

ASSAY OFFICE report

David Evans

ACTIVITY

Following three successive record years for hallmarking, the year 2002 fell narrowly short of making it four in a row. The Golden Jubilee hallmark proved to be less popular than the Millennium Mark, being applied to less than 5% of the articles. The downturn in 9ct gold was compensated by increases in 14ct gold, 18ct gold, platinum and sterling silver. The office was used by 3,800 customers who submitted 69,000 packets containing 6.7 million articles, of which 20,000 (0.3%) were rejected. The Common Control Mark of the International Hallmarking Convention was applied to 3.8m articles. The sale of Dealers' Notices doubled to 3,954 indicating that more retail outlets are offering jewellery and silverware.

REGISTRATIONS

During the year there were 584 enquiries, which resulted in 438 new registrations with the London Assay Office, an increase of 24%. This resulted in 793 sponsor mark punches being manufactured.

ANTIQUe PLATE COMMITTEE

A total of 142 pieces were examined, of which 42

conformed to the Hallmarking Act, 54 bore illegal additions, 39 bore counterfeit marks, six bore transposed marks and one was a duty dodger. As ever, the Office remains indebted to the Committee and Panel members who provide their knowledgeable advice free of charge. These bare facts do not do justice to the challenges faced by the Committee and the sophistication of recent fake pieces, which has caused disquiet in the antique silver trade. The Metropolitan Police is continuing its investigation, and pieces have been seized as evidence.

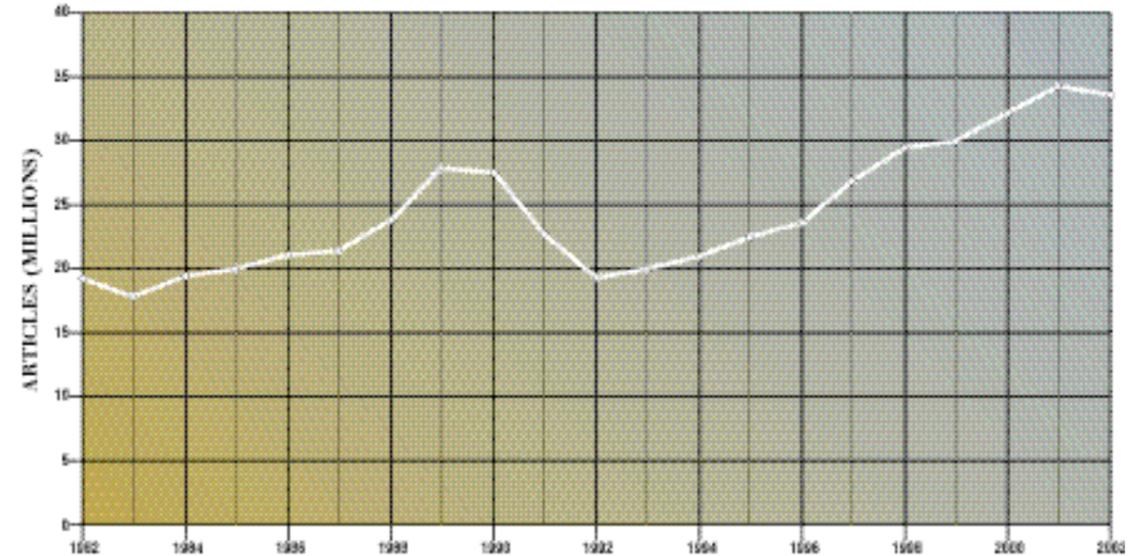
SUSPECTED OFFENCES

Apart from the above, a total of 65 suspected offences against the Hallmarking Act were reported to the Office by Local Authority Trading Standards Offices. Twenty witness statements were issued after examining articles.

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

The revised, and simplified, accession procedure was used in practice for the first time by the inspection group on a visit to the Assay Office in Latvia, which has now been invited to accede to the Convention. Inspection visits have been requested by Cyprus and Israel. Ratification of accession by Poland and Lithuania is awaited. Hungary, Slovenia and Uzbekistan are actively considering accession. Representatives from Dubai attended the Standing Committee as observers for the first time. There are now more observers than members and this demonstrates that independent third party verification of precious metal articles for the purpose of free and fair trade is not just an issue which is confined to the EU. Since its inception, the Secretariat of the Convention has been provided by EFTA. As many of the original EFTA countries have transferred to the EU, EFTA is no longer the organisation it once was. The staff of the Secretariat also provided services to the Pharmaceutical Inspectorate Convention. An agreement has been reached by the two Conventions whereby the Secretariat will transfer from EFTA to the World Health Organisation. It is a fortuitous coincidence that this reflects the international interest in the Convention from countries outside the EU.

HALLMARKING 1982-2002



ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN ASSAY OFFICES

Under the Chairmanship of Mrs M Ulaczyk of the Warsaw Assay Office, two round robins (fineness tests) were conducted. The Association is indebted to the Prague Assay Office and the Swiss Assay Office for organising the distribution of samples and collating the results. At a recent meeting, Austria reported that changing from compulsory to voluntary hallmarking had resulted in 14% non-compliance being detected by market surveillance. With the prospect of the draft directive being re-activated, the next meeting under the Chairmanship of Dr I Karis of the Cyprus

Assay Office will be useful in discerning any changes in the national positions over the past ten years. The Holland Assay Office continues to be the Treasurer and the London Assay Office provides the Secretariat.

A HAIR-RAISING MOMENT!

Whilst learning from one's own experience is recommended, learning from others is better. Craig Johnston and Wayne Plummer underwent a sponsored leg wax, raising £450 for Children in Need. Their advice is that this should not be attempted by the Freemen and Liverymen of the Company as a means of charitable giving! ■

European
hallmarking countries
(coloured gold)



WORK DEALT WITH BY THE LONDON ASSAY OFFICE FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 2002																	
NUMBER OF ARTICLES																	
	GOLD							SILVER					PLATINUM				
	950	925	916 22 carat	750 18 carat	585 14 carat	375 9 carat	TOTAL	800	825 Sterling	850 21 carat	925	TOTAL	950	950	950	TOTAL	
BRITISH	812	0	387,363	857,877	31,293	2,377,214	3,424,172	186	1,058,996	6,747	2,045	1,367,149	162	176	66,693	49	58,987
FOREIGN	150	0	56,570	229,933	34,109	1,136,982	1,593,161	516	981,334	627	44	692,421	0	66	11,636	11	11,815
TOTAL	912	0	453,433	1,087,810	65,402	3,514,196	5,017,333	702	1,739,999	7,374	2,089	1,745,977	162	244	107,492	61	107,676

WORK DEALT WITH BY THE LONDON ASSAY OFFICE FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 2002																	
WEIGHT OF ARTICLES																	
	GOLD (grams)							SILVER (grams)					PLATINUM (grams)				
	950	925	916 22 carat	750 18 carat	585 14 carat	375 9 carat	TOTAL	800	825 Sterling	850 21 carat	925	TOTAL	950	950	950	TOTAL	
BRITISH	8,741	0	3,058,929	3,390,205	180,720	11,323,000	17,943,174	0	24,148	749	144	26,044	1,118	1,326	684,937	332	697,156
FOREIGN	156	0	369,466	1,395,368	14,335	6,202,593	8,922,058	26	17,643	25	2	17,896	0	420	70,370	119	70,939
TOTAL	8,999	0	3,427,995	4,775,563	195,055	17,525,493	26,865,232	26	41,791	774	146	43,940	1,118	1,746	755,307	451	768,095