



HALLMARKING GUIDANCE NOTES



PRACTICAL GUIDANCE IN RELATION TO THE HALLMARKING ACT 1973

INFORMATION FROM THE ASSAY OFFICES OF GREAT BRITAIN

OCTOBER 2016



London



Edinburgh



Birmingham



Sheffield

Guaranteeing The Quality Of Precious Metals Since 1327

THE PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDANCE NOTES

The purpose of these notes is to give practical guidance in relation to the Hallmarking Act 1973 and subsequent amendments. No reliance must be placed on the document for a legal interpretation. The UK Assay Offices are happy to answer questions arising from these guidance notes and on any articles or other issues not specifically mentioned.

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HALLMARKING PRECIOUS METALS

WHY ARE PRECIOUS METAL ARTICLES HALLMARKED?

Silver, palladium, gold and platinum are rarely used in their purest form but instead they are normally alloyed with lesser metals in order to achieve a desired strength, durability, colour etc.

It is not possible to detect by sight or by touch the gold, silver, platinum or palladium content of an item. It is therefore a legal requirement to hallmark all articles consisting of silver, palladium, gold or platinum (subject to certain exemptions) if they are to be described as such.

The main offence under the UK Hallmarking Act 1973 is based on description. It is an offence for any person in the course of trade or business to:

- Describe an un-hallmarked article as being wholly or partly made of silver, palladium, gold or platinum.
- Supply or offer to supply un-hallmarked articles to which such a description is applied.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE HALLMARKED?

Any article described as being wholly or partly made of gold, silver, platinum or palladium that is not covered under exempt articles.

Main Exemptions:

Articles below a certain weight are exempt from hallmarking. The exemption weight is based on the weight of the precious metal in the article, excluding, for example, diamonds, stones etc., except in the case of articles consisting of precious metal and base metal in which case the exemption weight is based on the total metal weight:

- Silver 7.78 grams
- Palladium 1.0 gram
- Gold 1.0 gram
- Platinum 0.5 grams

Any pre-1950 item may now be described and sold as precious metal without a hallmark, **if the seller can prove that it is of minimum fineness and was manufactured before 1950.**

Other Exempt Articles

A full list of exemptions can be found on pages 14 – 16 of these Guidance Notes.

WHAT ARE THE PRECIOUS METAL STANDARDS FOR HALLMARKING?

The precious metal fineness standard for UK hallmarking (expressed in parts per thousand) for each precious metal, along with the standard of solder permitted to be used, for each individual fineness, is listed below. The hallmarking standards available under the International Hallmarking Convention (common control mark) are also listed.

Alloy	UK Fineness (ppt)	Permitted Solder (ppt)	Convention Permitted Solder (ppt)
Gold	999	750	750
Gold	990 (Convention not allowed)	750	Not available
Gold	916.6	750	750
Gold	750	750	750
Gold	750 Filigree or watch case	740	740
Gold	750 White	500	585
Gold	585 Yellow, Red	585	585
Gold	585 White	500	585
Gold	375	375	375
Silver	999	650	650
Silver	958.4 (Convention not allowed)	650	Not available
Silver	925	650	650
Silver	800	650	550
Platinum	999	Minimum PM fineness 999	Minimum PM fineness 800
Platinum	950	Minimum PM fineness 950	
Platinum	900	Minimum PM fineness 900	
Platinum	850	Minimum PM fineness 850	
Palladium	999	Minimum PM fineness 700	Minimum PM fineness 700
Palladium	950		
Palladium	500		

WHAT ARE THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OF A HALLMARK?

A HALLMARK IS MADE UP OF 3 COMPULSORY SYMBOLS:



1. The Sponsor's or Maker's Mark

This indicates the maker or sponsor of the article. In the UK this mark consists of at least two letters within a surround. No two marks are the same.

2. Metal and fineness (purity) Mark

Indicates the precious metal content of the article and that it is not less than the fineness of the article indicated. The fineness is indicated by a millesimal number (parts per thousand) and the metal type is indicated by the shape of the surround.

Silver	Palladium	Gold	Platinum
	2009	 9 carat	
 Sterling		 14 carat	
 Britannia		 18 carat	
	2010	 22 carat	
		 24 carat	

3. Assay Office Mark

Indicates the particular Assay Office at which the article was tested and marked. There are now 4 Assay Offices in the UK – London, Edinburgh, Birmingham and Sheffield.

Assay Office Town Marks



London



Edinburgh



Birmingham



Sheffield

There is also a range of optional marks that can be applied alongside the Hallmark if requested. These are:

Traditional Fineness Symbols – optional



Sterling Silver



Sterling Silver Scotland



Britannia Silver



Palladium



Gold



Platinum

The Date Letter – optional

Until 1999 the date letter was compulsory. This is no longer the case, but it can be applied voluntarily in addition to the compulsory marks. The date letter changes once a year on January 1st.



2015



2016



2017



2018



2019



2020



2021



2022



2023



2024

Alternatively...

The Common Control Mark and Convention Marks

The UK has been a signatory to the International Convention on Hallmarks since 1972. This means that UK Assay Offices can strike the Convention Hallmark which will then be recognised by all member countries in the International Convention. Conversely, Convention Hallmarks from other member countries are legally recognised in the UK. Articles bearing the Convention Hallmark do not have to be re-hallmarked in the UK.



Silver



Palladium



Gold



Platinum

Finenesses recognised under the Convention are:

Silver: 800, 925, 999

Palladium: 500, 950, 999

Gold: 375, 585, 750, 916, 999

Platinum: 850, 900, 950, 999

A Convention Hallmark consists of 4 marks:



Sponsor



Common Control Mark

925

Fineness (Purity) Mark



Assay Office Mark

APPROVAL OF SPONSORS' MARKS AND USE OF LOGO MARKS

CAN I USE MY COMPANY LOGO AS A SPONSOR'S MARK?

Any sponsors' mark can be registered with an Assay Office but the design must be approved by an assay office. The Assay Office will use the following guidance to make an approval.

- (a) In order to allow accurate searches of the Sponsors' mark register a logo must either contain at least two letters or if a symbol only is used it must be contained with an approved Assay Office standard surround.
- (b) The supplier must provide the assay office with an authorised hard copy of the Registered Trade Mark or other registered design.
- (c) The supplier must provide the assay office with a written undertaking that they have the authority to use the trade mark.
- (d) The assay office is not responsible for validating ownership of the design or its use, or for verifying its registration, although it is expected that common sense and existing knowledge will be applied when approving such designs.
- (e) The design must allow the mark to be clearly distinguished and described.
- (f) Numbers alone will not be approved.
- (g) Designs resembling the character of a current or ancient hallmark will not be approved.
- (h) Any design must be of size that allows it to be made into a punch which can be used for the hallmark and still be legible. It is unlikely that designs of more than 5 characters long could be made into a satisfactory punch.

If the logo cannot be approved as a sponsors' mark, the logo is a decorative addition which is not an integral part of the approved hallmark then there are clear guidelines to be followed.

- (a) must be principally for decorative purposes;
- (b) must not give the impression that it is a present or formerly authorised hallmark.
- (c) must not give or purport to give additional information about that article regarding the standard of the metal, or at which Assay Office or when it was marked.
- (d) must not be described as being part of a hallmark.

For the full guidelines on the use of logo marks, please refer to The British Hallmarking Council's 'Principles and Guidance on Sponsor's Marks, Logo and Town Marks'.

CAN I USE MORE THAN ONE PRECIOUS METAL IN ONE ARTICLE?

Articles consisting of more than one precious metal can be hallmarked, subject to the following conditions:

- The item can only be marked if, in the opinion of the Assay Office, an ordinary person will be able to determine which part is which precious metal.
- Each precious metal component must be at least the minimum legal fineness for that metal i.e. silver 800, palladium 500, gold 375, platinum 850 (parts per thousand).
- The full Hallmark (Sponsor's Mark, Assay Office mark and precious metal fineness mark) struck will be that of the least precious metal, in order, silver, palladium, gold and platinum. This will normally be struck on the appropriate metal.
- The minor (fineness) mark will be stamped on the "higher" precious metals.

Anomalies

Where small components are used, the above may not be possible. In these circumstances the following rules apply:

- If it is not practical to stamp the fineness marks on the "higher" precious metals, they may be stamped on the lower precious metals.
- If this is not practical then the fineness marks can be stamped on another precious metal part.
- If neither of these options are practical, the full hallmark (Sponsor's Mark, Assay Office mark and least precious metal fineness mark) will be applied on the least precious metal part and all other marks omitted.
- When a platinum article has small component parts consisting of gold and the gold parts are of a fineness of 750 parts per thousand or higher, then the article may be hallmarked with a platinum full mark and the appropriate gold fineness mark. This will not apply if the gold components are 585 or 375ppt. The gold fineness mark can be applied anywhere on the article.

CAN I USE NON-PRECIOUS METALS IN COMBINATION WITH PRECIOUS METALS?

Articles made of precious metals and other materials can be hallmarked, subject to the following conditions:

A mixed precious metal and base metal article, or an article of mixed precious metal and other materials, can only be hallmarked if any precious metal component is at least the minimum legal fineness for that metal i.e. silver 800, palladium 500, gold 375, platinum 850 (parts per thousand).

If an article includes base metal parts then:

- Those base metal parts must be clearly distinguishable from precious metal parts by colour and/or texture and must be clearly visible by their extent.
- The word + METAL must be applied next to the Hallmark on the precious metal part.
- Whenever practical the word METAL or the name of the metal should also be struck on the base metal part/s (brass, stainless steel, titanium etc.), in a manner which complies with any Regulation made by The British Hallmarking Council.
- The Hallmark can only be applied to the precious metal component. Sufficient space must also be available adjacent to the Hallmark for the addition of the "+METAL" mark.

If an article does not include base metal parts, but other materials, then:

- The other materials must be clearly distinguishable from any precious metal part.
- The non-precious metal part must not be plated to resemble any precious metal.
- The extent of each part must be clearly visible.
- The precious metal part must be of a thickness of not less than 100 micrometres.
- A mixed material article containing only a single precious metal will be hallmarked on the precious metal part only, as if it was a separate article.
- For an article with more than one precious metal and a base metal the rules which apply to hallmarking Mixed Precious Metals apply.
- NB Articles must still comply with the UK Nickel regulation to include the whole REACH Directive.

HALLMARKING GOLD PLATED SILVER ARTICLES AND MOKUME GANE

CAN I HALLMARK GOLD PLATED SILVER ARTICLES?

Gold plated silver articles will be hallmarked as silver.

Gold plated articles are not covered by the 'mixed metals' amendment to the Hallmarking Act (2007).

Other than the silver hallmark, or a 925 stamp on underweight articles, no other standalone gold fineness marks are permitted on gold plated silver articles, because they are potentially confusing and misleading to consumers.

A gold fineness description is allowed if the article is described as silver and immediately followed by the words 'gold plated'. For example an article with a silver hallmark (or 925 stamp on the underweight articles) can be described as '925 & 18ct gold plated'.

CAN I HALLMARK GOLD PLATED BASE METAL ARTICLES?

Gold plated base metals items cannot be hallmarked, this includes 'bonded gold' on base metal, 'rolled gold' on base metal and 'plated gold' on base metal.



GUIDANCE ON HALLMARKING OF MOKUME GANE ARTICLES CONTAINING PRECIOUS METAL(S)

WHAT IS MOKUME GANE?

Mokume Gane is a traditional Japanese method for laminating various colours of metals together and manipulating them to create patterns that resemble wood patterns. Mokume gane translates closely to “wood grain metal” or “wood eye metal”, describing the way the metal takes on the appearance of natural wood grain.

The traditional components are relatively soft metals and alloys of gold, silver and copper, but modern processes have enabled the inclusion on non-traditional metals such as titanium, platinum, iron, bronze, and brass.

The rules defined here relate only to articles that include parts manufactured as Mokume Gane (as defined above). Articles that include small or thin parts of precious metal and or base metal constructed in other ways that cannot be defined as Mokume Gane are not to be evaluated using these guidelines and must be subject to the established rules for articles consisting of more than one precious metal or articles consisting of precious metal and base metal.

1. Hallmarking Mokume Gane

- Each precious metal layer must be at least the minimum legal fineness i.e. silver 800, palladium 500, gold 375, platinum 850 (parts per thousand).
- The Assay Office must be able to test the precious metal(s), otherwise the articles will be rejected for hallmarking (or accepted as a revised submitted standard), in accordance with normal Assay Office procedures.
- Mokume Gane articles consisting of more than one fineness of a precious metal will be hallmarked at the lowest fineness found for that precious metal.
- Sufficient space must be available for the respective hallmark as defined below, otherwise the articles will be rejected for hallmarking (or accepted as a revised submitted standard), in accordance with normal Assay Office procedures.

CAN I HALLMARK MOKUME GANE ARTICLES CONSISTING OF MORE THAN ONE PRECIOUS METAL?

1.1 Hallmarking Mokume Gane Consisting of Precious Metal only

Mokume Gane articles consisting of more than one precious metal can be hallmarked, subject to the following condition:

- The full Hallmark (Assay Office and fineness mark) struck will be that of the least precious metal, in order, silver, palladium, gold and platinum normally on the appropriate metal and will be applied to the least precious metal, and a part/minor mark (fineness mark) of the “higher precious” metal(s) will be stamped on these precious metal areas.
- If it is not practicable to position the marks as above, the full hallmark and part/minor marks can be applied across the article.

CAN I HALLMARK MOKUME GANE ARTICLES CONSISTING OF PRECIOUS METAL AND BASE METAL?

1.2 Hallmarking Mokume Gane Consisting of Precious Metal and Non-Precious Metal

Mokume Gane articles made of precious metals and base metals can be hallmarked, subject to the following conditions:

- The item can only be marked if, in the opinion of the Assay Office, an ordinary person will be able to clearly distinguish by colour the precious metal(s) from the non-precious metal(s).
- The word “+METAL” must be applied next to the hallmark in a manner which complies with any Regulation made by The British Hallmarking Council (for example, Mixed Metals).
- The full Hallmark (Assay Office and fineness mark) struck will be that of the least precious metal, in order, silver, palladium, gold and platinum normally on the appropriate metal and will be applied to the least precious metal, a part/minor mark (fineness mark) of the “higher precious” metal(s) will be stamped on these precious metal areas and the word METAL or the name of the metal (e.g. brass, copper etc.) will be applied to the base metal surfaces.
- If not practicable to position the marks as above, the full hallmark and part/minor marks can be applied across the article.
- The majority of the article by weight must be made from precious metals.

CAN I HALLMARK ARTICLES CONSISTING OF MOKUME GANE AND OTHER PRECIOUS METALS OR BASE METALS?

1.3 Hallmarking Articles Containing Mokume Gane and non-Mokume Gane Parts

If the article includes parts that are not Mokume Gane then normal mixed metal hallmarking rules will apply to those precious metal parts and/or non-precious metal parts:

- The majority of the Mokume Gane part of the article must be made from precious metals.
- The Mokume Gane parts will be considered as precious metal parts.



EXEMPT ARTICLES

The following gives a full list of articles exempt from compulsory hallmarking under part II of schedule 1 of the 1973 Hallmarking Act. As amended by the Hallmarking (Exempted Articles) (Amendment) Order 1975 and the Hallmarking (Exempted Articles) Orders 1982 and 1986.

Exempted Articles

1. An article which is intended for dispatch to a destination outside the United Kingdom.
2. An article which is outside the United Kingdom, or which is in course of consignment from outside the United Kingdom to an Assay Office in the United Kingdom.
3. Any coin which is, or was formerly at any time, current coin of the United Kingdom or any other territory.
4. Any article which has been used, or is intended to be used, for medical, dental, veterinary, scientific or industrial purposes.
5. Any battered article fit only to be remanufactured.
6. Any article of gold or silver thread.
7. Any raw material (including any bar, plate, sheet, foil, rod, wire, strip or tube) or bullion.
8. Any manufactured article which is not substantially complete, and which is intended for further manufacture.
9. Any article which is wholly or mainly of platinum, and which was manufactured before 1st January 1975.
10. Any article which is wholly or mainly of palladium, and which was manufactured before 1st January 2010.

Articles Exempt if of Minimum Fineness

11. Any article which;
 - (a) Is wholly or mainly of gold or of silver or of gold and silver assaying in all its gold parts not less than 375 parts per thousand and in all its silver parts not less than 800 parts per thousand; and
 - (b) Was manufactured before the year 1950 and has not since the beginning of the year 1950 been the subject of any alteration which would be an improper alteration if the article had previously borne approved hallmarks.

12. Any musical instrument, where the description is applied to the mouthpiece and the mouthpiece is of minimum fineness.
13. Subject to the provisions of this paragraph, any article containing only one precious metal, being a metal of minimum fineness and of a weight less than that specified in the following table:

Silver	7.78 grams
Palladium	1 gram
Gold	1 gram
Platinum	0.5 grams

NB In the case of articles consisting of precious metal and base metal the above exemption weight is based on the total **metal** weight, including base metals.

14. Any article, except an article made of chain work, which is wholly of one or more precious metals of minimum fineness and which is so small or thin that it cannot be hallmarked
15. Any article which is of minimum fineness and which is imported temporarily (whether as a trade sample, or as intended for exhibition or otherwise) and for the time being remains under the control of the Commissioners of Customs and Excise.
16. Before 1975, many precious metal articles (e.g. rings, whatever their weight, other than wedding rings) were exempted from hallmarking. Platinum was not hallmarked at all. Any article covered by these exemptions, if (a) of minimum fineness (Gold 375 parts per thousand and Silver 800 Parts per thousand) and (b) proved to have been manufactured before 1975, may still be described and sold as precious metal.
- 16a. The following articles of gold, if manufactured before 1st January 1975, and (except in the case of articles mentioned in sub-paragraph (d) below) of minimum fineness-
 - (a) Rings, except wedding rings, pencil cases, lockets, watch chains and thimbles.
 - (b) Articles consisting entirely of filigree work.
 - (c) Articles so heavily engraved or set with stones that it is impossible to mark them without damage.
 - (d) Jewellers works, that is the actual setting only in which stones or other jewels are set and jointed sleeper earrings.

16b. The following articles of silver, if manufactured before 1st January 1975 and (except in the case of articles mentioned in paragraph (e) below) of minimum fineness –

- (a) Locketts, watch chains and stamped medals.
- (b) Mounts the weight of which is less than 15.55 grams.
- (c) Articles consisting entirely of filigree work.
- (d) Silver articles the weight of which is less than 7.78 grams.
- (e) Jewellers works, that is the actual setting only in which stones or other jewels are set.

17. However, even articles which should have been hallmarked when they were made, but bear no hallmark, are now treated as exempt if they were manufactured before a specific date. Since 1999, the date has been 1920, but the amended legislation alters this date to 1950. Therefore, any pre-1950 item may now be described and sold as precious metal, if the seller can prove that it is of minimum fineness and was manufactured before 1950.



OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Adhesives & Solder

Adhesives and solder can be used as long as it is not excessive, nor used for strengthening, weighting or filling. Adhesives may be used in place of solder.

Filled Hollow Articles

Hollow articles may be filled with non-metallic substances. Such articles must be marked 'FILLED' before hallmarking.

Plated Articles

Hallmarked articles may also be plated as follows:

Article made of:	Plating Permitted
Platinum	Gold, platinum, rhodium
Gold	Gold, platinum, rhodium
Palladium	Palladium, gold, platinum, rhodium
Silver	Silver, palladium, gold, platinum, ruthenium, rhodium

- If the plating is applied after hallmarking, the plating or coating must not exceed 2 micrometres on any part of the article.
- If precious metal articles are plated with the same precious metal, for example gold plated with gold, the standard of fineness of the plating must not be less than the standard of fineness of the article itself.
- Any precious metal used for plating must never be less than the minimum UK standard of fineness.
- The use of base metal for plating on precious metal articles is not permitted, whether as an interlayer or as a surface treatment.

Making an alteration to a hallmarked article

- It is possible to make an alteration to a hallmarked article, subject to the following conditions:
- The altered article must be of the same character and purpose as the original (e.g. a spoon must not become a fork.)
- The addition must be of the same standard as the article to which it is being added.
- The weight of the addition must be no heavier than 0.5 grams in platinum, 1 gram in gold, 1 gram in palladium and 7.78 grams in silver.
- The addition must not be greater than 50% of the article's total weight.
- Any other alteration must be re-submitted to an Assay Office.

GUIDANCE ON DESCRIBING PRECIOUS METALS

The purpose of this section is to provide practical guidance on the way in which product should be described at point of sale.

Subject to the provisions of the 1973 Hallmarking Act, any person who, in the course of a trade or business—

- (a) applies to an unhallmarked article a description indicating that it is wholly or partly made of silver, palladium, gold or platinum or
- (b) supplies, or offers to supply, an unhallmarked article to which such a description is applied, shall be guilty of an offence.

Gold Plated Base Metal Articles

- The terms ‘bonded gold’, ‘rolled gold’ and ‘gold plated’ are allowed to refer to either gold plated silver articles or gold plated base metal articles
- For ‘bonded gold’, the bonded gold layer must be of fineness of at least 375 parts per thousand and of a fineness recognised in the UK. This means that bonded gold of 10k can only be described as 9 carat in the UK.

Gold Plated Silver Articles

- When the word ‘gold or a specific gold fineness description is used to describe a gold plated silver article, the article must be described as silver and the word ‘gold’ must be directly followed by ‘plated’ e.g. ‘18ct gold plated silver ring.’
- Other terms like ‘vermeil’ may be used in addition but the phrase ‘gold plated’ and the word ‘silver’ must appear within the description e.g. ‘18ct gold plated vermeil silver ring’.
- The term ‘silver gilt’ may be used to describe a gold plated silver article, providing a gold fineness is not applied as part of the description e.g. ‘silver gilt ring’.
- The gold plated layer must be of a fineness of at least 375 parts per thousand and should not exceed 2 microns in thickness.

Examples of misleading descriptions for gold plated silver articles, that are not allowed include:

- 22ct gold clad ring
- 22ct gold vermeil ring

USE OF THE WORDS 'SILVER', PALLADIUM', 'GOLD' AND 'PLATINUM' WHEN USED TO DESCRIBE BASE METAL JEWELLERY AND WATCHES

The following guidance refers to instances when the words 'silver', 'palladium', 'gold' and 'platinum' are used as adjectives to describe the colour of a product and are not intended to imply that the product is wholly or partly made of gold, platinum, palladium or silver.

- If an article contains no precious metals or is below the minimum fineness and the words 'silver', 'palladium', 'gold' and 'platinum' are used as an adjective to describe colour then the description must make this clear.
- By way of an example, if a base-metal watch, containing no gold is described as a 'gold watch' in order to describe its colour, this would constitute an offence under schedule 1 of the Hallmarking Act.
- Suggested examples of how the watch should be described include 'yellow metal watch', 'gold tone watch', 'gold coloured watch', which are not misleading to the consumer. These descriptions are offered by way of examples only and are not an exhaustive list.



CONTACT DETAILS FOR UK ASSAY OFFICES



The Goldsmiths' Company Assay Office

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Edinburgh Assay Office

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Assay Office Birmingham

1 Moreton Street
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Guardians' Hall
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S6 2AN
Tel: 0114 231 2121
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Guaranteeing The Quality Of Precious Metals Since 1327