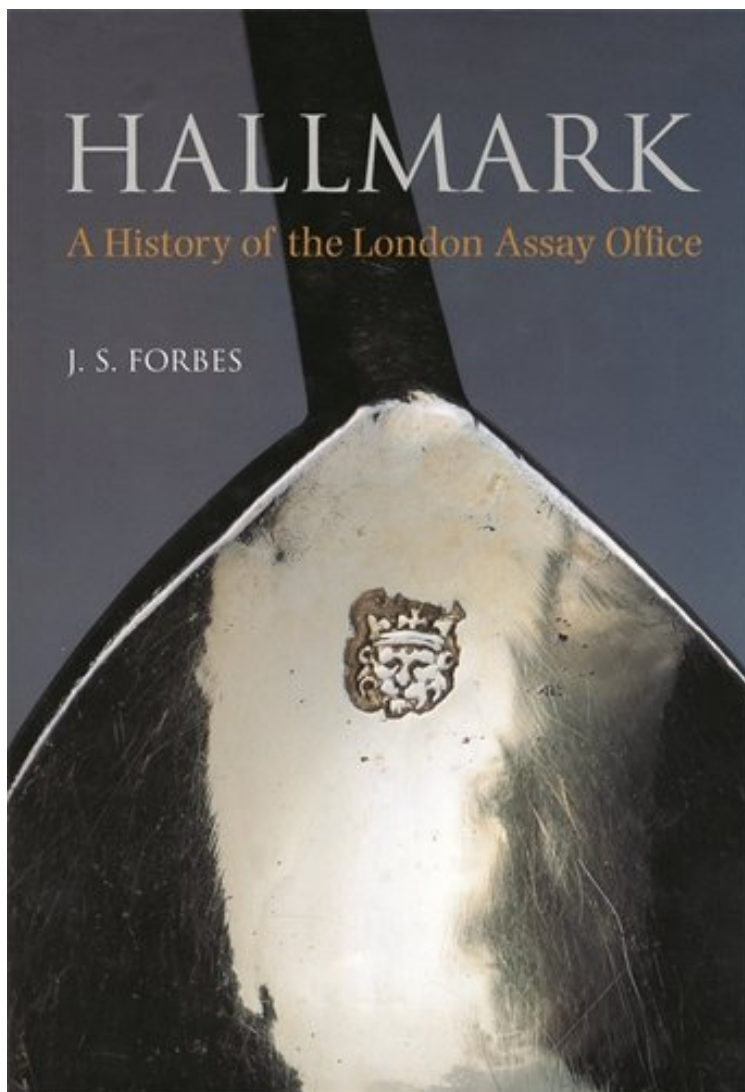




John S. Forbes

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Hallmark: A History of the London Assay Office

John S. Forbes : Hallmark: A History of the London Assay Office before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised [Hallmark: A History of the London Assay Office](#):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. [Hallmarks on English Silver](#)By Martin ChasinJ.S. Forbes spent some thirty years as head of the London Assay office in charge of testing and marking silver and gold objects. The volume, which has been thoroughly researched traces the history of the assaying of silver objects from the thirteenth century to the present. Although limited to the London assay office the book necessarily traces the work of all the assay offices. The author shows how silver objects were tested for metal content and then marked with the sterling standard for 925 grams of silver per 1000 or with the Britannia standard for a higher silver content. He then shows the development of

the symbols, i.e. the lion passant for sterling, the symbol for the city of London, and the addition of the date year.

Interestingly, the date year is a great benefit to the collector and historian who thereby knows the exact date of production. However, the year was added so that if articles were found to be below standard the officers in charge for that year could be identified. Forbes shows how the Goldsmith's Company in London gained and retained control of the hallmarking to the present day. The book is clearly written and well researched. It is a must for anyone interested in English silver and is unlikely to be replaced as a standard reference work.

The minute books of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, which are the core of this study, provide an almost unbroken record since the 1330s, and names prominent in the company's affairs include Isaac Newton, Charles II, Paul de Lamerie, the Vyners and the Garrards. Appendices include a glossary of terms and a list of London silver hallmarks. Testing articles made of precious metals and stamping them with hallmarks to indicate that they are of a minimum standard of purity has been carried out by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths for seven centuries. At the beginning of the 14th century Edward I initiated the first, rudimentary hallmarking system, and by 1327 the Goldsmiths' Guild had been granted its first royal charter. The ensuing history of the London Assay Office encompasses royal greed, forgery and counterfeiting, interlopers from abroad, plague, war and fluctuating fortunes - and continuing worries over the intrinsic value of the metal. Even today the Assay Office participates in the ancient tradition of the trial of the pyx, testing the coin of the realm.

From Library Journal Forbes, who served as head of the London Assay Office for 30 years, focuses on the London office but in the process provides a full history of English hallmarking, i.e., the assaying of silver articles and their stamping/markings by the Goldsmith's Company at its hall. The result is a history of the enforcement of a standard for silver--one of the oldest continuous forms of consumer protection. The date year, symbolized by a letter of the alphabet within a shield, each changing regularly, now provides the collector with the exact date of manufacture. Yet it was originally adopted to identify the year of manufacture so that, should a substandard article be uncovered, the officials who presided over the assay could be held responsible. Carefully researched and clearly written, this book is filled with fascinating stories of people and events, of corruption and cunning. Undoubtedly, it will remain the standard on the subject for decades to come and should be included in public as well as academic libraries.-Martin Chasin, Adult Inst., Bridgeport, CT Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.