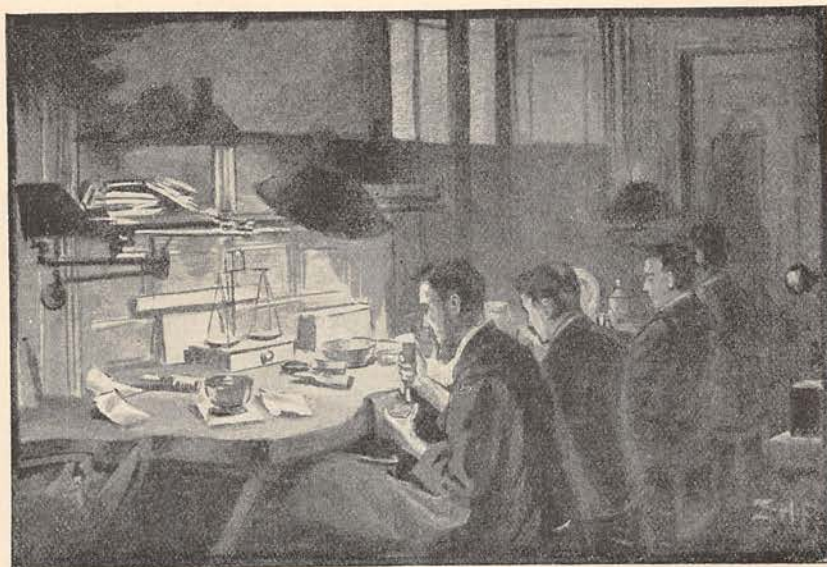


HALL-MARKING.



AT GOLDSMITHS' HALL.



EVERYBODY knows the theory of the hall-mark—that it is a guarantee of genuineness, up to a certain standard, of any manufactured article of gold or silver. But everybody does not know the origin and process of hall-marking, nor how to interpret the true value

and significance of hall-marks.

The custom itself is an old one—at least seven hundred years old, if we go back to the consolidation of the Goldsmiths' Company of London. In the early part, indeed, of the twelfth century, it was found necessary by the workers in precious metals to take steps for the protection of their trade and the public from dishonest workers and fraudulent traders. Thus was formed a Guild which was the germ of the great Goldsmiths' Company—which continues one of the wealthiest and most powerful trade corporations of London, but was not gifted with a charter until some time after it had been in useful and active existence. This Guild instituted marks on gold and silver plate as a protection for the public, and so made it necessary for all makers to take their goods to Goldsmiths' Hall to be officially stamped, after assay.

This custom, first established in London, was afterwards adopted by all the Goldsmiths' Companies throughout the kingdom. Some of the provincial towns have very old records. York, for instance, as an assay town, dates back to 1423; Newcastle-on-Tyne to the middle of the thirteenth century; and Chester to the fourteenth century. At one time there were twelve

assay towns, with authorised offices for the stamping of gold and silver plate—viz., London, York, Exeter, Chester, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Norwich, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, Sheffield, Bristol, and Birmingham. But of late years the offices at York, Exeter, Bristol, Norwich, and Newcastle have been closed, and now the assay towns are these: London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, Chester, Sheffield, and Birmingham.

To the Guardians and Wardens of the several companies belongs the duty of selecting experienced and suitable persons to make the necessary assays of goods submitted for marking. The Wardens superintend, and have to take oath before a Justice of the Peace on election, that they will faithfully discharge their duties, and not disclose the pattern or design or other secret relating to any plate brought to them for assay. The Assay Master has to take a similar oath, and also to give sureties that he will discharge his duties faithfully and not engage in the buying or selling or manufacture of plate.

But why is it necessary to test the quality of gold and silver plate? Because "gold" and "silver" in the arts are not always the definite and exact terms that they are in commerce and finance. In dealing with currency matters, for instance, gold and silver means bullion—the actual precious metals themselves. But in the arts, gold and silver are terms that may be applied to composite metals of widely differing values.

Take gold, for instance. In the arts, pure gold is rarely used, and pure gold contains 24 parts, or carats, to the ounce. (A carat is not a weight, except

as applied to diamonds, but a proportion.) What is called "standard gold" contains 22 carats of gold and 2 carats of alloy to the ounce, and any gold articles hall-marked 22 carats are worth their weight in sovereigns, apart from any added value as works of art. But besides this "standard gold" there are five qualities recognised by official markings—viz., compounds of 20 parts of gold and 4 of alloy; of 18 parts of gold and 6 of alloy; of 15 parts of gold and 9 of alloy; of 12 parts of gold and 12 of alloy; and of 9 parts of gold and 15 of alloy—to the ounce.

These qualities are called respectively 20-, 18-, 15-, 12-, and 9-carat gold. And one object of hall-marking is to protect the public from paying the price, say, of 22-carat gold for an article made of 9-carat gold.

Once upon a time the term "fine gold" was applied by jewellers only to pure (*i.e.*, 24-carat) gold, but now it is applied indifferently to all gold above 12 carats (*i.e.*, 15 carats and upwards), because modern art is enabled to give the appearance of the pure to the alloyed article. By extracting the alloy from the surface only, the skilful worker can leave a thin crust of pure gold upon even a 10-carat article, and the buyer has nothing but the hall-mark to show him what he really is buying.

There is not a more wonderful mineral in the world than gold, and it is no wonder that it dominates society. Only platinum exceeds it (and that but slightly) in specific gravity, and yet it can be beaten into leaves of which it would take 200,000 to make an inch of thickness. If a half-sovereign be beaten out, it can be made to cover a surface of 3,294 square feet. With a metal so ductile one can do almost anything. Hence its unrivalled value in the arts, and hence its adaptability to the arts of the swindler.

The method of assaying and determining the proportions of alloy is too technical for these pages. We will assume, then, that the working goldsmith or silversmith has sent his piece of plate, or ornament, or watch-case, to the assay office most convenient for him. He has bought the metal from the refiners of a given quality, and he now calls upon the appointed authority to testify that his finished work is of the declared quality.

If it is not "up to the mark" the authorities at Goldsmiths' Hall will break up the article and return the metal to him; and they will do this even if it is merely the presence of solder that brings the test below the declared quality of the whole. If the article is found by the Assayer to be "up to the mark," it is then hall-marked.

Each office has its own scale of charges for assaying and marking, and these charges are assessed not so much with a view to profit as to cover the expenses of the establishment.

A Parliamentary paper recently issued contains a return to the House of Commons of all these charges. It would take too much space to give them all, or even a selection; but as an example, gold watch-cases are charged for assaying and marking by the

London Hall, 9d.; Birmingham, 5d.; Chester, 6d.; Dublin, 8d.; and Glasgow, 1s. Silver watch-cases are charged at London, 2d.; at Chester, 1d. per oz.; at Dublin, 6d. each. At Birmingham silver-wares, not exceeding in weight 5 dwts. each, excepting watch pendants, are charged 3d. per dozen; chains, 1d. per oz.; other wares, $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per oz. At Sheffield silver goods not exceeding 10 dwts. each in weight, are charged 3d. per dozen; and other wares, $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per oz. At Edinburgh a charge of 1s. per oz. is made for stamping gold, and of 2d. per oz. for stamping silver, with assay charges in addition of 1s. per gold article, and 3d. per silver article. These are mentioned merely as examples, and in the report of the London Goldsmiths' Hall, it is expressly stated that owing to the thorough examination made, "every single article, and every part of such article, being separately assayed," the expenses of the Assay Office have for many years exceeded the fees received. Appended to the schedule of rates of the London Company is the following note:—"Ordered by the Wardens that your name-mark be struck before sent to Hall, so that the same be perfect when the work is finished; and that the note for the delivery of goods sent to be marked be made out in the same manner as the notes sent with the work in the morning with a receipt at the bottom."

What then are the marks impressed on the articles?

First, there is the Standard mark, accompanied by an emblem which indicates the place or "Hall" of Assay.

Second, there used to be the duty-mark, the King's or Queen's head, denoting that the duty has been paid—but this mark is now abolished, as the duty was removed in 1890; it is to be found, therefore, only on plate made before that date.

Third, the date-mark, which is a letter indicating the year in which the assay was made.

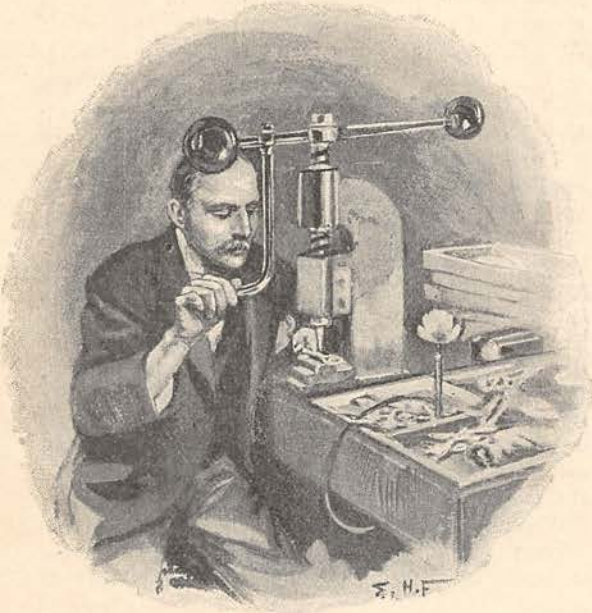
And lastly, the maker's initials or name, *i.e.*, the name-mark.



HALL-MARKING WEDDING RINGS.

The Hall-mark, *par excellence*, is the stamp of the town or assay office, and it indicates a great deal.

As we have said, five towns which used to have assay offices no longer possess them, and the hall-marks of these may be indicated first. The hall-mark of York was five lions on a cross, and the standard-mark



HALL-MARKING SMALL PLATE.

appended was a leopard's head; but nothing has been marked there since 1857. The hall-mark of Exeter was, until 1877, a castle with three towers, but only 22-carat wedding rings and silver goods were marked there; silver cups, etc., are in existence marked at Exeter in the sixteenth century with a capital letter X and a crown over it. The hall-mark of Norwich was once a castle and lion, and afterwards a leopard's head. The hall-mark of Newcastle-on-Tyne was, until 1888, three castles; and this office also had a standard-mark for silver of a leopard's head. Bristol, although an authorised assay town, does not seem ever to have selected a hall-mark—at all events, no goods were actually marked there.

To come now to the existing Halls. So long ago as the year 1300, the leopard's head, crowned, was selected by the London Goldsmiths' Company for both standard gold and silver, the standard for gold being then 22 carats. The date letter was first added in 1436, and on old silver plate the date letter is now often the determining factor of value. In 1545 a standard-mark was adopted in addition to the hall-mark—a lion passant, stamped alongside the leopard's head on both gold and silver.

In 1697 was adopted the new standard of silver metal called Britannia; for this the hall-mark is a lion's head, and the standard-mark the figure of Britannia with trident. The old silver standard was reverted to in 1720, with the old markings, but the Britannia standard and markings are still legal, though now little used.

When in 1798 18-carat gold was introduced, the standard-mark adopted for this quality was a crown with the figures 18. A change was made in the London hall-mark in 1823 by the removal of the crown from the head of the leopard, and from then till now the mark has been the uncrowned head, very like a cat's. In 1844 the old standard-mark for 22-carat gold was abandoned for a crown and the figures 22. Then, when in 1854 15-, 12-, and 9-carat gold was authorised by law, the following standard-marks were adopted for these qualities: the figures 15.625 for 15-carat gold, the figures 12.5 for 12-carat gold, and the figures 9.375 for 9-carat gold.

At Edinburgh, the hall-mark is a castle with three towers. The standard-mark for 22-carat gold is a thistle and crown with the figures 22; for 18-carat gold a thistle without the crown and the figures 18; and for 15-, 12-, and 9-carat gold, the figures only. For silver the standard-mark is also the thistle.

Dublin has for hall-mark the figure of Hibernia in profile, seated, with arm outstretched. For 22-carat gold the standard-mark is a harp with a crown over it and the figures 22 underneath; but Dublin has the exclusive privilege of marking 20-carat gold, with a plume of three feathers and the figures 20. For 18-carat gold the standard-mark is a unicorn's head and the figures 18; and for 15-, 12-, and 9-carat gold the marks are the same as at the London Hall. For silver the Dublin standard-mark is a crowned harp.

At Glasgow, the hall-mark is the city emblem—the tree, with bird, bell, and fish. The standard-mark for 22- and 18-carat gold is a lion rampant, and the figures 22 and 18 respectively. The same mark is also used with the figures 15, 12, and 9, to denote the other qualities. The standard-mark for silver is also a lion rampant.

Chester is a very old assay town, and the hall-mark originally was the city arms. Since 1784, however, the mark has been three wheat-sheaves with a sword erect between the two uppermost. The standard-mark for 22- and 18-carat gold is a crown with the figures; for the lower qualities the same as London. The standard-mark for silver is the same as London—the lion passant.

We now come to the more modern offices chiefly used for the stamping of silver. And here it should be noted that although there are six standards of gold, as already explained, there are only two standards of silver. These are what is called "sterling silver," being equal to coin, consisting of 11 oz. 2 dwts. of pure silver and 18 dwts. of alloy to the pound; and "Britannia silver" (now little used), consisting of 11 oz. 10 dwts. of pure silver, and 10 dwts. of alloy, to the pound. Technically the standards are "925" and "959" respectively—1,000 representing pure silver.

The Sheffield office was established in 1773 for the marking of silver goods only, and an enormous business is done there in assaying silver-plate of all kinds. The hall-mark is a crown, and the standard-mark the same as London—the lion passant.

The Birmingham office was also established in 1773.

but gold as well as silver is assayed there. Indeed, this is the largest of all the provincial offices, and it stamps more goods than all the others put together. The hall-mark is an anchor, and the standard-marks for both gold and silver are precisely the same as London.

Now as to the date-mark—the duty-mark, as we have said, being no longer necessary. Each office has a letter to represent the year in which the article is stamped. The first twenty letters of the alphabet only are used in London, excluding J, represented in various types—a different letter for each year and a change of type every twenty years. Most of the other Halls, however, use the whole alphabet, and the round is the “cycle” of a date-mark.

In London the year-letter is changed on 29th May, in Birmingham on 24th June, in Chester on 5th August, in Sheffield on 24th June, in Edinburgh and Glasgow on 24th June, in Dublin in May. The present cycles began in London in 1876 with **A**; Birmingham in 1875 with **a**; Chester in 1884 with **A**; Sheffield in 1893 with **a**; Edinburgh in 1882 with **a**; Glasgow in 1871 with **A**; Dublin in 1871 with **A**.

We need not give the extinct offices, but complete tables are to be found in jewellers' guides, and other technical handbooks, of all the date-marks of all the assay offices for each year from the earliest marking to the present time. It requires a very long and large experience to read off the dates of old plate at first sight from the marks, and, indeed, some of the date-marks are so alike, though representing different cycles, as to easily mislead all but an expert. In modern plate the difficulty is not so great, although it has been suggested that, to prevent confusion, a larger number of types might be employed, and a longer interval permitted before the re-employment of a type once used.

The maker's name-mark is stamped at the place of manufacture, with a name, or initials, previously registered at the assay office. The stamp must correspond exactly with the device registered at the Hall; but a secret factory-mark, indicating a department or workman, is sometimes allowed in addition.

All gold and silver plate and watch-cases for sale in the United Kingdom must, according to law, be assayed and hall-marked. Watch-chains need not be so marked, but they sell better when they are.

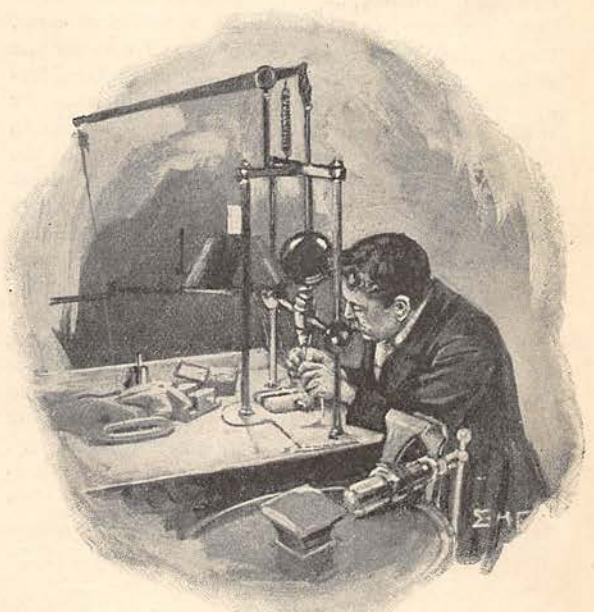
The penalty on every dealer who sells or exchanges any ware of gold or silver having a forged or counterfeit or removable mark, is £10 for every article. The penalty on every dealer who erases or defaces or alters a hall-mark, is £5 for every offence. The penalty on every officer of any of the halls who marks as standard goods that are under standard is £20.

Some makers mark inferior articles as 9-c. or 10-c. These are not hall-marks, and should only be accepted when the maker's name is known and trusted.

With regard to foreign plate, the following is the process adopted, according to the Parliamentary paper

above named. The plate is brought to Goldsmiths' Hall during business hours in securely-fastened cases (often of considerable size), in the custody of a Custom House official, to whom the Assay officer must grant a formal receipt. The cases are then opened, the contents weighed and sorted, each parcel being treated on its merits, so that the whole consignment may not be condemned for a defect in any single lot. The Assay officer prepares two lists of the articles, with the weights and prices marked against each, and then he proceeds to make a report in detail, after assay, of the various separate packets into which the contents of the case have been divided. His next duty is to place upon each article the name-mark of the importer. If the plate is “proved” of standard, it is reweighed and repacked for delivery to the importer. If it is “proved” below standard, it is repacked, and re-delivered to the Customs, under seal. The cost of assaying and marking foreign plate includes all these and a number of supplemental services, and averages about 2½d. per oz. Practically the whole of the foreign plate imported into this country is dealt with at the London Hall.

The following are the marks placed on foreign watch cases:—London, a full moon with rays; Birmingham, an equilateral triangle; Chester, an acorn with two leaves; Sheffield, crossed arrows; Edinburgh, St. Andrew's Cross; Glasgow, a bishop's



HALL-MARKING WATCHES AND CHAINS.

mitre; Dublin, a shamrock. But as these marks differ so much from those on the British-made articles, foreign watchmakers seem to prefer, as a rule, to have their cases marked in their own country. On foreign silver watch-cases will be found, instead of the lion, two bears *rampant*, and the figures “0935”; and on gold cases the figures 18K., 14K., 10K., &c.