The earliest form of consumer protection still playing a vital role in the modern world.

Gold, silver, platinum and palladium are always used as an alloy in the manufacture of precious metal jewellery, watches and silverware. The precious metal is mixed with other elements to give it the properties, such as flexibility and durability, needed to produce a desirable article.

Even the most experienced jeweller or chemist cannot tell how much precious metal there is in an alloy, or whether a thick plating of precious metal is masking a base metal core, just by looking at it. This offers the unscrupulous a huge opportunity for fraud and there is a need to protect the public and honest suppliers. Therefore all items, over the minimum specified weight, being sold as gold, silver, platinum or palladium in the UK must be hallmarked to confirm that they meet the legal standards of the Hallmarking Act, 1973.

Hallmarking must be carried out by a UK assay office or an assay office belonging to the International Convention. Assay Office Birmingham was founded in 1773. For more than 240 years it has built an outstanding worldwide reputation based on its established expertise and its total integrity and independence.

Assay Office Birmingham, having embraced the latest technological developments, is now the largest assay office in the world and the leading UK provider of a range of services to the UK jewellery industry.

The history of UK Hallmarking dates back over 700 years to a statute instituted by Edward I. Its purpose then was the same as it is today – to protect the public against fraud and the trader from unfair competition.

It is, in fact, the earliest form of consumer protection.

Hallmarks can be applied in one of three ways. The traditional methods of marking by hand punches or hydraulic press are widely used but the 21st Century marking by laser is also an option, utilising the latest technology to mark hollow, highly finished or intricate items of jewellery, or watches.

The assaying and hallmarking process starts with testing. Samples are selected from each batch and tested. Using X-ray Fluorescence Spectrometry Analysis (Xrf) the precious metal content of the piece is determined.

The traditional methods of assaying, such as cupellation for gold and potentiometric titration for silver are still used when necessary but the vast majority of product received into Assay Office Birmingham is now tested by the Xrf method.

The app enables users to quickly research and identify the date letter on precious metal jewellery and silverware. Available for £9.99, the app also contains useful information relating to hallmarks.

Hallmarks confirm that an item is made from precious metal and meets the legal standards of the Hallmarking Act, 1973. The app helps users to identify the date letter and understand the meaning of the hallmark.
In the UK it is illegal to sell or describe any item as Gold, Silver, Platinum or Palladium unless it is hallmarked. The hallmark guarantees the precious metal content of the item you are buying, giving you complete reassurance.

**Compulsory Marks**
- **The Sponsor’s Mark:** This is the signature, name or company name of the sponsor/manufacturer or person responsible for the item.
- **The Standard Mark:** This shows the fineness of the metal – i.e., the purity of the precious metal content in parts per 1000 in relation to the standard recognized in the UK. For example, 750 parts per 1000 by weight is equivalent to the old 18-Carat gold standard. The alloy must be at least 750 parts per 1000 to be marked as such. There is no negative tolerance.

**Standard Marks**
- **Gold:** 375, 585, 750, 916, 999
- **Silver:** 800, 925, 950
- **Platinum:** 850, 900, 950
- **Palladium:** 500, 950

**Optional Marks**
- **Date Letter:** Shows the year in which the item was hallmarked.
- **Traditional Marks:** These are traditional standard marks that can be used today.

**Commemorative Marks**
Special hallmarks are applied to items, which celebrate major events.

**International Convention Marks**
Since 1972 the UK has been a signatory to the International Convention on Hallmarks. This means that UK assay offices can apply the common control mark which will then be recognized by all member countries in the convention. Conversely, convention hallmarks that have been applied in other member countries are recognized in the UK.

**Look for the Hallmark**
- The Anchor is the symbol of Assay Office Birmingham. When you see the Anchor on any item made from a precious metal, you know it has been tested at the world’s largest assay office.

**It’s Your Guarantee**
- Gold and Palladium articles weighing less than 1g, Silver articles weighing less than 7.78g and Platinum articles weighing less than 0.5g are exempt from hallmarking.

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**Example Hallmark Codes**
- Gold: 375 585 750 916 999
- Silver: 800 925 950
- Platinum: 850 900 950
- Palladium: 500 950

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**Birmingham Assay Office**
- Birmingham (9 carat) (14 carat)
- Sterling Britannia
- Gold Silver Platinum Palladium

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**Compulsory Marks Example**
- **Sponsor Common Control Mark Example:** Fineness Birmingham.