

# ASSAY OFFICE report

David Evans

**Right:**  
Some substantial items of silver still find their way into the office. Delphis Lefrancois, Dave Puckett and Tracy Harrington had three big problems on their hands

**Below:**  
HRH the Prince of Wales inspecting the work of Paulette Goddard during his visit to the Hall on 10 February 2005



## ACTIVITY

Although the last quarter of 2004 was the busiest of the year, it was not as busy as the previous year. Consequently the year as a whole showed a slight decrease of 2%, although 22 carat gold remained the same, 18 carat gold increased by 5% and platinum increased by 16%. The major throughput remained 9 carat gold and this declined by 13%. However, for the past five years hallmarking in the UK has been at unprecedented levels, mainly due to the increase in imported articles. These articles are usually individually wrapped, often in retail packaging, and as a result they require more space. The Office was accordingly reconfigured to cope with this feature.

## REGISTRATIONS

There were 448 new registrations for the year which resulted from 619 enquiries, representing 5% of total registrations. As the overall number of



articles marked declined, a conclusion which can be reached is that as many of those who register their mark leave the trade as join it.

## ANTIQUÉ PLATE COMMITTEE

A total of 144 pieces were examined of which 76 conformed to the Hallmarking Act. Of the remainder, there were 43 pieces with alterations and additions, 7 with transposed marks, and 11 with counterfeit marks. For pieces suspected of bearing transposed marks X-Radiography is now used to assist the Committee in reaching a conclusion.

## SUSPECTED OFFENCES

Seventeen suspected offences against the Hallmarking Act were reported to the Office by Local Authority Trading Standards Offices which resulted in four prosecutions. Training sessions have been provided for Trading Standards Authorities. These are free of charge. An increasing number of complaints has been received regarding jewellery purchases from Internet auction sites. A further problem is the faking of familiar brand names on jewellery.

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

There have been no meetings of International Standards Committee 174 or CEN TC283, both of which deal with jewellery. This is disappointing in view of the global discussion within the trade on the definition of white gold which is needed to satisfy manufacturers, retailers and the expectations of consumers. The BSI Technical Committee for Jewellery has met, the principal topics being the wear test for nickel and watches.

## INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

Successful inspections were made of the Assay Offices in Hungary and Ukraine. Slovakia and Slovenia have formally expressed their intention to initiate the accession procedure. Both France and Spain will be holding discussions with their respective trades before making a decision. Of the ten countries which joined the European Union last year, eight have either acceded to the Convention or are in the process of doing so. Further afield, representatives of the Assay Offices in Bahrain, Dubai, China and India attended the last meeting of the Standing Committee, and have expressed an intention to accede in due course. If this comes about, the Convention will be twice the size that it was two years ago.

## STAFF

John Forbes, who was Deputy Warden from 1953 to 1983 passed away in January 2005. A former Chairman of the Convention, he retained a keen interest in European developments and remained a source of sage advice and encouragement. A memorial service will be held later in the year. Chris Clements retired from the Silver Department after 30 years' service. He now only samples cocoa.

## BRITISH HALLMARKING COUNCIL

In the latest round of government cuts announced recently the Council has been earmarked as one of the 'quangos' to be abandoned by 2007. It may be subsumed within another Council with a larger consumer remit. The British Hallmarking Council was

established by the Hallmarking Act of 1973 with the duty of ensuring that 'adequate facilities for the assaying and hallmarking of precious metal are available... in the United Kingdom, of supervising the activities of assay offices...ensuring the enforcement of the law with respect to hallmarking and of advising the Secretary of State...concerning the execution of this Act...' Who will be in charge of these responsibilities in the future is by no means clear.

**Below:**  
European map of hallmarking countries



WORK DEALT WITH BY THE LONDON ASSAY OFFICE FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 2004																	
NUMBER OF ARTICLES																	
	GOLD							SILVER				PLATINUM					
	999	995	918 22 carat	750 18 carat	585 14 carat	515 9 carat	TOTAL	999	925 sterling	800 Britannia	999	TOTAL	950	900	850	800	TOTAL
BRITISH	763	30	341,062	689,510	35,388	1,866,875	2,893,262	2,164	3,781	919,238	2,142	918,273	87	136,068	277	7	136,470
FOREIGN	50	26	122,070	272,701	21,036	1,539,287	1,814,074	2,065	110	669,590	1,701	653,716	3	19,621	272	0	19,896
TOTAL	813	56	463,132	962,211	56,424	3,386,162	4,707,336	4,229	3,891	1,588,828	3,843	1,572,089	90	155,689	549	7	156,246

WORK DEALT WITH BY THE LONDON ASSAY OFFICE FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 2004																	
WEIGHT OF ARTICLES																	
	GOLD (grams)							SILVER (kilograms)				PLATINUM (grams)					
	999	995	918 22 carat	750 18 carat	585 14 carat	515 9 carat	TOTAL	999	925 sterling	800 Britannia	999	TOTAL	950	900	850	800	TOTAL
BRITISH	10,313	302	2,008,899	3,382,830	113,700	8,857,264	15,502,508	226	510	22,194	31	22,938	619	927,323	1,752	176	929,251
FOREIGN	1,051	60	1,209,132	1,566,945	107,600	6,546,194	9,534,922	37	1	18,062	32	18,162	25	147,273	2,441	0	149,738
TOTAL	11,364	362	3,218,031	4,949,775	221,300	15,403,458	25,037,430	263	511	40,256	63	41,100	644	1,074,596	4,193	176	1,079,289