



## GROUP VISITS

The Birmingham Assay Office is pleased to welcome Organised Groups to visit the establishment by prior arrangement.

Groups are welcomed by our Curator and given an overview of Hallmarking and the other services we provide. They are then taken on a guided tour of the unique Birmingham Assay Office Silver Collection, which contains many fine examples of silversmithing, from pieces by Matthew Boulton right up to works from the modern era.

A visit to our Library which contains a collection of unique books and manuscripts is also included in the tour.

For more information about Group Visits, please call us on 0121 236 6951

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OVER 230 YEARS OF PROTECTION  
FOR CONSUMERS AND TRADERS...

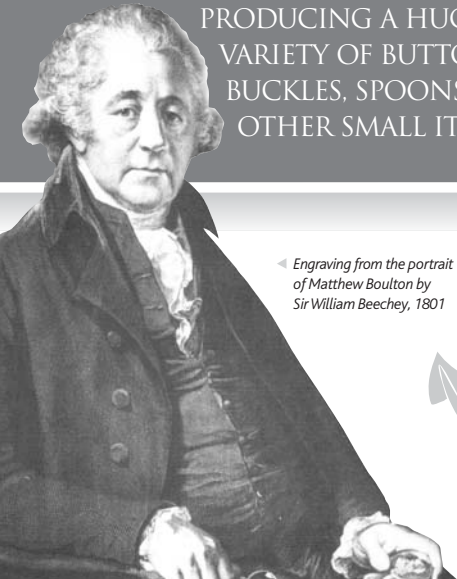
...AND JUST AS VITAL TODAY.



# A HERITAGE OF SERVING THE JEWELLERY AND PRECIOUS METALS INDUSTRIES IN THE UK.

THE BIRMINGHAM ASSAY OFFICE WAS FOUNDED IN 1773 AT A TIME WHEN SILVERSMITHING WAS BOOMING IN THE CITY, WITH MANUFACTURERS

PRODUCING A HUGE VARIETY OF BUTTONS, BUCKLES, SPOONS AND OTHER SMALL ITEMS.



◀ Engraving from the portrait of Matthew Boulton by Sir William Beechey, 1801

One of them was Matthew Boulton, one of the leading industrialists of the age, who employed over 700 people at his purpose-built Soho Manufactory in the Handsworth area of the city.

Having invested heavily in the Soho facility, Boulton was



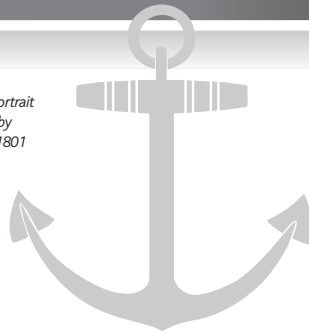
annoyed that he had to send all the products he manufactured to the Assay Office at Chester, some 70 miles away, to be hallmarked. Faced with the expense, delay and danger from highwaymen, Boulton resolved to do something about it and campaigned

for an Act of Parliament to create an Assay Office in Birmingham. Supported by his customers, who included the local nobility, landed gentry and members of the royal family, Boulton won the day and the Assay Office Bill was given Royal Assent on 28th May, 1773.

The first premises for the new Assay Office were three rooms above the Kings Head in New Street. The first day of opening was 31st August, 1773 and the first customer was Matthew Boulton.



◀ Standing cup, Liberty, 1901



◀ Viniagrette: Ledsam, Vale & Wheeler, 1829



◀ Caddy Spoons from  
The Birmingham  
Assay Office Collection



On its first working day, The Birmingham Assay Office hallmarked about 200 articles and in the first full year it hallmarked 16,983 ounces of silver. (Today, approximately 10 million items, manufactured in gold, silver and platinum, are hallmarked each year).

In 1878, just over 100 years after it was founded, The Birmingham Assay Office moved to its current home in Newhall Street, Birmingham. Built at a cost of £9,448, the building was extended just seven years later to

cope with increased business, and in 1972, an extra storey was added.

This Victorian building remains home to The Birmingham Assay Office and, while some of its grand rooms have been retained in their original style, most of the interior has been updated and equipped with the state-of-the-art equipment needed to meet the needs of modern industry. Today The Birmingham Assay Office has expanded outside its statutory duties and now offers a complete service to the jewellery industry and beyond.



# HALLMARKING

BRITISH HALLMARKING, ONE OF THE EARLIEST FORMS OF CONSUMER PROTECTION, REMAINS AN INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED SYMBOL OF QUALITY



Hallmarking in the UK dates back over 700 years to a Statute of King Edward I which instituted the assaying, testing and marking of precious metals.

Its purpose remains unchanged – to protect the public against fraud and the trader against unfair competition.

With precious metals and jewellery trading now taking place on an international basis, this earliest form of consumer protection is as vital now as it was in 1300.

Gold, silver and platinum are always used as alloys in the manufacture of jewellery, watches and silverware.

Even the most experienced jeweller or chemist cannot tell, just by looking at it, how much precious metal there is in a particular item, or if there is just a layer of precious metal masking a base metal core.



It is illegal for any trader to describe a precious metal article as such, unless it has been hallmarked.

British hallmarks provide the guarantee needed by both the consumer and trader. In the UK, hallmarks can only be applied by an independent Assay Office.



The hallmark consists of a number of symbols, each of which provides information to the owner of the article. Compulsory marks include:

**The Sponsor's Mark** – a unique mark which identifies the person or company that sent the article to be hallmarked.

**The Assay Office Mark** – the symbol of the Assay Office that tested the item and applied the hallmark.

The mark of The Birmingham Assay Office is an anchor.

**The Standard Mark** – this is the numerical symbol that shows the standard of fineness – ie the purity – of the precious metal content in parts per 1000.

A number of optional marks can also be applied including:

**Date Letter** – indicates the year in which the item was hallmarked.

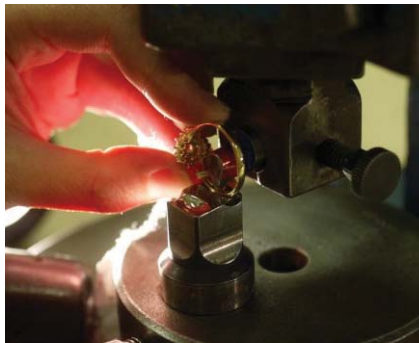
**Traditional Marks** - historical marks used to identify precious metals.

**Commemorative Marks** – designed to celebrate special events (eg The Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002).

**International Convention on Hallmarks** – since 1972 the UK has belonged to the International Convention on Hallmarks. Common Control Marks applied in any member country are recognised in all member countries.

The Birmingham Assay Office, founded in 1773, has grown to become the world's largest Assay Office and applies hallmarks to approximately 10 million precious metal articles each year.

The assaying process used depends on the precious metal being tested – fire refining is used for gold, potentiometric titration for silver and inductively coupled plasma optical emission spectrophotometry for platinum.



X-Ray Fluorescence technology is now also widely used for assaying.

Hallmarks are applied using a variety of techniques – hand punches and bench press are the traditional methods but today an increasing number of items are hallmarked using laser technology. Laser marks are particularly suitable for finished and semi-finished items and create the impression of the struck mark without any bruising or distortion.



# THE LABORATORY AT THE BIRMINGHAM ASSAY OFFICE

INTERNATIONALLY  
RECOGNISED AS A  
CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE  
FOR THE TESTING AND  
ANALYSIS OF BOTH  
PRECIOUS AND NON-  
PRECIOUS METALS

The Laboratory was originally formed to undertake assaying of precious metals as part of the hallmarking process and it continues to provide these and other services to the jewellery and precious metals industries.

However, The Laboratory has been the subject of major, on-going investment and this, coupled with the continuous professional development of all staff, enables the facility to offer a wide range of both traditional and state-of-the art testing techniques for both precious and non-precious metals and associated products.



The Laboratory is now a recognised centre of excellence in analytical technology and leads the world in some areas including, for example, the testing of nickel where its unique, UKAS accredited, 'quick nickel' test is providing manufacturers and importers of jewellery, watches and other articles with a fast and cost-effective method of checking that the goods meet EU nickel release requirements.



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A range of other tests, including plating thickness, tarnishing and durability testing are also available to the jewellery industry, together with packaging tests and tests for colour fastness to perspiration for leather and textiles.

Testing of articles for lead and other harmful elements, regulated by the RoHS regulations and EN71 is an increasingly vital service. The Laboratory also provides analysis of other base metals such as copper, zinc and tin together with analysis of minor elements in samples

of concentrates, bullion, electronic scrap and other precious/non-precious bearing metals. A variety of techniques are used including ICP-OES, AAS, and X-Ray Fluorescence Spectrometry Analysis (XRF).

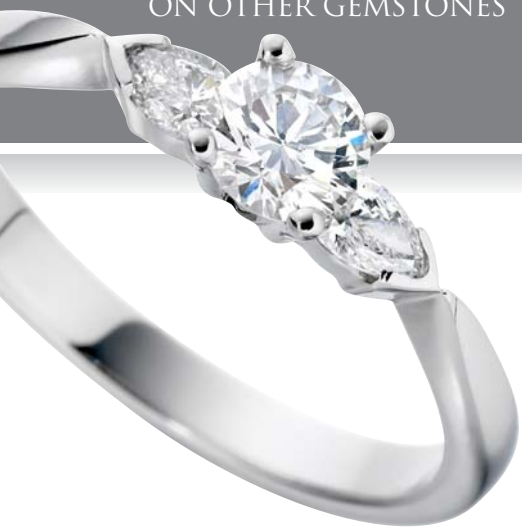
The Laboratory, which is fully accredited by UKAS to ISO 17025, provides Umpire Analysis Services to both refiners and other traders in precious and non-precious metals.

For more information please visit [www.thelaboratory.co.uk](http://www.thelaboratory.co.uk)

# ANCHORCERT®

## INDEPENDENT DIAMOND CERTIFICATION

EXPERT GRADING AND  
CERTIFICATION OF BOTH  
LOOSE AND MOUNTED  
DIAMONDS TOGETHER  
WITH EXPERT REPORTS  
ON OTHER GEMSTONES

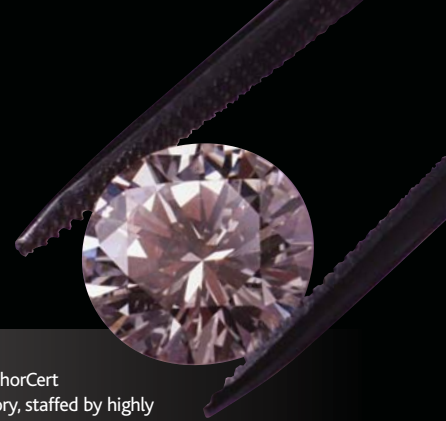


Over recent years, The Birmingham Assay Office has expanded the range of services it offers to the jewellery and associated industries and a major addition to its portfolio is AnchorCert Independent Diamond Certification.

Consumers in the UK are increasingly demanding that, when they buy a diamond, they understand fully the quality and characteristics of the stone. As a result The Birmingham Assay Office launched AnchorCert, the fast, efficient and totally independent diamond grading service. It provides rock solid reassurance about the quality of each stone that is examined.



The AnchorCert laboratory, staffed by highly qualified diamond graders and gemmologists, is now recognised as an international Centre of Excellence. It is unique in the UK in that it is the only one equipped with state-of-the-art equipment capable of detecting when a diamond has been subjected to undisclosed HPHT (high pressure/high temperature) treatment to improve the colour. Other equipment is designed to positively identify synthetic diamonds.



The laboratory is the only one in the UK to receive accreditation from UKAS for the certification of both loose and mounted stones, and an AnchorCert Diamond Report provides reassurance for consumers and added-value for traders.



In addition to diamond certification, AnchorCert also provides a range of services for coloured gemstones including the identification of natural gems and synthetic stones.



Photograph  
courtesy of  
Stephen Webster

AnchorCert also provides its own well established Tanzanite grading service. The service for this rare and precious gemstone is increasingly in demand and is available for both loose and mounted stones.

For more information please visit  
[www.anchorcert.co.uk](http://www.anchorcert.co.uk)



# SAFE GUARD<sup>®</sup>

THE INDEPENDENT JEWELLERY VALUATION SERVICE



THIS SERVICE, PROVIDED BY A TEAM OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED SPECIALISTS, PROVIDES ACCURATE, INDEPENDENT VALUATIONS OF JEWELLERY AND OTHER PRECIOUS POSSESSIONS

SafeGuard was first launched in the 1980's. It is the UK's leading independent jewellery valuation organisation and is now a service provided by The Birmingham Assay Office.

It now offers a range of services covering everything from contemporary items to the rarest antiques. Included are standard Safeguard valuations, The Jewellery Portfolio, a service developed for serious jewellery collectors, and the Safeguard Jewellery Assessment Report, designed to provide purchasers of contemporary jewellery, watches, silverware and previously owned and antique items with the reassurance they need before they buy.

SafeGuard valuations are provided on a fixed price per item basis, so both the retailers who market the service and their customers know exactly where they stand from the outset.

Valuations are provided by a team of highly trained, full-time valuers, all of whom are NAG registered or FGA qualified. The simple fact that they are dedicated to valuing precious possessions every working day increases their level of expertise continuously. They also have access to the sophisticated technology and expertise of AnchorCert and The Laboratory at the Birmingham Assay Office should they need it.



In addition to the actual valuation, the SafeGuard expert provides a brief, accurate description of each item including, where appropriate, the estimated size and weight of any precious stones, type of precious metal, approximate age and origin.

Each item is also allocated a SafeMark – a unique identity number which, when requested, can be carefully and unobtrusively inscribed on suitable items, especially rings.



A report providing the description, the SafeMark and a photograph of each item submitted is then prepared and sent to the owner.

The information and images are also recorded in the secure SafeGuard database. Should items be lost or stolen, the database will provide insurers with the independent valuation needed to meet any claim, and should items be recovered, the database can help to provide proof of ownership.

SafeGuard Valuations can be accessed in four ways. Many retail jewellers market SafeGuard, and jewellery owners can submit items for valuation via them. Jewellers also run special Valuation Days, where a SafeGuard Valuer provides customers with 'face to face' valuations of their treasured possessions. In some cases a SafeGuard Valuer will visit an owner's home to carry out the valuations. Alternatively items can be posted direct to SafeGuard.

For more information please visit [www.safeguardvaluations.com](http://www.safeguardvaluations.com)