

Hallmarking

Guidance Notes

Practical guidance in relation to the Hallmarking Act 1973



375

925

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, platinum and silver 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 or platinum content of an item. It is therefore a legal requirement to hallmark all articles consisting of gold, silver or platinum (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 or platinum.

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 or platinum 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 weight of 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:

- Gold 1.0 gram
- Silver 7.78 grams
- Platinum 0.5 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 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. The hallmarking standards available under the International Hallmarking Convention (common control mark) are also listed.

Alloy	UK or Convention Fineness	UK Permitted Solder	Convention Permitted Solder
Gold	999	750	750
Gold	990	750	750
Gold	916	750	750
Gold	750	750	750
Gold	750 Filigree or watch case	740	740
Gold	750 White	500	500
Gold	585 Yellow, Red	585	585
Gold	585 White	500	500
Gold	375	375	375
Silver	999	650	650
Silver	958 (Convention - not allowed)	650	Not applicable
Silver	925	650	650
Silver	800	650	650
Platinum	999	999	995 parts per 1,000 of gold, silver, platinum or palladium
Platinum	950	Two or more of gold, silver, platinum and palladium to total 950	
Platinum	900	900	
Platinum	850	850	

What does a Hallmark look like?

A Hallmark is made up of 3 compulsory symbols:

1. The Sponsor's or Maker's Mark - compulsory

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 - compulsory

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.

Gold



Silver



Platinum



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

3. Assay Office Mark - compulsory

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



London



Birmingham



Sheffield



Edinburgh

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

Traditional Fineness Symbols - optional



Gold



Silver
(sterling)



Silver
(britannia)



Platinum



Silver
(sterling scotland)

The Date Mark - optional

The date letter changes once a year on January 1st.



2006



2007



2008



2009



2010



2011

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.



Gold



Silver



Platinum

Finenesses recognised under the Convention are:

Gold - 375, 585, 750, 916, 990, 999. Silver - 800, 925, 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 (parts per thousand).
- The full Hallmark (Assay Office and fineness mark) struck will be that of the least precious metal, in order, silver, 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 375 parts per thousand. 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 (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 was 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.

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:

- Gold articles with gold, platinum, rhodium.
- Silver articles with silver, gold, platinum, rhodium.
- Platinum articles with platinum, rhodium.
- On gold the standard of fineness of 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.
- If gold or platinum are plated on silver then the standard of fineness of plating must not be less than the minimum standard of fineness for platinum and gold respectively.
- The plating or coating must not exceed 2 micrometres on any part of the article.

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 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 1 gram in gold, 7.78 grams in silver and 0.5 grams in platinum.
- The addition must not be greater than 50% of the article's total weight.

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:
 - Gold 1.0 gram
 - Silver 7.78 grams
 - Platinum 0.5 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 1000 and silver 800 parts per 1000) and (b) proved to have been manufactured before 1975, may still be described and sold as precious metal.
- 15a. The following articles of gold, 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, lockets, 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. 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.

London Assay Office

Goldsmiths' Hall

Gutter Lane

London EC2V 8AQ

Tel: 020 7606 8971 Fax: 020 7814 9353

www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk

Birmingham Assay Office

PO Box 151 Newhall Street

Birmingham B3 1SB

Tel: 0121 236 6951 Fax: 0121 236 9032

www.theassayoffice.co.uk

Sheffield Assay Office

Guardians' Hall,

137 Portobello Street,

Sheffield, S1 4DS

Tel: 0114 275 5111 Fax: 0114 275 6473

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.britishhallmarkingcouncil.gov.uk

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