

# ASSAY OFFICE report

Robert Organ

## ACTIVITY

During 2007, 25.4 million articles were marked by all of the United Kingdom assay offices, an increase of 2% over the previous year. This input was well below levels three years ago and the market remains volatile. There was a decrease of 5% in gold articles and an increase of 17% in silver articles, whilst platinum figures remained relatively neutral. This shift from gold to silver was almost certainly a result of the very high gold price experienced during the year. The number of articles hallmarked at London fell by 4.4%. A main focus of attention during the year was the opening of a sub-office in the premises of Brink's Limited at Heathrow Airport. This new facility was a response to the need to provide a better service for the increasing number of manufacturers and retailers who choose to import jewellery and silverware. The co-operation with Brink's decreases the number of steps in the distribution chain whilst increasing security. The facility is equipped with the latest hallmarking technology. The Greville Street sub-office has turned out to be an instant success and has received very favourable feedback from the trade. In its first year of operation, 137,000 articles were marked.

## ANTIQUe PLATE COMMITTEE

A total of 266 articles were examined, of which 150 conformed to the Hallmarking Act. The remainder comprised 48 with alterations and additions, 50 with transposed marks and 18 with counterfeit marks. There was a general feeling that the level of sophistication in the faking procedures was increasing.

The Fakes and Forgeries seminars scored two



Delegates at the IAAO meeting



notable firsts: a seminar was held outside of the Hall for the first time, hosted by the Edinburgh Assay Office; and seminars were then held abroad (in North America).

## SUSPECTED OFFENCES

Thirteen suspected offences against the Hallmarking Act were reported to the Office by local authority trading standards officers, which resulted in three prosecutions.

The Assay Office presented two seminars for the Trading Standards Institute. They were provided free of charge to the Institute and were designed to improve the hallmarking knowledge of trading standards officers. The seminars had a similar format to the Fakes and Forgeries seminars with a series of lectures in the morning, followed by a hands-on session using a combination of genuine and fake items in the afternoon.

## STANDARDS COMMITTEES

Voting took place over the summer for ISO/DIS 11494 (determination of platinum by ICP); ISO/DIS 11495 (determination of palladium by ICP); ISO/DIS 15093 (determination of platinum, gold and palladium by difference); ISO/DIS 15096 (determination of silver by difference); and ISO/DIS 11596 (sampling of precious metals for jewellery alloys). A meeting of TC 174 to discuss the outcome is needed before the standards can be finally adopted.

## INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

Slovakia and Cyprus acceded to full membership in 2007. Officials from the Pakistan Government visited London to seek assistance from the Assay Office with the establishment of hallmarking facilities within Pakistan with a view to joining the Convention, as soon as possible. Four delegates from Pakistan were trained during the year. The meeting of the International Convention took place at Goldsmiths' Hall on 14 April 2008.

## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ASSAY OFFICES (IAAO)

The Assay Offices of Catalonia and Menorca in Spain signed the Memorandum of Understanding. To reflect the growing number of assay offices outside of Europe who have signed the Memorandum of Understanding, the Association decided to change its name to the International Association of Assay Offices (formerly the Association of European Assay Offices). The inaugural meeting took place at Goldsmiths' Hall on 15 April, following the Convention meeting the previous day. It was attended by 67 delegates from 29 countries.

## CHANGES TO THE HALLMARKING ACT

The Mixed Metal Amendment and pre-1950 amendments, discussed in this report last year, had come into force on 6 April 2007. New guidance notes were drawn up to reflect these changes and are now available from the assay offices. A Regulatory Impact Assessment is being prepared by the British Hallmarking Council to modify the Act to include palladium as a metal which requires hallmarking. It is expected that the legislation will come into force in 2009. Further changes to the Act may well be needed to accommodate the implications of the European Union Services Directive.

## STAFF

Tim Swann received his long service award. Kevin Bowles became Manager of the Heathrow Sub-Office after several successful years as Head of the Gold Department. Ian Raymond, formerly Head of the Silver Department, returned last year in a new role as the Process and Quality Development Manager. Another new position, Marketing Manager, was filled by Christina Reti who also co-ordinated the overseas Fakes and Forgeries seminars. John Love, the Superintendent Assayer, confessed that he could no longer stand the singing when helping out in the Packet Handling Department: suitable personal protective equipment has been issued. ■



Sir Jerry Wiggan and Ronnie Le Bas, guest speakers at the joint Convention and IAAO dinner



Top left and above: The Fakes and Forgeries seminar 'team' and supporters in America



Left: Tim Swann and the Prime Warden

WORK DEALT WITH BY ASSAY OFFICE LONDON FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 2007																	
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	998	TOTAL
BRITISH	773	27	159,086	388,556	25,555	1,390,647	1,954,644	0	617,210	2,009	4,908	624,027	3	394	92,466	130	92,963
FOREIGN	66	19	120,972	333,928	33,258	1,050,059	1,538,301	8	1,190,855	561	1,109	1,192,333	1	17	36,570	22	36,810
TOTAL	839	46	280,058	722,484	58,813	2,430,706	3,492,945	8	1,767,965	2,570	5,917	1,776,360	4	401	129,036	152	129,593

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	998	TOTAL
BRITISH	7,571	285	1,368,933	2,313,907	193,118	6,437,761	10,321,655	0	14,526	231	662	15,419	18	4,988	642,867	692	648,565
FOREIGN	952	446	1,290,435	2,023,114	216,717	4,064,573	7,596,237	5	28,476	16	43	28,540	8	101	270,647	230	270,986
TOTAL	8,523	731	2,659,368	4,337,021	409,835	10,502,334	17,917,892	5	43,002	247	705	43,959	26	5,089	913,514	922	919,551