

UPCYCLING SILVER FLATWARE INTO JEWELLERY

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PHOTOGRAPHS: LAUREL GUILFOYLE, JAYNE RIMINGTON



As consumers we are becoming increasingly conscious of how products are made and their impact on the environment. This has led to a significant increase in re-purposing and upcycling of goods by all sorts of people from hobbyists to large-scale manufacturers. By upcycling unloved silver cutlery, it is possible to create a beautiful piece of jewellery and with care preserve its original history and provenance.

The act of crafting jewellery from a piece of silver flatware (knives, forks and spoons) is thought to date back to the 1600s. With silverware being expensive it would only be used by royalty or in wealthy households. When pieces of silver cutlery went missing it's thought that the servants, whose job it was to polish the flatware, stole items that they would then fashion into a ring or other piece of jewellery for their loved ones. Many servants were too poor to be able to afford to buy a wedding or engagement ring, so this would give them the means to have one made. Many households had their family crest engraved on the cutlery handle; this meant the culprits could be found and punished for their crime. Cutlery jewellery has seen a resurgence due to fashion, the growing interest in handcrafts, the rising cost of precious metals and environmental ethics.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

As a jeweller, silversmith or craftsperson you will appreciate the time, effort and process that an antique silver object has had invested in it. You may even cringe at the thought of re-purposing such an object as many are beautiful and valuable. However, there are many pieces of used antique silver cutlery that are unloved and would make a perfect object to remodel and give new life to. Before embarking on this process, it is important to be aware of the legal requirements in the UK, especially if the intention is to sell the object.

When making and selling silver a jeweller should have his or her own hallmark and send their work to their nearest Assay Office so that it may be tested and hallmarked, not only to protect themselves as a maker but also to give the consumer reassurance that the piece is being sold as described. Any object that is described as silver and weighs 7.78g or more requires a hallmark. Each precious metal has an allowance weight that it must conform to. If a piece of silver of 7.78g or more does not



The annual 'Make Your Mark' exhibition at Goldsmiths' Hall

possess a hallmark, then it can only be described as 'white metal' when selling.

The Antique Plate Committee (APC) advises the Assay Office on spurious silver articles. They examine and establish the authenticity of the pieces and determine if the items have been illegally transformed. This may be by change of use or by altering with an addition to the piece. When upcycling, there are many potential scenarios that you will need to consider; for example if you are mixing metals, or if you intend to add or subtract the silver or if you wish to preserve the original hallmark. It is worth being clear on the alterations you wish to make before you design and start working on these pieces as

this will influence the way in which you make, finish and hallmark your final piece.

'Since 1478, the hallmark has included a distinctive date letter indicating the year of hallmarking. The temptation to make an article appear older than it is by using counterfeit punches, or by transferring a genuine hallmark from an antique into a modern article has proved too great for some. This is an offence under the Hallmarking Act (1973). It is also an offence to alter a hallmarked article without the written permission of any Assay Office. Articles altered legitimately bear an 'additions' mark, indicating the year of alteration.'

Assayofficelondon.co.uk



Some of the sources you can use for finding silver cutlery

If you propose to upcycle a piece of antique silver and use a section of the piece that does not carry the original hallmark, or if you cut the original hallmark off with the intention of making a new object, then you will need to send the object into the Assay Office as normal to be tested and have your own hallmark added. For example, if the bowl part of a spoon is converted into a pendant and the original hallmark is on the handle, which has been removed.

However, if you wish to incorporate the original makers' hallmark and the antique silver piece has been altered then this will need to be sent into the Assay Office to be inspected,

Hallmarks indicate the provenance of the spoon (top) and pickle fork (bottom)

have a certificate issued and a laser mark indicating that an alteration has been made will be added to the piece. When you go through this procedure you can also request your own hallmark to be added alongside the original hallmark. There are charges for this service, but it means that the item is legal to sell and will have the benefit of displaying historic marks and can be sold as such.

The pickle fork featured in this article, which has been converted into a ring and a pendant would cover both above scenarios. The pendant doesn't bear the original hallmark, therefore can be stamped with my hallmark as a new piece of silver. However, the ring, which is made from the handle of the fork, bears the original hallmark so this would need to be sent in, inspected and given a laser mark showing alteration and a certificate. I could also then request my hallmark be stamped alongside the original hallmark.

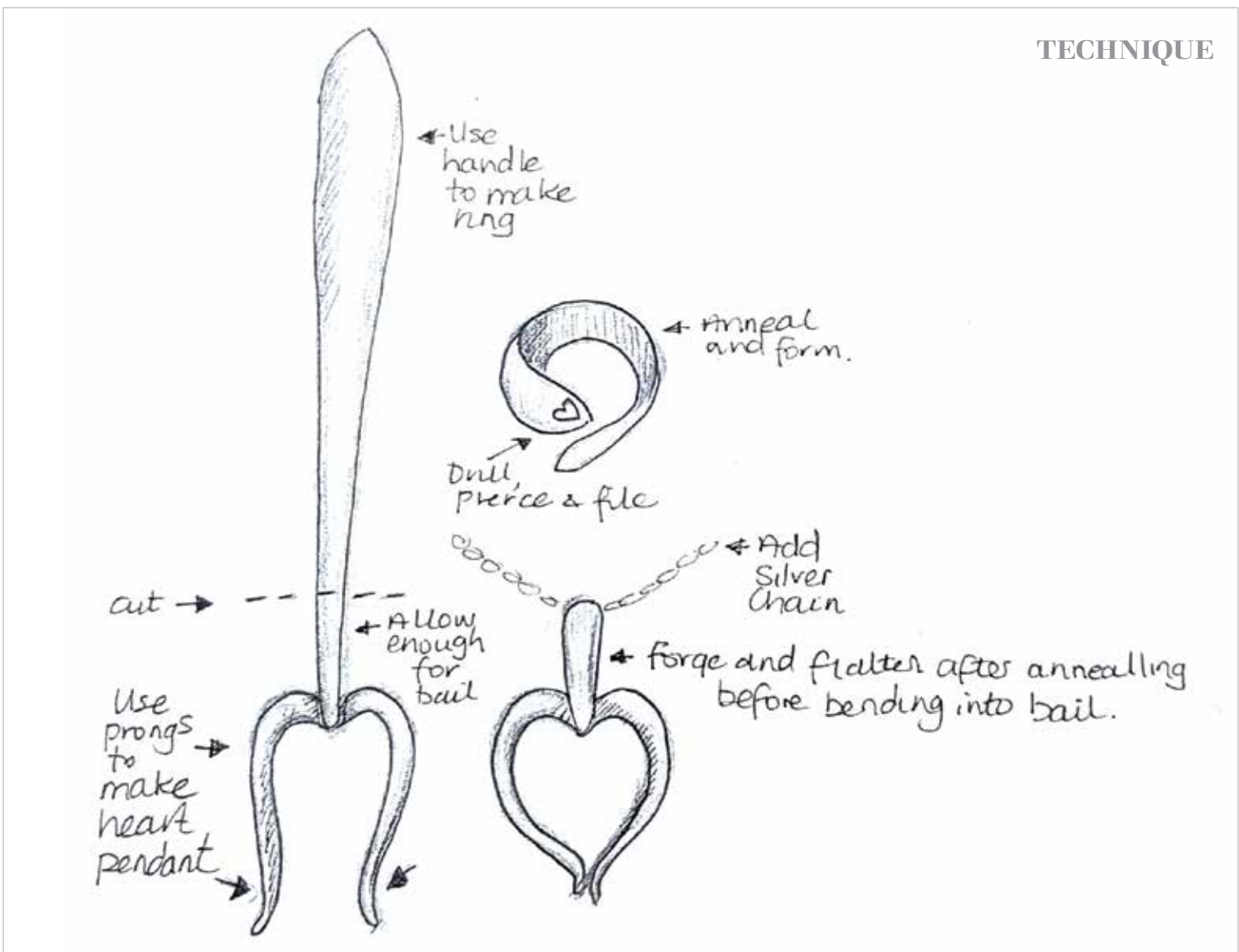
The London Assay Office at Goldsmiths' Hall holds an annual exhibition, 'Make Your Mark' that encourages students and graduates of precious metal courses to visit where they can

learn all about the process of hallmarking as well as applying for their own hallmark if they haven't already got one registered. If you are in any doubt about the piece you plan to make and how the law would affect it then it is advisable to check with your nearest Assay Office.

SOURCING THE MATERIAL

There are many places where you can look for used Sterling silver cutlery. The most common are charity shops, car boot sales, flea markets and online auction sites. If visiting a shop or a market it is worth carrying a magnifying glass or jewellery loupe so that you can give the object closer inspection. Shop around to get an idea of a fair price and have an idea of what scale you would like to work at and what type of pieces you would like to make. Bear in mind that if you buy larger pieces of silver that you may need larger tools.

If using online auction sites then make sure you read the full description and inspect the photographs carefully, also allow for postage costs when considering how much you are prepared



Plan the finished look of your piece with notes and sketches

to bid for the item. If looking for markets to visit there are many online resources that you can subscribe to and keep you up to date with events, for example, [fleamarketinsiders.com/best-vintage-markets-and-antique-fairs-in-england](https://www.fleamarketinsiders.com/best-vintage-markets-and-antique-fairs-in-england)

IDENTIFY THE MATERIAL

A jewellery loupe or magnifying glass is helpful to examine the hallmarks as they tend to be small and can be difficult to distinguish if the item is well worn. When you do your research on upcycling silver it is worth learning about the UK Assay Office hallmarks so that you can better understand the provenance of the metal pieces you are interested in. Common letters to find are 'EPNS'; these stand for 'Electro Plated Nickel Silver'. Nickel Silver is the base metal that the silver is plated onto. When looking for Sterling silver, the hallmarks you need to look for are the lion passant or Britannia mark. In Scotland the thistle mark represents silver from Edinburgh and lion rampart mark is silver from Glasgow and

Edinburgh. Silver from Dublin is represented by a crowned harp mark.

The top piece of silver in the photograph is a spoon that was made in Sheffield; the Assay Office is represented by a crown. The lion passant shows that the spoon is silver, the 'W' and shape of shield shows that it was made in the year 1964 and the letters 'FH' are the maker's mark for 'Francis Howard Ltd', based in Sheffield. The bottom piece of silver is a pickle fork that shows the makers mark 'A' for Abraham Bros. Ltd, an anchor for the Birmingham Assay Office, the lion passant identifying that this is Sterling silver, and the letter 'B' and shape of shield which shows this was made in 1926. The '925' mark alone does not guarantee that the item is silver; this could be an item from another country or simply a 925 stamped by the maker and not tested by an Assay Office. If in doubt, contact your nearest Assay Office.

DESIGNING THE PIECE

Take the time to make some sketches and notes on the design of your piece, after all

this could be a commission that becomes an heirloom. You will need to make informed decisions about how the original piece will be transformed and then plan the finished look. After examining and researching the piece you may want to make the original hallmark a feature (in which case follow the procedure mentioned above about legal requirements and sending to the Assay Office).

You will also need to think about how the object will be worn and if it needs a chain or other fittings and how these will be attached. When working on this fork project it was important to make sure the measuring was accurate as it was made into two final pieces. Also, be aware of where the original piece has been soldered and that when you reheat to anneal the piece that the joints may be vulnerable especially if you intend to bend near them. Be sympathetic to the piece and if it already has a beautiful shape then incorporating this into the design can make the process simpler and preserve an element of the original design. ►

How to turn your cutlery into jewellery

This technique shows you how a pickle fork can be changed into two items of jewellery. The first task is to create a design for the new pieces; the handle is to be made into a ring while the prongs will be shaped into a heart-shaped pendant.



HOW TO MAKE

MATERIALS & TOOLS

- Sterling silver flatware (such as spoon, fork or knife)
- Torch
- Ceramic/soldering block
- Tweezers
- Pickle
- Piercing saw and blades
- Centre punch
- Hammer
- Steel block or anvil
- Flexshaft/Dremel with drill and drill bits
- Wire cutters
- Pliers – flat and round
- Ring mandrel
- Rawhide mallet
- Needle files
- Sanding sticks
- Polishing equipment
- Goggles and dust mask

RESOURCES

Widely available from advertisers in this magazine

MEASURE

1 To ensure the handle is long enough to make the correct size of ring, you will need to use a ring sizer to ensure the ring is appropriately proportioned. Then, using wire around a labelled ring mandrel, wrap the wire at the correct size letter. Use wire cutters to remove the wire, open and line up along the silver handle to mark where the ring is to be cut from. Allow enough in the length of the silver if the ring is to be a wraparound.

MARKINGS FOR ALTERATIONS

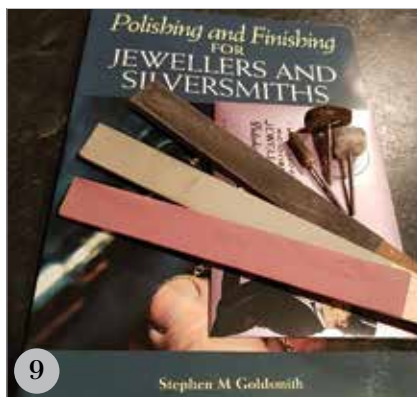
2 Use a Sharpie to mark any alterations you wish to make before shaping the piece. This may involve cutting, piercing shapes out, engraving, hammering or stamping patterns. The heart shape at the end of the handle will be a feature of the ring when it is formed. The line at the top of the handle is where the fork will be cut for the end of the ring and the top of the bail for the pendant.

DRILLING AND PIERCING

3 If any shapes are to be pierced out of the silver this is best to be done before the piece has been shaped, then it can be held securely in a vice or clamped onto a wooden block before drilling. Use a centre punch and a hammer to make a guide mark before drilling. Use a small drill bit that will make a hole large enough to pass the saw blade. Feed the saw blade through the hole and secure the other end of the blade into the saw. Using the bench peg to keep the piece steady pierce out the shape that you have marked. Use needle files to neaten up the shape and remove sharp edges.

CUTTING AND FILING

4 Depending on the piece of silver and the design that you plan determines when you use the saw for any cutting. It may be that the silver you have will be bent and shaped in one piece and that no cutting is required. For this design the fork has been cut in two parts. This has been done after the piercing in the handle because it is easier to work with and secure as the item is a larger piece. Use needle files and sanding sticks to neaten up and remove sharp edges. ▶



ANNEALING

5 When the original item was made it is likely that it was made from sheet silver, then cut and forged into shape. During the process of making the object the silver will have been hammered and work hardened to make it robust. To enable the forming and shaping of the piece into a new object the silver needs to be annealed which involves heating it so that the metal softens and becomes malleable. Heat the silver by gently stroking the flame evenly along the piece until it is a salmon pink colour. Remove the flame, allow the piece to cool for a few seconds then using tweezers place the piece in a bowl of water to quench. When it is cooled down then remove from the water, dry and then place in pickle to remove oxidation. If you do not take the time to anneal and then try to bend and shape the object, then there is a risk that it will crack or break.

FORGING

6 When the silver has been annealed it can be forged and shaped on a steel block or anvil. The handle of the fork is quite thick and round, so to be able to bend and shape it into a pendant and ring the silver has been forged flat. Using the cross pein end of the hammer,

the strokes have been made along the length of the handle. This creates a wider and flatter shape. It may be necessary to anneal again if the object requires a lot of hammering and forging. When you have reached the required shape and thickness use a needle file and sanding sticks to remove sharp edges and neaten up.

FORMING

7 After annealing, the fork prongs have been shaped into a heart pendant by using flat nose pliers and bending gently. At the top of the prongs a small amount of the handle has been left and forged so that this can be bent into a pendant bail. This has been done with round nose pliers. The same pliers have been used to start to shape the ring from the fork handle, and then the silver is placed on a ring mandrel and formed using a rawhide mallet. This is then gently hammered until each end overlaps and the ring has reached the correct size on the mandrel.

POLISHING, FINISHING AND HALLMARKING

8 There are many ways of finishing your pieces. You may wish to have a matte, hammered or high-shine finish. The nature of

the desired finish will determine what tools and accessories that you require. You may wish to try out different finishes on scrap pieces of metal. Once you have filed off any sharp edges and refined pierced shapes with needle files then you can work through different grades of sanding sticks, papers and cloths. There are also many options for polishing with various flexshaft/Dremel attachments. To achieve high standards on the finish of your work it is worth reading, researching and experimenting until you discover the techniques and tools you need.

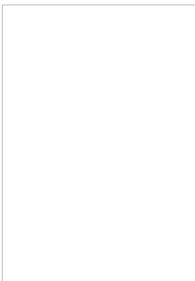
As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, if you intend to sell the upcycled silver then you will need to have the object hallmarked if it weighs over 7.78grams. If you are unsure about the process or have any queries regarding hallmarking, then contact one of the UK Assay Offices and they will advise you.

CONTACT

fireball-lily.co.uk
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USEFUL LINKS

There are four Assay Offices in the UK:
London: assayofficelondon.co.uk
Edinburgh: edinburghassayoffice.co.uk
Birmingham: theassayoffice.com
Sheffield: assayoffice.co.uk



BIOGRAPHY

Jayne is a Designer/Maker Silversmith that is currently studying for a BA (Hons) in Glass, Ceramics, Jewellery & Metal at UCA Farnham. She creates contemporary commissioned silverware and jewellery in various materials and sells her work by exhibiting through galleries and at craft fairs. Jayne has been a contributor to *MJ* magazine for five years.

