

Assay Office Report

By Dr Robert Organ

Activity

The number of articles sent for hallmarking to all UK assay offices increased from 9,156,752 in 2013 to 10,452,413 in 2014, a 14% increase. Gold and silver articles were responsible for this increase, with gold articles increasing by 23.2% and silver by 7.2%. The number of platinum articles marked was static compared to last year, while palladium articles dropped by 4.1%. The early growth in palladium, seen since its introduction five years ago, seems to have stalled.

Despite the welcome growth in hallmarking numbers over the year as a whole, there were signs at the end of 2014 that growth was slowing, creating a sense of uncertainty for the year ahead.

The rate of growth in the number of articles marked by London was slightly behind the UK as a whole, with the number of articles hallmarking rising from 2,793,014 in 2013 to 3,083,696 in 2014, up by 10.4%. All of this was attributable to an increase in gold articles hallmarking; fewer silver, palladium and platinum articles were hallmarking compared with the previous year. London's market share continued to grow and was an encouraging 31% for the year.

The sub-offices at Heathrow and Greville Street continued to prove successful during 2014. The Heathrow sub-office hallmarking 1.6 million articles and Greville Street 186,000 articles. Heathrow remained the largest of the Assay Office's manufacturing sites in terms of articles hallmarking. The sub-office at Allied Gold had a good first year of operation.

The increase in hallmarking numbers is partly a consequence of improvements in the general economy and a sustained reduction in gold price. The valuable income provided from supplying smelting and assaying services to companies which buy scrap gold fell further in 2014. However, new avenues were explored for providing additional income based on exploiting the use of existing skills, expertise and equipment. These included the introduction of a range of non-precious metal testing services and a precious metal buying course. The ability of the Assay Office to produce the highest quality hallmark punches in the world has been recognised, and several orders from overseas assay offices have been fulfilled.

Investment in the future continued apace. The four new lasers ordered at the end of 2013 were delivered and are in use. Their full potential is still being explored. In addition, the engineering workshop saw the introduction of a CNC milling machine. This has increased the quality and efficiency of producing hallmark punches as well as the normal tooling used for hallmarking. A new silver titrator for the laboratory was purchased. The Assay Office retained its accreditation to international standards ISO 17025:2005 and its certification to ISO 9001:2008.

A full marketing and events programme was organized including Fakes and Forgeries seminars, Valuation Days, Hallmarking Information Days and other specialist training courses. The Assay Office had stands at New Designers, Chatsworth House, Goldsmiths' Fair and Art in Action. The highlight of the events calendar was the *Make Your Mark* event held at Goldsmiths' Hall. Designed for full-time and part-time students on precious metal related courses, it included celebrity guest speakers, live demonstrations, special offers, careers advice and all sorts of useful information for those entering the trade. Over 750 people attended. Rumour has it that the Clerk needed stout walking boots and a ration pack to reach the end of the long queue to enter.



Lyn Mills and her husband with the Prime Warden and Deputy Warden at her freedom ceremony
Image: Sophia Tobin



Charlotte Turner, the new Marketing Manager of the Assay Office
Image: Julia Skupny

Antique Plate Committee

A total of 73 pieces were examined, of which 19 conformed to the Hallmarking Act. The remainder comprised 37 with alterations and additions, seven with transposed marks, nine with counterfeit marks and one was outside the Committee's jurisdiction.

Suspected Offences

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

Standards Committees

Ten ISO standards on the assaying of precious metals were published, further details of which can be obtained from the Office.



Instagram [instagram.com/theassayoffice](https://www.instagram.com/theassayoffice)

International Convention on Hallmarks and International Association of Assay Offices

Italy's attempt to accede to the Hallmarking Convention remains thwarted. This is causing a considerable amount of bad blood within the Convention and there is no clear way forward. A gala dinner at Goldsmiths' Hall will mark the highpoint of 40th anniversary celebrations of the Hallmarking Convention to be hosted by the Assay Office in September 2015.

The International Association of Assay Offices (IAAO) continues to grow. Taiwan signed the Memorandum of Understanding in 2014.

Changes to the Hallmarking Act

There were no changes to the Hallmarking Act during the year. However, a momentous decision was taken when the British Hallmarking Council gave permission for the Sheffield Assay Office to operate a sub-office overseas. Subsequently, UK hallmarks have now been applied outside of the UK for the first time.

Staff

Charlotte Turner has joined the Assay Office as the new Marketing Manager. Caroline Waker received her Long Service Award. Lyn Mills received her Freedom which coincided with the release of her new book, *50 excuses why the Deputy Warden cannot take your call*.