

Assay Office

Activity

The number of articles sent for hallmarking to all UK Assay Offices in 2015 increased by 5.8% on the previous year, to a total of 10,495,354. Gold, platinum and palladium increased by 14.5%, 40.2% and 25.8% respectively but silver fell by 3.5%. Despite the welcome growth in hallmarking numbers over the year as a whole, submission of items remained patchy with large fluctuations on a month by month basis. There remains little optimism about a sustained period of growth, especially with worldwide economic uncertainties.

The rate of growth in the number of articles marked by London was ahead of the UK as a whole with the number of articles hallmarking rising by 12.3% to 3,135,312 in 2015. The growth was attributable to an increase in gold and platinum articles because less silver and palladium were marked. London market share continued to grow and was an encouraging 30% for the year.

The sub-offices at Heathrow and Greville Street continued their success during 2015. The Heathrow sub-office hallmarked 1.82 million articles and Greville Street 198,566 articles. Heathrow remained the largest of the Assay Office's manufacturing sites in terms of articles hallmarked. The sub-office at Allied Gold continued to function well and an agreement to continue the operation for a further period of time was signed. A sub-office with state-of-the-art equipment was opened during the year in the manufacturing premises of the luxury retail jeweller Graff Diamonds. The Assay Office can proudly boast an unrivalled service for all sectors of the market – large multinational companies sending in bulk quantities for hallmarking; smaller businesses; students; hobbyists; importers; exporters; and luxury, high-end manufacturers/retailers.

A strategic review of the Assay Office took place during 2015, the principal conclusion of which was that the main part of the Assay Office should remain at Goldsmiths' Hall and that it should be run along the lines of a more conventional, commercial business. The Assay Office Management Committee was replaced by a new Assay Office Management Board to reflect this change. One of the first acts was to introduce the simplest pricing structure for hallmarking available today. This demystified hallmarking pricing for the customer and facilitated substantial operational efficiency improvements. More improvements are planned over 2016 with an emphasis on customer service and quality. The Assay Office retained its accreditation to international standards ISO 17025:2005 and its certification to ISO 9001:2008.



Flower fairy playing cards and box, masterpiece by Candice Devine, 2016, silver with slate plinth. Image: Julia Skupny

A full marketing and events programme was organised including 'Fakes and Forgeries' seminars, Valuation Days, Hallmarking Information Days, Buying Precious Metal and other specialist training courses. The Assay Office had stands at New Designers and Goldsmiths' Fair. The highlight of the events calendar was again Make Your Mark held at Goldsmiths' Hall. This is fast becoming the premier event for provision of information for prospective students and current students looking to build their career. This year it was held over two days and over 700 students attended. During the past year training was also provided for the Pakistan and Sri Lanka Assay Offices.

The Assay Office was instrumental in setting up the International Hallmarking Convention and the International Association of Assay Offices. It was thus appropriate that the meeting and celebrations associated with the 40th anniversary of the Convention were held at Goldsmiths' Hall. The gala dinner included a guard of honour provided by the Pikemen and Musketeers and a concert by the Ogmores Vale Welsh Male Voice Choir. A visit to the Goldsmiths' Centre was included in the celebrations. The Deputy Warden (who is Welsh himself) was caught singing the anthems with the choir. While he was completely tuneless, there was no shortage of effort. He is being encouraged to audition for the *X Factor* next year.



The Ogmores Vale Welsh Male Voice Choir sing at the International Hallmarking Convention anniversary meeting. Image: Julia Skupny

Antique Plate Committee

A total of 93 pieces were examined, of which 39 conformed to the Hallmarking Act. The remainder comprised 34 with alterations and additions, three with transposed marks, 15 with counterfeit marks and two were outside the Committee's jurisdiction.

Suspected Offences

A total of nine suspected offences against the Hallmarking Act were reported to the Office by Local Authority Trading Standards Officers, which resulted in one prosecution.

Standards Committees

Chris Walne, the new Laboratory Manager, sat on the committee which looks at the modification and introduction of ISO standards relating to the testing of precious metal jewellery. New standards are being developed for 999.9 purity precious metals. Modifications regarding the interpretation of results for ISO Standard EN1811:2001 – Nickel Release were published.

International Hallmarking Convention and International Association of Assay Offices

The 2015 meeting of these organisations was probably the largest gathering of Assay Offices in history. The Convention elected a new Chairman, Dahlia Yarom from Israel. No new members signed the Memorandum of Understanding for the IAAO.

Staff

Ian Raymond (Deputy Superintendent), Brent Jones (Laboratory Manager), and Lyn Mills (Deputy Warden's Secretary), retired during the year.

Julie Ann Bull, the Assay Office Laser Consultant, won a bronze in the Goldsmiths' Craft & Design Council Awards. Candice Devine also won two bronzes in the same competition for her masterpiece. This was created as part of her apprenticeship which she duly completed, receiving her Freedom in March. This was a very proud moment for her Master, Dave Merry, who himself was given the rarely awarded status of Honorary Member of the Chartered Trading Standing Institute for his huge contribution to hallmarking enforcement. Dave's head has grown three inches in a year, the same as Will Evans' beard.

Robert Organ