extent of each part must be clearly visible.
- The precious metal part must be of a thickness of not less than 100 micrometres.
- A mixed material article containing only a single precious metal will be hallmarked on the precious metal part only, as if it were a separate article.
- For an article with more than one precious metal and a base metal the rules which apply to hallmarking Mixed Precious Metals apply.
- NB Articles must still comply with the UK Nickel regulation.

Exempt Articles

The following gives a full list of articles exempt from compulsory hallmarking under part II of schedule 1 of the 1973 Hallmarking Act. As amended by the Hallmarking (Exempted Articles) (Amendment) Order 1975 and the Hallmarking (Exempted Articles) Orders 1982 and 1986.

Exempted Articles

1. An article which is intended for dispatch to a destination outside the United Kingdom.
2. An article which is outside the United Kingdom, or which is in course of consignment from outside the United Kingdom to an Assay Office in the United Kingdom.
3. Any coin which is, or was formerly at any time, current coin of the United Kingdom or any other territory.
4. Any article which has been used, or is intended to be used, for medical, dental, veterinary, scientific or industrial purposes.
5. Any battered article fit only to be remanufactured.
6. Any article of gold or silver thread.
7. Any raw material (including any bar, plate, sheet, foil, rod, wire, strip or tube) or bullion.
8. Any manufactured article which is not substantially complete, and which is intended for further manufacture.
9. Any article which is wholly or mainly of platinum, and which was manufactured before 1st January 1975.

Articles Exempt if of Minimum Fineness

10. Any article which;

a) Is wholly or mainly of gold or of silver or of gold and silver assaying in all its gold parts not less than 375 parts per thousand and in all its silver parts not less than 800 parts per thousand; and

b) Was manufactured before the year 1950 and has not since the beginning of the year 1950 been the subject of any alteration which would be an improper alteration if the article had previously borne approved hallmarks.

11. Any musical instrument, where the description is applied to the mouthpiece and the mouthpiece is of minimum fineness (see below).
12. Subject to the provisions of this paragraph, any article containing only one precious metal, being a metal of minimum fineness and of a weight less than that specified in the following table:

Platinum _____ 0.5 grams
Gold _____ 1 gram
Palladium _____ 1 gram
Silver _____ 7.78 grams

NB In the case of articles consisting of precious metal and base metal the above exemption weight is based on the total metal weight, including base metals.

13. Any article, except an article made of chain work, which is wholly of one or more precious metals of minimum fineness and which is so small or thin that it cannot be hallmarked (see below).
14. Any article which is of minimum fineness and which is imported temporarily (whether as a trade sample, or as intended for exhibition or otherwise) and for the time being remains under the control of the Commissioners of Customs and Excise (see below).
15. Before 1975, many precious metal articles (e.g. rings, whatever their weight, other than wedding rings) were exempted from hallmarking. Platinum was not hallmarked at all. Any article covered by these exemptions, if (a) of minimum fineness (Gold 375 parts per thousand and Silver 800 parts per thousand) and (b) proved to have been manufactured before 1975, may still be described and sold as precious metal.

15a. Gold Exemptions:

The following articles of gold are exempt, if manufactured before 1st January 1975, and (except in the case of articles mentioned in sub-paragraph (d) below) of minimum fineness:

- (a) Rings, except wedding rings, pencil cases, locket, watch chains and thimbles.
- (b) Articles consisting entirely of filigree work.
- (c) Articles so heavily engraved or set with stones that it is impossible to mark them without damage.
- (d) Jewellers works, that is the actual setting only in which stones or other jewels are set and jointed sleeper earrings.

15b. Silver Exemptions:

The following articles of silver, if manufactured before 1st January 1975 and (except in the case of articles mentioned in paragraph (c) below) of minimum fineness-

- (a) Locketts, watch chains and stamped medals.
 - (b) Mounts the weight of which is less than 15.55 grams.
 - (c) Articles consisting entirely of filigree work.
 - (d) Silver articles the weight of which is less than 7.78 grams.
 - (e) Jewellers works, that is the actual setting only in which stones or other jewels are set.
16. However, even articles which should have been hallmarked when they were made, but bear no hallmark, are now treated as exempt if they were manufactured before 1950 **if the seller can prove that it is of minimum fineness and was manufactured before 1950.**

Other Important Information

Adhesives

Adhesive may be used in place of solder as long as it is not excessive, nor used for strengthening, weighting or filling.

Filled Hollow Articles

Hollow articles may be filled with non-metallic substances. Such articles must be marked "FILLED" before hallmarking.

Plated Articles

Hallmarked articles may also be plated as follows:

Article made of :	Plating permitted:
Platinum	Platinum, rhodium
Gold	Gold, platinum, rhodium,
Palladium	Palladium, gold, platinum, rhodium
Silver	Silver, palladium, gold, platinum, rhodium

- The plating or coating must not exceed 2 micrometres on any part of the article
- On gold the standard of fineness of the plating must not be less than the standard of fineness of the article itself.
- On silver the standard of fineness of plating must not be less than the standard of fineness of the article itself.
- Any precious metal used for plating must never be used at less than the minimum UK standard of fineness.
- The use of base metal for plating on precious metal articles is not permitted

Making an alteration to a hallmarked article

It is possible to make an alteration to a hallmarked article, subject to the following conditions:

- The altered article must be of the same character and purpose as the original (e.g. a spoon must not become a fork).
- The addition must be of the same standard as the article to which it is being added.
- The weight of the addition must be no heavier than 0.5 grams in platinum, 1 gram in gold, 1 gram in palladium, and 7.78 grams in silver.
- The addition must not be greater than 50% of the article's total weight.
- Any other alterations must be re-submitted to an Assay Office.

Notes

The Goldsmiths' Company

Assay Office

Goldsmiths' Hall

Gutter Lane

London EC2V 8AQ

Tel: 020 7606 8971 Fax: 020 7814 9353

www.assayofficelondon.co.uk

Birmingham Assay Office

PO Box 151 Newhall Street

Birmingham B3 1SB

Tel: 0871 871 6020 Fax: 0121 236 9032

www.theassayoffice.co.uk

Sheffield Assay Office

Guardians' Hall,

Beulah Road, Hillsborough,

Sheffield S6 2AN

Tel: 0114 231 2121 Fax: 0114 233 9079

www.assayoffice.co.uk

Edinburgh Assay Office

Goldsmiths Hall

24 Broughton Street

Edinburgh EH1 3RH

Tel: 0131 556 1144 Fax: 0131 556 1177

www.assayofficescotland.com

British Hallmarking Council

www.bis.gov.uk/britishhallmarkingcouncil

Information from the Assay Offices of Great Britain



London



Birmingham



Sheffield



Edinburgh

GUARANTEEING THE
QUALITY OF PRECIOUS
METALS SINCE 1327