

1366	Two Austrian Princes (Albrecht and Leopold ) issued a decree on assaying precious metals. Two guild masters were appointed to test the fineness, both being under the supervision of the master of the mint.
1659	Patent of Emperor Leopold I allowed work in 14 lot silver.
1708	Patent of Emperor Joseph I (known as the Augsburger und Wiener-Probe) permitted a fineness of <a href="#">13 lots and 14 lots</a> .
1737	Patent of Emperor Charles VI introduced a fineness standard of <a href="#">15 lots</a> .
1774	Patent of Empress Maria Theresa illustrated the hallmarks that were to be used.
1784	State control of the standard of fineness began in Austria, starting in Vienna.
1786	State control of fineness was introduced in Galicia (see Poland).
1806	A regulated state system of marking throughout the entire Austro-Hungarian Empire was introduced, except for Hungary, Slovakia (under Hungarian domination), and Transylvania
1866	From 1 August a new standard of hallmarks and marks of fineness for silver, calculated in thousandths instead of the previous <a href="#">lot system</a> was introduced. These hallmarks were now also used in Hungary. Permitted fineness standards are 950, 900, 800 and 750/1000.
1872	The marks in use were altered so that the letter indicating the seat of the assay office became part of the standard mark. These marks were used in part of Yugoslavia until 1919, in part of Poland until 1920, in the Austrian Republic until 1921, in Czechoslovakia until 1922, and in Hungary until 1937
1921	Marks of the new Austrian Republic came into force with the law of 21 October

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### Lots

1	=	062.5/1000
12	=	750/1000
13	=	812.5/1000
14	=	875/1000
15	=	937.5/1000
16	=	1000/1000

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### Deniers

1	=	083.3/1000
8	=	666.6/1000
9	=	750/1000
10	=	833.3/1000
11	=	916.6/1000
12	=	1000/1000

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### Zolotniks

1	=	010.4/1000
84	=	875/1000
94	=	980/1000
96	=	1000/1000

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### Dineros

24 granos	=	1 dinero
9	=	750/1000
11	=	916.6/1000
12	=	1000/1000

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### Sterling

20 dwt (pennyweight)	=	1 oz (ounce) Troy
11 oz 2 dwt	=	925/1000 = Sterling Standard

**11 oz 10 dwt**

**=**

**958.3/1000 = Britannia Standard**

**12 oz 0. dwt**

**=**

**1000/1000**

[More](#)

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# The Standard Mark



The first statutes regulating the standard of silver and gold were laid down in an [Act of 1300](#) in the reign of Edward I.

Until the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup>C the two hallmarks of the Leopard's head crowned and the [date letter](#) plus the [maker's mark](#) were sufficient guarantee of the standard of silver (92.5% pure) and gold (18 ct).

Despite the riches won from the dissolution of the monasteries, Henry VIII debased the currency year after year and in 1544 the Goldsmiths' Company declared that "none of the Company enterprise is to work any worse silver than upright Sterling upon pain of being punished by the Wardens", and the standard mark of the Lion Passant Guardant was introduced.

This apparently enraged the King so much that he demanded the surrender of the Goldsmiths' Company's charter. Only the King's death in 1547 seems to have saved the day for the Company.

Until 1550 the the lion passant guardant - walking to the left, its head turned over its shoulder - was crowned, after that time the lion passant became uncrowned and remains so until the present day. After 1822 the Lion Passant ceased to be guardant.

In Scotland the Thistle mark was used from 1759 until 1975 when it was replaced by the Lion Rampant. Prior to this time the Assay Masters mark was stamped on the piece.

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- **Act 28 Edward I. c.20 (1300)**

*It is ordained, that no goldsmith of England, nor none elsewhere within the King's dominion, shall from henceforth make or cause to be made any manner of vessel, jewel, or any other thing of gold or silver, except it be good and true allay\* that is to say, gold of a certain touch, and silver of the sterling allay or of better, at the pleasure of him to whom the work belongeth; and that that none work worse silver than money; and that no manner of vessel of silver depart out of the hands of the workers until it be essayed by the Wardens (Gardiens) of the craft, and further that it be marked with a Leopard's Head and that they work no worse gold than of the Touch of Paris; and that the Wardens of the craft shall go from shop to shop among the goldsmiths to essay if their gold be of the same Touch that is spoken of before, and if they find any other than of the Touch aforesaid, the gold shall be forfeit to the King*

*And that none shall make rings, crosses, nor locks, and that none shall set any stone in gold except it be natural. And that gravers, cutters of stones and of seals, shall give to each their weight of silver and gold (as near as they can) upon their fidelity; and the jewels of base gold which they have on their hands they shall utter as fast as they can; and from thenceforth, if they buy any of the same work they shall buy it to work upon, and not to sell again.*

*And that all the good towns of England, where any goldsmiths be dwelling, shall be ordered according to this statute as they of London be; and that one shall come from every good town for all the residue that be dwelling in the same unto London, for to be ascertained of their Touch. And if any goldsmith be attained hereafter because that he hath done otherwise than before is ordained, he shall be punished by imprisonment, and by ransom at the King's pleasure. And notwithstanding all these things before-mentioned, or any point of them, both the King and his Council, and all they that were present at the making of this ordinance will and intend that the right and prerogative of his crown shall be saved to him in all things."*

\*Allay=Alloy

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# The Date Letter

[Date Letter Sequences](#)

[Date Letter Decoder](#)

Towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup>C it was ordained that the "keeper of the touch" (the Assay Master) should be responsible for maintaining the standards of gold and silver presented for assay. This was a result of continuing complaints regarding substandard wares which did not comply with the Sterling standard. Towards this end, the date letter system was introduced, devised to ascertain the year a piece was presented for assay and to trace offending makers (and Assay Masters).



***The date letter sequence starting 1697 (London)***

The first full cycle of date letters in London began in 1478 with "A" and continued in an unbroken series of twenty year cycles (omitting the "J" and from "V" to "Z") until the Britannia standard was introduced as a result of the "Great Recoinage" of William III in 1696.



***The date letter sequence starting 1975 (London,)***

A new twenty year cycle was begun at this time and this continued, differentiated by changing styles, cases of letter and shield shapes until the four remaining Assay Offices were harmonised with the Hallmarking Act, a new cycle starting with "A" on the 1st January 1975.

Until 1660 the date letters were changed on St. Dunstan's Day (the patron saint of goldsmiths), May 19th. On the restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, the date was changed to Oak-apple Day (the King's birthday), May 29th.

The Edinburgh date letter system was adopted in 1681 and at the same time the "Deacons Mark", which was used as a standard mark from 1457, was changed to the Assay Masters Mark alongside the date letter which was changed in October, following a twenty five year cycle. One happy result of this five hundred years of legislation as far as the modern collector is concerned, is that a piece can be dated with an accuracy that many collectors of other antiques and works of art would envy.

# The Makers Mark

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In 1363 Edward III ordered that "each Master Goldsmith shall have a mark unto himself, and which mark shall be known by those who shall be assigned by the King to supervise their works and allay."

At first, these marks were often a symbol of either the maker's shop sign or a rebus (pun) of the maker's name, but gradually during the 17<sup>th</sup>C initials, usually embellished with symbols, became more common. The [Huguenot](#) craftsmen who registered their marks tended to follow the custom of their native France and use a fleur-de-lys and two pellets (or grains) above their initials.

In 1697 when the [Britannia standard](#) came in to force, makers were required to re-register their marks in the form of the first two letters of the surname. With the re-introduction of the Sterling Standard in 1720 makers were required to mark their Sterling wares with the initials of the forename and surname but makers continuing to use the Britannia standard used the first two letters of the surname.

The Act of 1739 ordered that workers should destroy their existing marks and substitute others with the initials of their Christian names and surnames in letters of a different character from those used previously. This form of mark has been used until the present day

# British Silver Date Letter Marks

## SilverMine Date Letter Decoder

Select a town by clicking on an image below, holding the mouse pointer over the image will show a description of the mark. Your browser must support frames (IE3 or Nav3 or better) . Internet Explorer in full screen mode and a screen resolution of 1024 x 768 is recommended. It must be remembered that the images of the marks are just a computer rendering of drawings of the actual marks. They are intended only as a guide to the approximate shield or cartouche shape and the style of the lettering.

<b>London</b> <i>1558 - 1999</i>			
<b>Birmingham</b> <i>1773 - 1999</i>			
<b>Sheffield</b> <i>1773 - 1999</i>			
<b>Edinburgh</b> <i>1681 - 1999</i>			
<b>Chester</b> <i>1701 - 1961</i>			
<b>Exeter</b> <i>1701 - 1883</i>			
<b>glasgow</b> <i>1681 - 1964</i>			
			

**Newcastle**

*1702 - 1884*

**York**

*1559 - 1857*





# The SilverMine Guide to English Silver

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## Glossary

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### Acanthus

*Classical ornament in the form of stylized leaf decoration based on the scalloped leaves of the acanthus plant.*

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### Alloy

*Originally the fineness of gold or silver was determined "à la loi" - according to the law. Later this term was applied to the mixing of base metals such as copper to gold or silver to harden or colour it.  
An amalgam formed of two or more metals.*

---

### Andiron

*Metal objects in pairs, with a horizontal iron bar for supporting logs in the fireplace and a vertical decorative element at the front in brass, iron or silver. Popular in England until the 18<sup>th</sup>C when the use of logs as fuel was replaced by coal.*

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### Annealing

*Process for restoring the malleability of silver or other metals which have been made brittle by hammering; the metal is heated until red hot then plunged into cold water. This re-arranges the molecular structure of the metal.*

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### Anthemion

*From the Greek word for flower; bands of stylized lotus and palmette motifs derived from classical architecture.*

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### Apron

*Decorative framework between the supports of a kettle stand, basket, [épergne](#) or centrepiece. Often [cast](#), pierced and [chased](#).*

---

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- A**rabesque *Surface decoration of scrolling, and intertwining foliage, tendrils and scrolls. Thought to be of Moorish influence, it became popular in northern Europe in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup>C reaching England in the second half of the century and becoming popular in the decorative arts.*
- 
- A**rgyll *A vessel resembling a small coffee pot designed for keeping gravy warm whilst on the table. An inner chamber is filled with hot water thus keeping the surrounding gravy warm. First recorded c.1760, it was possibly first made for the 4th Duke of Argyll.*
- 
- A**rmorial *The representation of a full coat of arms including the motto (if any), the shield of arms, the helmet and crest engraved on a piece of silver.*
- 
- A**ssay *The testing and trial of metals to determine their purity by [touch](#), fire, [cupellation](#) or other means. There are four Assay Offices in Great Britain today; [London](#), [Edinburgh](#), [Birmingham](#) and [Sheffield](#).*
- 
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- A**ssay Scrape *The portion of silver scraped from an unfinished piece by the assayer, sometimes visible as a series of long gouges on the backs of trays and waiters. Usually these marks are removed by the maker during finishing when it has been returned from hallmarking.*
- 
- A**uricular *Early 17<sup>th</sup>C Dutch style characterized by lobe-shaped or cartilaginous forms; developed by Paul and Adam van Vianen of Utrecht. Found in English silver during the second quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup>C. Also known as the lobate style.*
- 
- B**aluster *Small vertical moulding of undulating profile and usually of circular section, commonly used for candlesticks and finials and stems of cups, etc.*
- 
- B**ath Border *A moulded applied border formed of pairs of shallow curves meeting at a point intersected by short straight sections. Used for [waiters and salvers](#).*
- 
- Back to Top**
- B**eading *A decorative border ornament composed of adjacent half rounds. Used on trays, waiters and salvers particularly during the neo-classical period and later.*
- 
- B**illet *A simple box-like moulding of alternating relief bars, usually achieved by stamping and much used on mid-16<sup>th</sup>C plate.  
Also the [thumbpiece](#) on a flagon or tankard.*
- 
- B**ombé *A [baluster](#) - like curved form but of square or rectangular section rather than circular.*
- 
- B**oss *A raised area used in decoration, originally the protuberance on a shield.  
See: [Embossing](#)*
- 
- B**right-cut *A technique of engraving much used in the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup>C. The effect is achieved by the back of the graver burnishing the cut as the front part of the tool picks out the metal giving a distinctively crisp appearance.*
- 
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## Britannia

A silver [alloy](#) composed of 95.84% silver and 4.16% other metals, also expressed as 11 ounces 10 dwt (pennyweight) of pure silver to 8 dwt per pound [Troy](#).

It was introduced to prevent the use of the [sterling](#) coinage for plate-working. It was the enforced standard in English silver from 1697 -1719 and optional thereafter. The new standard was marked with a figure of [Britannia and a lions head erased](#), this practice continuing until 1975 when the leopard's head replaced the lions' head erased in association with the Britannia figure.

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## Buffet of Plate

The means by which the princes, nobility and ecclesiastics of the Middle Ages and the 16<sup>th</sup>C displayed their wealth . Plate and precious vessels were displayed in rows in the dining halls.

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## Bullet shape

Spheroid form popular for [teapots](#) during the second quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup>C, with flush cover and tapering sides.

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## Burnishing

The technique whereby gold or silver is brought to a high finish by rubbing the surface with a hard smooth object such as agate or other hardstone, a dog's tooth (presumably removed from the dog) or very high grade steel.

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## Campana

Of Greek vase shape, waisted like a bell. A term used to describe the neo-classical vases of the Regency period.

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## Candelabrum

A candlestick with arms and nozzles for two or more candles.

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## Carat

A measure of the purity of gold. Pure gold is 24 carats, alloyed with 50% of other metals it becomes 12 carats. Until the hallmarking act of 1798 all gold had to be 22 carat, although marked with the same marks as [sterling](#) silver. Legal standards of purity are now 9 ct, 14ct, 18ct, and 22ct.

---

## Cartouche

Originally a scroll of paper (as in the surrounds for the names of the Pharaohs of Egypt), it was developed as a decorative shield, normally [engraved](#), [embossed](#) or [cast](#), and generally containing a coat of arms or an inscription.

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## Caster

A box or container of variable form but with a [pierced](#) cover, for sprinkling sugar, salt or ground spices. [More](#)

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## Casting

A process for making metal objects whereby molten metal is poured into a mould. Stronger but more extravagant with metal than raising, it is used in plate for items like feet, stems, spouts, and [finials](#).

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## Caudle Cup

Popular two handled vessel of the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup>C. Now more properly called a [porringer](#), these vessels were supposed to have been used for drinking "caudle", a warm spiced gruel of oatmeal, ale, sugar and spices which was much advocated for curing minor ills and recommended for pregnant women. Also known as a posset cup.

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## Cellini Ewer

William Elliot was the first to reproduce the so-called "Cellini" ewer in the 1820's, a vase shaped piece richly decorated with masks, foliage, [strapwork](#), medallions and scrolls in what was considered to be at the time the Renaissance style. The design continued to be made in silver and later in [electro-plate](#) throughout the 19<sup>th</sup>C.

<b>C</b> hamber Candlestick	<i>A small portable <a href="#">candlestick</a> on a plate-shaped base with a scroll or ring handle; often equipped with a snuffer or extinguishers. Found in the late 16<sup>th</sup>C and into the 19<sup>th</sup>C.</i>
<b>C</b> hamplevé	<i>A form of enamelling in which the ground is recessed to receive the enamel.</i>
<b>C</b> harger	<i>A large, shallow plate or dish used for serving meat. Sometimes used for decorative purposes.</i>
<b>Back to Top</b>	
<b>C</b> hasing	<i>The tooling or surface working of metal to create a relief pattern. Different punches of various sizes and shapes are used to push the metal into different patterns. Unlike <a href="#">engraving</a> or carving, this does not entail the removal of any metal.</i>
<b>C</b> hinoiserie	<i>An escapist Western style loosely based on Chinese art and motifs usually applied to European forms. The style was popular in silver during the late 17<sup>th</sup>C and mid 18<sup>th</sup>C with a further revival c.1820.</i>
<b>C</b> hippendale	<i>A moulded border of alternating long convex and short concave curves, much used for <a href="#">salvers and waiters</a> from c.1730 in imitation of the wood-carving patterns popularised by the furniture-maker Thomas Chippendale.</i>
<b>C</b> loisonné	<i>A form of enamelling in which narrow strips of metal wire are soldered on to the base to form compartments into which the enamel is poured.</i>
<b>C</b> lose Plating	<i>A method of applying a layer of silver foil to tinned steel by heat fusion and <a href="#">burnishing</a>. Originally a cutlers device for plating knives, scissors, spurs and the like.</i>
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<b>C</b> oaster	<i>A small tray for circulating bottles or food around the dining table, especially a circular decanter stand with silver sides and a turned wooden base.</i>
<b>C</b> ommunion Cup	<i>The vessel which took the place of the chalice in Anglican communion services after the Reformation, generally with a beaker-shaped bowl, knopped stem and circular foot.</i>
<b>C</b> oral and Bells	<i>Old name for a child's rattle, usually incorporating a whistle, the coral terminal being an aid to teething.</i>
<b>C</b> rest	<i>Heraldic device or badge surmounting a coat of arms. Originally worn on a knight's helmet, it was used on silverwares as an indication of ownership without the expense of having a full coat of arms engraved.</i>
<b>C</b> resting	<i>An edging ornament standing proud of a horizontal surface, fashionable on medieval and early Renaissance silver.</i>
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<b>C</b> ruet	<i>Small bottles, usually with a stopper, used for oil and vinegar in domestic settings and for wine and water in the eucharist; usually of glass, with silver stopper from the 18<sup>th</sup>C. <a href="#">More</a></i>

**Cruet frame** *Silver stand, fitted for cruet bottles, often designed in the 18<sup>th</sup>C for several bottles or two bottles and three [casters](#).*

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**Cupellation** *An [assaying](#) or refining process whereby the components of an [alloy](#) oxidised at high temperature are separated by absorption into the walls of a "cupel", a shallow porous vessel.  
The term "cupel" also refers to the bottom or receptacle of a silver refining furnace.*

---

**Cut card** *Silver sheet of thin gauge cut into silhouettes, usually of foliage or scrollwork design, soldered on to bowls, cups, tankards, inkwells and other silver to produce ornament in relief. Especially popular during the last half of the 17<sup>th</sup>C.*

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**Cutlery** *Any implement with a cutting edge, including knives, scissors, penknives, razors but excluding fish knives and servers and butter knives which are classed as [flatware](#).*

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**Date Letter** *The letter of the alphabet used by assay offices to indicate the year of assay and changed annually. The months the letters changed were different for each office until 1975 when the remaining assay offices all started on the 1st January with the letter "A". [More](#)*

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**Diaper** *Ornament, often done by [chasing](#), producing a trellised or latticed design of diamonds, squares, and similar formal shapes.*

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**Duty Marks** *A mark of the Sovereign's Head in profile struck on all silver from 1st December 1784 to 1st May 1890 to indicate that duty had duly been paid at the time of assay. [More](#)*

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**dwt.** *see: [Pennyweight](#)*

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**Egg and dart** *An edge moulding, usually stamped in sections, of ovoid shapes alternating with vertical arrow-like bars. Said to have been derived from shields and spears. Chiefly used during the 16<sup>th</sup>C and early 17<sup>th</sup>C it was revived during the 19<sup>th</sup>C by the vogue for gothicism.*

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**Electroplating** *The process of coating a base metal (generally nickel) with pure silver through the process of electrolysis.  
The laws of electrolytic deposition had been formulated by Faraday as early as 1833 and the process was patented by the Elkington company of Birmingham c.1840.  
Experiments to gild silver using Volta's battery resulted in the "Galvanic Goblet" made by Paul Storr in 1814 which is now in the Royal Collection. [More](#)*

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**Electrotyping** *An extension of the [Electroplating](#) process that deposits a layer of metal on casts taken from originals. This process allowed the accurate reproduction of intricate and complex designs such as shields, plaques, sculptures and carvings. The process was patented by the Elkington company c.1840.*

---

**Embossing** *Decoration worked from the back of the piece to bring up bosses and other relief shapes. Usually further definition of the embossed area is needed and this is done*

from the front with [repoussé](#) work.

## Engraving

Surface decoration of metal made by cutting fine V-shaped grooves with a sharp tool. Most commonly used in heraldic decoration, the technique can produce a delicacy of line akin to drawing.

## Epergne

The English term, of uncertain origin, for a table centrepiece, usually of silver, composed of branches, baskets, bowls, dishes and candle branches. Popular during the last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> C.

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## Etching

Form of surface decoration in which a pattern is eaten into the surface of the metal by acid. Used during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> C to produce engraved designs at less cost.

## Feather-edge

A slightly curved repeating pattern of cuts using the same technique as [Bright-cut engraving](#). First used from about 1700, it was chiefly used as a border decoration on [flatware](#) and [cutlery](#) but was also used on wine labels and small boxes.

## Festoon

A garland or drapery motif arranged in pendulant curves and often with a knot or ribbon at either end.

## Filigree

Work composed of fine wires, coiled and assembled into open panels. Probably originating in the Orient, it became popular in Holland during the 17<sup>th</sup> C. Most English filigree-work of that time is probably the work of immigrant craftsmen. Several filigree workers have been recorded working in Birmingham during the early 19<sup>th</sup> C making caddy-spoons, boxes and other smallwares.

## Finial

Ornament placed at the top of a cover or corner of a pediment.

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## Fish-skin

The tanned and treated skin of the shark or ray, which has spiny scales which are rubbed down to produce a roughened surface. Usually dyed black, it was used during the 17<sup>th</sup> C and 18<sup>th</sup> C for canteens and knife cases. Sometimes incorrectly known as [shagreen](#).

## Flagon

A tall covered pouring vessel with a handle, usually with a cylindrical or pear-shaped form.

## Flat-chasing

A technique for the surface decoration of metal, resembling [engraving](#) but produced with a hammer and punch which does not involve the removal of any metal.

## Flatware

The proper term for all flat tableware - spoons, forks, slices, scoops, casters etc. - that does not have a cutting edge but is used for scooping or parting food. [More](#)

## Fluting

Decoration imitating the vertical channelling of classical columns, resembling a musical flute cut in two.

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<b>F</b> rosting	<i>An acid treatment giving a slightly roughened surface. Popular during the 19 C.</i>
<b>G</b> adrooning	<i>A lobed border of stamped or convex curves, either vertical or slanting to left or right. A popular kind of border from the late 17<sup>th</sup>C onwards.</i>
<b>G</b> arnish	<i>An old term for a set of dishes or plates (usually pewter) and of services made en suite.</i>
<b>G</b> erman silver	<i>A white <a href="#">alloy</a> of nickel, copper and zinc. Used as a base metal for late-period fused plate, the alloy was said to have originated in China where it had been used from very early times. Also known as Argentine.</i>
<b>G</b> ilding	<i>The process of coating silver with a thin layer of gold. Until the introduction of electrolytic gilding in the 1860's the effect was achieved by applying an amalgum of gold and mercury to a piece and then driving off the mercury with heat. This was an extremely dangerous process which accounted for the very high prices charged by gilders and the scarcity of craftsmen prepared to carry out the work. The process is now illegal and all modern gilding is achieved by a process similar to that of electrolytic silver plating .</i>
	<b>Back to Top</b>
<b>G</b> oldsmith	<i>A term applied without distinction to craftsmen in gold and silver, and in modern times perpetuated by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths in the City of London, originally the trade guild of the craftsmen.</i>
<b>G</b> rotesque	<i>Fantastic human or animal forms used as decoration, engraved, chased or modelled. Often associated with intertwining scrollwork, flowers and foliage to produce bizarre or extravagant motifs.</i>
<b>G</b> uilloche	<i>A running spiral ornament composed of two or more ribbons or bands twisted one over the next, sometimes enclosing small rosettes or wheel-like motifs.</i>
<b>H</b> allmark	<i>The official mark struck on a piece of silver or gold by an assay office or guild as a guarantee of it's standard of purity. So named from its original use at Goldsmiths' Hall in London.</i>
<b>H</b> anap	<i>Medieval term for a drinking cup or bowl, the term has also been used by some writers for standing cups. The term derives through middle English from the Anglo Saxon "hnaepp".</i>
	<b>Back to Top</b>
<b>H</b> anoverian	<i>A plain <a href="#">flatware</a> pattern with the terminals turning upwards toward the bowl (as opposed to Old English in which the end curves downwards). Made from c.1710 to c.1775, the pattern was often engraved with crests, armorials or initials on the end, the spoons and forks being laid with the prongs or bowls downwards on the table.</i>
<b>H</b> elmet ewer	<i>A type of ewer reminiscent of an inverted Roman helmet, with an ovoid body on a low stem; particularly favoured by <a href="#">Huguenot</a> silversmiths.</i>
<b>H</b> ob-nob	<i>To drink together. The term is found in 18<sup>th</sup>C inventories to describe pairs of small waiters which presumably were used to hand glasses of drink.</i>

**H**ollow ware *A generic term for any vessel produced by raising, [casting](#), stamping or spinning. It includes any form of pot or other vessel, casters and even candlesticks and waiters.*

**H**uguenot *French protestants who were reluctantly tolerated after the Edict of Nantes in 1598 which gave them religious freedom until the Edict was revoked by Louis XIV in 1685. The revocation caused a flood of exiles to the British Isles, the Low countries, the Baltic States and Russia. Many goldsmiths of French extraction were allowed to settle in England and the best known Huguenot families include: Willaume, Harache, Tanqueray, de Lamerie (de la Merie) Courtauld and Platel. Their high standards of workmanship and design had a marked effect on the craft in the 17<sup>th</sup>C and 18<sup>th</sup>C. Huguenot craftsmen brought many of their traditions with them, one of which was the use of fleurs-de-lys and pellets in their maker's mark.*

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**H**usk *A decorative motif especially popular during the neo-classical period consisting of repeating bell shapes based on a wheat husk.*

**I**ncuse *A mark simply stamped or hammered in below the surface of the metal. Since such punches were cut proud of the die, they were easily damaged and although they were used by outworkers to mark small pieces, their use in the [duty marks](#) of 1784 - 1786 was soon superceded by a punch which gave a cameo impression and both the punch and the piece being struck were less liable to damage.*

**J**olly boat *Type of double wine bottle or decanter stand in the form of a shallow boat used by the Royal Navy. Often of leather, they were fashionable during the Napoleonic wars.*

**K**itchen *A type of tea urn with a lamp or heating iron and a spigot or tap. A term used by Matthew Boulton in his catalogues to describe his plated urns.*

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**K**itchen pepper *A small spice dredger or [caster](#), usually with a handle. Also known as a pepper box.*

**K**nop *A small boss or knob protruding from the stem of a cup or candlestick, or the [finial](#) on a cup, pot or spoon.*

**K**nurl *A simple ridged ornament, sometimes imitating ropework, used on less expensive wares instead of using applied wires and mounts.*

**K**nife-box *An upright box with a sloped lid fitted with slots to accommodate knives, and sometimes spoons or forks. Usually of wood, marquetry, [shagreen](#) or japanned ware sometimes with silver fittings.*

**K**rater *An art-historical term for a two handled vase of classical form. Also known as a crater.*

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**L**ambrequin *A deeply scalloped fringe-like ornament common in late 17<sup>th</sup>C French decorative arts*



*introduced to England by Daniel Marot.*

**L**atten

*A yellow, copper based [alloy](#) similar to brass.*

**M**aker's mark

*The mark officially registered at an assay office pertaining to a maker, firm or sponsor. [More](#)*

**M**ask

*Decorative motif of a human, bird or animal head, often [grotesque](#). Popular as applied decoration and for side handles with ring ends on punch bowls and the like.*

**M**agnetic plate

*A form of [electroplating](#) developed by J. Prime of Birmingham in 1844 using a magnetic machine to deposit gold, silver and copper.*

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**M**atting

*A series of punch marks applied evenly and close together to form an overall matt textured pattern. Often used to contrast highly polished areas.*

**M**azarine

*A flat or almost flat plate fitting into a large oval dish and pierced for the purpose of straining off excess water from fish, common in the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup>C and often decorated with elaborate [engraving](#).*

**M**olinet

*A long stirring rod inserted through the aperture on the top of a chocolate pot to whisk the chocolate into a frothy beverage. Projecting flanges, usually pierced, make the lower part resemble a battle mace. Very few molinets survive.*

**M**onteith

*A cooler for wine glasses, resembling a punch bowl but with a notched rim to suspend the glasses by their feet cooling in iced water. First found c.1680 and fashionable for about 40 years. [More](#)*

**M**oresque

*A linear decoration, popular during the mid 16<sup>th</sup>C and composed of scrolling stylized foliage. Derived from Near Eastern art and similar to the [Arabesque](#) but less tightly arranged.*

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**M**uffineer

*A small plain [caster](#), found during the late 17<sup>th</sup>C and early 18<sup>th</sup>C in silver and brass and often with a scroll handle to the side.*

**M**ullet

*An heraldic term for a five pointed star.*

**N**iello

*A black compound of copper, silver and lead or sulphur, lead and mercury used to fill engraved detail. Mainly used in Continental silver for enhancing scrollwork designs.*

**N**ozzle

*The socket with a flange, usually removeable, to hold the candle in the 'stick and to help prevent grease from running down the stem.*

**O**gee

*An architectural moulding consisting of a double curve, convex above and concave below.*

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**O**volo *An oval convex moulding placed vertically. Popular in 16<sup>th</sup>C stamped work.*

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**P**arcel-gilt *Silver which is gilded in selected areas. see: [gilding](#)*

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**P**atera *Circular ornament in low relief based on the classical libation dish, much used in 18<sup>th</sup>C neo-classical silver where it was also adapted to oval outlines. Often enriched with [fluting](#), foliage, etc.*

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**P**atina *The softened lustre of polished silver naturally resulting from usage, caused by oxidation of the surface by way of minute scratches.*

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**P**ennyweight *A measure of [Troy](#) weight, the twentieth part of an ounce [troy](#), equivalent to 24 grains. Usually abbreviated - dwt.*

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**P**ewter *An [alloy](#) consisting principally of tin and lead or bismuth. The Pewterer's Company required that an alloy of not less than 94% tin and 6% of other metals be used for the finest quality English pewter.*

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**P**iercing *Cut decoration. Until c.1760 it was done with very sharp chisels and was often enhanced with [engraving](#). Examination of the cut edges shows how the metal has been slightly turned in as the chisel presses into the metal. Saw piercing (similar to fretwork) generally superceeded chisel-piercing in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup>C and the method is revealed by the tiny vertical teeth marks in the cut. Shortly afterwards a mechanical development of chisel piercing, the fly press, was introduced and used on factory made goods. Simple dot punching for [casters](#) and the like was done with a round cutter or a bow-drill.*

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**P**lanishing *The first stage in finishing the surface of plate before polishing, the removal of hammer marks which occur during [raising](#) is achieved with the use of a special flat-headed hammer.*

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**P**late *Generic term for wrought silver and gold, derived from the Spanish word "plata" meaning silver. Not to be confused with [Sheffield Plate](#)*

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**P**orringer *A small shallow circular vessel with one or two flat handles, in silver or pewter, found in pewter from the mid 16<sup>th</sup>C. Also a deeper vessel, often covered, with two scroll handles, occurring mainly in silver, but sometimes in base metal and pottery from the mid to late 17<sup>th</sup>C. [More](#)*

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**P**ouncing *An overall punched decoration, similar to [matting](#) but usually rather coarser, used from the early 17<sup>th</sup>C onwards.*

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**P**ricked *A description of the dotted style used for simple initials, dates and inscriptions in the 16<sup>th</sup>C and 17<sup>th</sup>C. Chiefly found on spoons, small cups, dishes and other pieces intended for presentation at Christenings and weddings; presumably carried out by*

shopkeepers who were not trained engravers.

## Pricket

The spike on which a candle was stuck before the introduction of the socket-type candleholder. Very rare in silver apart from the very large ecclesiastical candlesticks.

## Quilting

A rare form of chased ornament, resembling waves, used on tureens, candlesticks, etc., from c.1750 to c.1760.

## Raising

The method of making [hollow ware](#) by hammering and forming a sheet of silver over a raising stake.

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## Reeding

A moulding consisting of two or more parallel half-flutes. Sometimes combined with a ribbon-like motif traversing the reeded bands to form borders such as reed-and-tie and reed-and-ribbon.

## Régence

Not properly applicable to English silver, though the style was brought to England in the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup>C. Régence is a French decorative influence that made use of surface enrichment with [diaperwork](#), scalework, flowerheads, scrolls and masks formally arranged; often interpreted by [flat chasing](#) or [repoussé](#) chasing in low relief.

## Regency

A loose description of the taste of grandiose and usually gilded silver made from c.1790 to c.1820 - the period of the Prince Regent's influential patronage to the London silver trade, and especially Rundell, Bridge and Rundell. The actual Regency lasted from 1811 to 1820 when George IV succeeded.

## Repoussé

The process of [embossing](#) metal from the back by hammering domed punches into simple shapes, then giving definition and detail from the front by [chasing](#).

## Rococo

Probably derived from the French "rocaille" (pebble work) and certainly French in inspiration, probably due to the influence of [Huguenot](#) craftsmen. The rococo style consisted of motifs of shells, seaweed, corals, mermaids, shellfish and other marine themes in asymmetrical display combined with scrolls and double curves. It was in fashion between c.1730 and c.1760. Much of the finest rococo silver was cast and richly chased.

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## Salver

A tray or plate, sometimes footed, for serving food or drink; often with a moulded border and decorated with an engraved coat of arms in the centre. [More](#)

## Sconce

The socket for a candle at the top of a candlestick, often with a detachable nozzle inside it. Also a branched candlestick with an oval or elongated, polished or mirrored, back-plate fixed to a wall.

## Shagreen

Originally the skin of the ass (from the Persian "saghari", French "chagrin"), a leather covered with indentations formed by rubbing seeds over the moist skin and rubbing them in. Much used for scabbards.

In the late 17<sup>th</sup>C to early 18<sup>th</sup>C the term became confused with [fish-skin](#), shagreen was usually dyed green with a vegetable dye and used for covering boxes and caskets.

Method invented by Thomas Boulsover of Sheffield c.1743 of fusing a layer of sterling

## Sheffield Plate

silver to a sheet of copper by heating and rolling the two together. The introduction of [Electroplating](#) spelled the end of the Sheffield plate trade which was virtually extinct by 1845. [More](#)

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## Silver-gilt

Silver plated with a thin layer of gold (see: [parcel-gilt](#))

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## Sinking

The first stage in making a piece of silver by hand. A flat sheet of silver is placed over a depression and hammered in to a bowl shape prior to being turned over and placed over a stake for [raising](#).

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## Skillet

English medieval term for a saucepan with a round bowl, three feet and a long handle.

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## Snuffer

An instrument of scissor form with a box at the end, for trimming candle wicks; a redundant form after the invention of the self-consuming wick at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>C.

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## Spinning

A method of working metal using a long handled tool and working the metal over a shaped chuck rotating in a lathe. Used for making [tea and coffee pots](#), [casters](#), [jugs](#), [bowls](#), etc. in the 18<sup>th</sup>C.

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## Stamping

A relief ornament produced by hammering the metal from the back over dies. About the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup>C die-stamping was developed, particularly in Sheffield and Birmingham, to produce candlesticks, vases, baskets and coasters.

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## Standish

Early term for an inkstand, usually fitted with an inkwell and sand box and, until the mid 18<sup>th</sup>C, often with a bell.

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## Sterling

The minimum permitted standard for silver in Britain, allowing 18dwt. of base metal (usually copper) to the pound [Troy](#) or 925 parts per 1000 pure silver (92.5%) to harden it.

Established in 1300, it has been the standard for wrought silver ever since except from 1697 to 1720 when the higher [Britannia standard](#) was in force.

There seems to be different interpretations of the term "sterling". One school of thought is that is derived through the Middle English "starling", from the small star stamped on the silver pennies, from the Old English "steorling": steor = STAR (+ LING)

The other interpretation is it is from the 12<sup>th</sup>C "Easterling", a term for Germans (from the east) who were called in by King John to regulate the fineness of the coinage.

Until c.600AD the only foreign gold coins had circulated in Britain. In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, the gold and silver coinage was crude and locally distributed. King Offa of Mercia (757 - 796) who controlled much of England introduced Frankish silver currency, soon minting his own well made and regulated silver coins which became the first "national" currency since Roman times. It seems likely that these links to the East remained until the time of King John.

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## Strapwork

Form of decoration resembling strips of cut and curling leather. Also used to describe the pierced spine of silver decoration applied to the wooden or leather-covered handles of coffee and chocolate pots c.1690 to 1710.

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## Swags

Bunches of fruit, flowers or foliage, often arranged as festoons or garlands, and engraved or chased. Popular on 16<sup>th</sup>C silver, the style was revived during the [rococo](#) period and re-introduced more formally during the neoclassical period.

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## Tankard

A mug with a hinged cover, usually for beer. [More](#)

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## Thumbpiece

Sometimes called a [billet](#), the cast projection above the hinge of a tankard, jug or pot. Elizabethan designs include angels, cherubs and the like. Later 17<sup>th</sup>C designs feature double corkscrews, acorns and simple bifurcated shapes.

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## Tine

The prong of a fork.

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## Tolerance

The permitted deviation from the standard fineness of a precious metal for which allowance was made during [assay](#), largely because the old [touchstone](#) methods of testing were inaccurate.

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## Tontines

A group of silverwares (and in one instance, a piece of gold) recording the names of subscribers to a loan, together with their date of death and sometimes also their ages. The last survivor inherited the whole income from an annuity based on a scheme by the Italian banker Lorenzo Tonti who devised the scheme whereby subscribers to a loan or fund shared the proceeds among the survivors. The earliest example of a tontine is a gold tumbler cup of 1702 by Pierre Harache. Others include a pair of silver waiters, a cup and cover, a large mug and an inkstand. Tontines should not be confused with pieces bearing memorial inscriptions.

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## Touch

In early records, the Touch indicated the standard of fineness with reference to the [Touchstone](#). Later the term came to be applied also to the marks struck on the gold and silver by the assayer.

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## Touchstone

A black jasper or flinty slate (later replaced by Wedgwoods black Jasperware pottery) used for testing gold and silver by rubbing the metal on the stone and comparing the streak with that made by needles of known fineness. The method was inaccurate and was replaced by a chemical method of assaying c.1840 which in turn was replaced by the Gay-Lussac process of volumetric analysis in 1932.

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## Toy

A term used to describe smallwares such as buttons, buckles and the like.

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## Trefoil

A three-leafed shape.

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## Troy

The gold and silversmith's traditional unit of weight.

$24 \text{ grains} = 1 \text{ pennyweight (dwt)} = 1.555 \text{ grammes} = 0.055 \text{ oz}$   
 $20 \text{ pennyweight (dwt)} = 1 \text{ ounce Troy} = 31.1 \text{ grammes} = 1.097 \text{ oz}$   
 $12 \text{ ounces Troy} = \text{one pound Troy} = 373.2 \text{ grammes}$   
 $1 \text{ gramme} = 0.032 \text{ ounce Troy} = 0.643 \text{ dwt.}$

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**V**ermeil

*Gilding of silver or bronze in the French manner to achieve a reddish colour.*

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**V**itruvian

*A regular wave-like scroll ornament much used in neoclassical silver.*

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scroll

**V**olute

*A spiral scroll as used in Greek architecture, usually with two scrolls placed at either end of a flat section. Sometimes twisted.*

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**W**ater-leaf

*A stylised leaf shape especially popular as chased or applied decoration on neoclassical silver and popular well into the 19thC. Also applied to water lily leaves.*

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**W**ickering

*Plaited split withies (willow) used to insulate the handles of jugs, kettles, coffee pots and other vessels used for hot liquids.*

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# The Britannia Standard



In the latter part of the 17thC the "clipping" and melting down of coinage became a serious problem to the Crown. The Great Recoinage of William III began in 1696 with an Act to "encourage the bringing of wrought plate to be coined".

This Act introduced milled coins (which cannot be "clipped"), and raised the standard of wrought plate from the sterling standard of 92.5% purity to 95.8% pure silver. New hallmarks were ordered with the new standard being marked with a Lion's Head Erased (torn off at the neck) and a figure of a woman "commonly called Britannia" which replaced the [Lion Passant](#) and the Leopard's Head Crowned.

In addition, makers were required to register new marks using the first two letters of their surname instead of the usual practice of the initials of the forename and surname, a single initial or a device.

The new standard was obligatory throughout the Kingdom but it was in 1700 that the Assay Offices of [Chester](#), [York](#), [Exeter](#) and [Norwich](#) were brought in to line. The [Newcastle](#) office followed in 1701. Scotland was not at that time under the jurisdiction of Westminster.

Although the new standard lent itself to finer work, it was softer and was not as robust as the sterling standard. It was also more expensive. Many makers immediately began to lobby for the reinstatement of the sterling standard but some, notably many [Huguenot](#)-born silversmiths who were used to the higher standard in France and those in the export trade counter-petitioned for it's retention.

On the 1st of June 1720 a compromise was reached, the Sterling standard was restored (but with the imposition of a 6d per ounce duty on all wrought plate) (see: [Duty Mark](#)) but those who preferred working in the Britannia Standard were still allowed to use the marks of Britannia and Lion's Head Erased.



### **An Anchor (1773 - present)**

#### [Birmingham Date Letter Sequences](#)

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Assay marking began in Birmingham in 1773. The date letter, which followed a 25 year cycle, was changed in July until 1975 when it (along with all other British date letter sequences) changed in January. The [Britannia](#) figure was used in silver of 95.84% purity.

**B**irmingham gained the right to assay gold and silver articles with the establishment of the Birmingham Assay Office in 1773. The Assay Office was established largely due to the efforts of Matthew Boulton. There is a story that when the manufacturers of Birmingham and [Sheffield](#) (established at the same time) were in London lobbying Parliament for the institution of Assay Offices, they stayed at an inn in the Strand called the "Crown and Anchor". Thinking that these two symbols would make good hallmarks, they decided to toss a coin to see which town would get which mark.

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## The Sheffield Assay Office

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A crown (stamped upside down 1815/19) to 1975

A Tudor rose (from 1st January 1975)

[Sheffield Date Letter Sequences](#)

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The Sheffield Assay Office was founded (along with [Birmingham](#)) in 1773. The Town Mark of a crown (sometimes in the same punch as the date letter on smaller wares and jewellery) was changed to a Tudor rose in 1975 with the harmonisation of British Assay Offices. The date letter was changed in July until that time when it (along with the other Assay Office date letters) changed in January.

Note that the date letters did not follow an alphabetic sequence until 1824. From 1868 the date letters followed a 25 year cycle.

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## The Edinburgh Assay Office

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Three towered castle (from 1485 onwards)

[Edinburgh Date Letter sequences](#)

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Plate was marked at Edinburgh from 1457 onwards. Date letters started in 1681. Prior to this date, a "Deacons mark" was stamped on the piece, to be replaced by the Assay Masters mark. This practice continued until 1759 when it was replaced by a Thistle mark. The Thistle mark continued until 1975 when it was replaced by a Lion Rampant. The date letter, which followed a 25 year cycle, was changed in October until the Hallmarking Act of 1975 when it (along with all other remaining British date letter sequences) changed in January.

# Trays and Salvers

- [Trays and salvers](#)
  - [Serving dishes and plates](#)
- 

## • Trays and Salvers

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*An early George II Square Salver  
by Paul de Lamerie, London, 1728*

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The difference between salvers and trays is that trays have handles and salvers do not. Trays are not found before the late 18th century. Most early salvers perished in the English Civil War and there are few survivors before the reign of Queen Anne.

America imported many salvers from England. Those they made themselves are similar to English ones at an earlier period, and because rare, are expensive. The most common pre-Revolution salver has a shell and scroll border and is more restrained than English salvers of the period.

Salvers under 6 inches (15cm), are occasionally called waiters. The early 18th-century salver is found with a central foot and is sometimes incorrectly called a tazza. Borders generally follow those of the period.

There are few oblong salvers, and square examples tend to date from c.1720-40, when a few rare octofoil (eight sided) examples were also made. Oval salvers, usually from the late 18th century, are much sought after.

Trays are usually oblong or oval, and being larger than salvers, are more expensive. Trays from the 1750s are rare and command high prices. Very large round salvers, being awkward to use, are not as collectable as their size might indicate.

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## • Serving dishes and plates

The earliest surviving plates and their attendant serving dishes are found in the early 18th century. At this time borders are absent but a thread moulding appears by the 1720s. By about 1730 the gadroon border takes over and the outline becomes waved and remains so, although plain circular plates were produced again at the end of the 18th century. More expensive plates have shell-decorated borders and some Regency ones have tied reed borders; beaded borders appearing around 1780.

Shaped oval meat dishes were made *en suite* with the plates and most popular are the very small and the very large. Some of the largest have tree-like wells for draining the juices and occasionally a [mazarine](#), although these have frequently been separated from their dishes. A set would have comprised six dozen dinner plates, two dozen soup plates and 15 or 20 dishes. Such sets are very rare today.

# Teapots, Coffee Pots & Cream Jugs

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- [Teapots](#)
  - [Coffee and chocolate pots](#)
  - [Milk and cream jugs](#)
- 

## • *Teapots*

During the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Tea, coffee and chocolate all became popular in England. Although examples of 17<sup>th</sup>-century coffee and chocolate pots exist, there are almost no teapots found until the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Early teapots are small as tea was very expensive until the 1760s. The earliest types are pear-shaped, but in about 1730 the bullet teapot takes over until around 1750. Silver teapots are rare between then and around 1770 when the drum-shaped teapot appears, followed by the oval shape that lasted until teapots became oblong in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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## • *Coffee pots and Chocolate pots*

The difference between a coffee pot and a chocolate pot is that the latter has a hinged or detachable cap or finial in the lid through which a rod (a molinet) was inserted to stir up the chocolate sediment into a frothy beverage. Projecting flanges, usually pierced, make the lower part resemble a battle mace. Very few molinets survive.

Coffee and chocolate pots are taller than teapots in order to keep the spout above the sediment. The 18<sup>th</sup> century starts with side handled tapering cylindrical examples with high domed covers until c.1730, chocolate pots are seldom seen after this time. Coffee pots take on a baluster-shape from 1730 until 1800, when they become vase shaped. Like the teapots, they then become oblong, before reverting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to mainly [baluster](#) styles.

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## • *Milk and cream jugs*

No milk or cream jugs are found before the reign of Queen Anne (1702 - 1714) and they are very rare until the 1720s. Early examples tend to be [baluster](#)-shaped, although the octagonal ones are much sought after. The smaller pitcher milk jug endures until around 1730 with a central foot and then on three feet until the 1760s when the central foot returns. Design then passes through the pear and helmet shapes until at the end of the century the cream jug matches the teapot or set.

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# Cruets and Casters

- [Casters](#)
  - [Cruets](#)
  - [Salts](#)
- 

## • *Casters*

In the days when keeping food fresh was a problem, spices such as pepper, nutmeg and cinnamon were used to enhance or disguise the taste of it. These were usually held in casters, so-called because they cast their contents over the food.

Since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the shape of the caster has scarcely altered. The early cylindrical and baluster shapes come with bayonet-type covers. These have two flaps that fit through wire at the rim and are turned to hold the lid in place. Octagonal examples appear in the reign of George I and after this time covers have bezels sitting inside the caster bodies.

Before about 1780 casters often came in sets of three: one with a large piercing for crushed loaf sugar; one for pepper and a third for other spices, or for dry mustard. In the latter case the caster would have a "blind" cover, without piercing. After about 1780 casters came singly or in pairs.

*18<sup>th</sup>C casters are usually marked in a group under the base. Some 18<sup>th</sup>C and 19<sup>th</sup>C examples are marked in a line on the side of the body.*

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## • *Cruets*

Framed cruets are found from about 1700. These usually comprise two bottles for oil and vinegar and three casters, all held by a silver, or Warwick, frame. The modern style mustard pot appears from about 1760. These usually have blue glass liners and are often pierced.

*Mustard pots are marked in a group on the base, in a line on the body or in a curve round the base*

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## • *Salts*



*A large circular saltcellar with gadrooned lip, fluted body on 3 anthemion feet with gilt interior by Adey, Bellamy and Savory, London 1830.*

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**F**rom the early 18<sup>th</sup> century salt was kept in pairs of salt cellars. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century most are on three feet. The exceptions are trenchers, the common form at the start of the period, and some that were made at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was usual to gild the inside of salts to resist corrosion. Some very elaborate salts were made in Regency and Victorian times.

*From the mid 18<sup>th</sup> C, salts are marked in a group on the base or in a line on the body.*

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# Bowls

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- [Monteiths](#)
  - [Porringers](#)
  - [Brandy Saucepans](#)
- 

## Monteiths

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A late 19th-century lobed and fluted Monteith with  
12½" (32cm)

Early punch bowls or monteiths will be marked in a straight line on the side of the body. Detachable rims must also be fully marked. Later examples are likely to be marked at the points of the compass underneath.

The term monteith is said to derive from a Scotsman called Monteith who is reputed to have had a cloak with a scalloped edge. Punch bowls and monteiths first appeared at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Early monteiths were smaller than punch bowls, with a waved border on the rim whose function was to enable glasses to be hung on the scalloped notches of the rim by their stems, their bowls cooling in iced water. The monteith rapidly expanded in size and by the 1690s had acquired handles, usually hung from lions' masks. As the monteith approached the size of the punch bowl the rim was often detachable so that the bowl could do duty as either; these rims have often been lost.

Early monteiths tend to have [gadroon](#) borders on at least the foot mount and there is almost invariably space on the body for a large and impressive coat of arms. The rims are often decorated with cherubs' masks or shells.

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## • *Porringers and Bleeding bowls*

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A late 17th-century porringer,  
London 1685, with  
engraved  
chinoiserie figures.  
ht 6½" (16cm)

English bleeding bowls can be marked as Monteiths, and in addition there should be a lion passant on the handle. Porringers and caudle cups are marked in the same way as other bowls, and in addition any covers must also be fully marked on examples earlier than the mid 18<sup>th</sup> C. Thereafter a maker's mark and lion passant are sufficient.

There are various derivatives of the basic bowl. A shallow bowl with a [pierced](#) handle is known in England as a bleeding bowl and in America as a porringer, which seems more reasonable as these bowls were almost certainly used for porridge. In America porringers were largely an 18<sup>th</sup>-century item. Styles followed the form of English ones of an earlier period. Bleeding bowls were made in England for about 100 years after the accession of Charles I in 1625. The earliest ones have straight sides and are indistinguishable from [skillet](#) covers. Later types have curved sides. As a rule the handles tended to become more elaborate over the years. The English porringers used for a variety of drinks and mixtures is a two-handled, rather deeper bowl with straight sides. Some have a spout. Those with [baluster](#) sides are sometimes known as caudle cups also known as posset cups.

These vessels were supposed to have been used for drinking "caudle", a warm spiced gruel of oatmeal, ale, sugar and spices which was much advocated for curing minor ills and recommended for pregnant women. . The earliest survivors date from the middle of the 17th century; the caudle cup continued for 50 years or so, but the porringer in its final form survived until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Its successors are the cups and covers produced in an infinite variety of styles down to the present day.

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## • *Brandy Saucepans*



*A baluster brandy saucepan  
and cover ht 6½" (16cm)*

*Brandy saucepans are usually marked in a group on the base*

The brandy saucepan is an 18<sup>th</sup>-century product. While some of the smaller ones may well have been used for heating brandy, the larger ones must surely have had other uses. The earlier examples have [baluster](#) or slightly flared bodies, whereas those made at the end of the century sometimes have straight sides. Some have a cover.

Bowls with an early 18<sup>th</sup>-century appearance are easily made up from tureen liners or dishes of a later date. It is often apparent that such bowls are not genuine as the style of decoration rarely accords with the date of the marks - usually late 18<sup>th</sup>-century.



# Candlesticks

- [Candlesticks](#)
  - [Chambersticks](#)
  - [Tapersticks](#)
- 

- *Candlesticks*



*A cast silver candlestick, London 1730 ht.6" (15.5cm)*

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Candlesticks have not survived in any numbers prior to around 1660, despite the fact that they must have been found in many homes.

The typical late 17th-century candlestick was "[raised](#)" from sheet metal and had a cluster column stem. This style was superseded toward the end of the century by the cast candlestick, which continued until after the middle of the 18th century, when increasing mechanisation brought about the introduction of the "loaded" candlestick which was stamped from sheet silver, the interior being filled with pitch.

Candlesticks became taller as the 18<sup>th</sup> century progressed, starting at about 6 or 7 inches (15-18cm), rising to 10 inches (25cm) in the 1750s and rising to a full 12 inches (30.5cm) by the start of the 19th century; Victorian candlesticks returned to about 10 inches (25.5cm).

Detachable nozzles, which stop the wax pouring down the stem of the candlestick, became a regular feature by the 1740s. They usually have the same decoration and conform in outline to the base of the candlestick.

*Sheet metal candlesticks are visually marked in a line on the stem just above the base. Cast candlesticks can be marked in the well, and if so the marks are likely to be worn. More often they are marked underneath in each corner if the candlestick is square, or in a line if it is circular. Cast candlesticks can also be marked on the outside of the base, where again wear is likely, or on the inside rim, in which case they are sometimes hard to find. Candelabra branches must be fully marked. Detachable drip pans, sconces and nozzles must bear at least a lion passant. The sconce on cast candlesticks is cast separately, so any made prior to 1784 should ideally have a lion passant struck on it, although this may have worn off. The nozzle should have the maker's mark and lion passant.*

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- *Chamber candlesticks*



*A late 18th-century chamberstick, London 1783, with beaded border; ht 5.5" (14cm)*

The classic chamber candlesticks, (here comes a candle to light you to bed...), have not, as a rule, survived in good condition. The earliest examples have flat handles and date from the early 18th century. From c.1720 the ring or scroll handle became standard and is frequently fitted with a slot to take the conical extinguisher (snuffer) found from the middle of the century on.

*Chamber candlesticks are marked in a line, usually on the base; nozzles and extinguishers should have a maker's mark and lion passant.*

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## • *Tapersticks*

Tapersticks, made to hold a wax taper, exist from the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and generally follow the style of candlesticks of the period. Unlike full-size candlesticks, they are usually found singly; pairs are rare and can usually command almost the same price as full-size candlesticks.

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# The Duty Mark

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In 1757 although the silver trade was obviously flourishing the Government recognised that very little of the 6d per ounce duty in force at the time was being paid. To resolve this situation they imposed instead a £2 plate licence payable by all those who made or traded in precious metals. It also made the counterfeiting of hallmarks a crime punishable by death! In 1784 legislation was introduced that recorded that duty of 6d per ounce had been paid by having the Sovereign's Head stamped on all precious metals other than the lightest and flimsiest examples.



- **F**rom 1784 - 1786 the head of George III was shown incuse in an octagonal punch, facing to the left.



- **F**rom 1786 this changed to the head in cameo, facing to the right.



- **T**his practice was continued for the heads of George IV



- and William IV



- **B**ut the head of Victoria was shown facing the left.
- 

Although the mark was struck at all provincial assay offices, its introduction was delayed in Dublin until 1807. The 6d per ounce duty remained in force until 1797 when it was doubled. Birmingham in particular showed this double duty by striking the Sovereign's Head twice

In 1804 the duty was raised to 1s 3d and again in 1815 to 1s 6d calculated on 5/6th of the total weight of the piece. This was to allow for the usual wastage incurred in finishing. The duty on gold and silver was finally removed in 1890 but the £2 plate licence remained in force until quite recently.



- **I**n 1934 - 1936 the Sovereign's Head was struck to mark the Silver Jubilee of George V and Queen Mary, used voluntarily on silver only



- **I**n 1952 - 1953 to mark the Coronation of Elizabeth II (on both silver and gold)



- and in 1977 to mark the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II (also a voluntary mark).
- 

**F**or nine months between Dec 1st 1784 and July 1785 the figure of Britannia - standing and struck incuse - was used on exported silver and gold. This mark was struck on finished wares and the danger of damage to a piece was so great that this practice was soon discontinued and duty drawback was claimed on shipping bills, thus making this the rarest of English silver marks.

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Although SilverMine is primarily concerned with sterling silver, we have included this brief guide to Sheffield Plate and Electroplate. These items can provide an interesting (and less expensive!) alternative.

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- [Sheffield Plate](#)
  - [Electroplate](#)
  - [History of Cutlery](#)
- 

## Sheffield Plate

The search for a silver substitute was prompted by the increasing prosperity of the 18<sup>th</sup>C middle classes and led to the invention of Sheffield Plate by Thomas Boulsover c.1743. The new material was made by fusing a sheet of sterling silver to an ingot of copper in a furnace. The resulting material was then rolled or hammered into a sheet and made up into both decorative and practical objects, using the power of the new technologies of the time.

The "double sandwich" form of Sheffield Plate was developed around 1770. Used for pieces such as bowls and mugs that had a visible interior, it consisted of a sheet of silver each side of a piece of copper; early manufacturers applied a film of solder over the bare edge of copper although such pieces are very rare. Later on, borders were applied with a U-shaped section of silver wire to conceal the copper which can be felt as a lip on the underside.

From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>C the borders of Sheffield Plate pieces became increasingly ornamental, more so than on [sterling](#) silver wares, probably because they could be produced far less expensively than solid silver borders. Borders should be carefully examined for wear. A little copper showing is generally considered attractive, but more than that is not. The decoration of Sheffield Plate is always [flat-chased](#), and the pattern should be visible on the underside of the piece. Engraving is not a feature of Sheffield Plate (except for coats of arms), as it would have meant cutting through to the copper base. In early pieces the copper showed through where coats of arms were engraved, but from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>C a more heavily plated disc, which could take the engraving, was let into the piece. In the Regency period this method was superseded by letting in a pure silver oblong; this can be easily seen as the rest of the object has a surface of sterling standard (92.5%), it oxidizes at a different rate from the pure silver part.

Most pieces of Sheffield Plate hollow ware, such as candlesticks and coffeepots, have a visible seam. If no seam is visible, the article has either been re-plated and the seam covered up in the process, or it is not Sheffield Plate. Some articles have a liner - for example, urns. Once this is removed, a dull lead-ish colour, caused by tin, should be visible on the inside. A silver colour inside indicates re-plating.

Much of Sheffield Plate is unmarked although some makers used a symbol. Some early 19<sup>th</sup>C Sheffield Plate had marks that resembled those used on sterling silver. A piece with "Sheffield Plate" stamped on it is electroplate made in Sheffield since the 19<sup>th</sup>C, rather than genuine Sheffield Plate. The end of Sheffield Plate was signified by the discovery of electroplating in the 1840's. By the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851 almost no Sheffield Plate was exhibited, electroplate being the new fashion..

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## Electroplate

This method of plating silver was used from c.1840 and gradually replaced Sheffield Plate, which after the Great Exhibition of 1851 became increasingly rare. Electroplating creates a coating of pure silver which is whiter and harsher in appearance than the softer glow of Sheffield Plate. The process involves covering one metal with a thin layer of silver by electro-deposition. The laws of electrolytic deposition had been formulated by Faraday as early as 1833 and the process was patented by the Elkington company of Birmingham in the mid 19<sup>th</sup>C.

In 1836 G.R. Elkington applied for a number of patents for "an improved method of gilding copper, brass, and other metals or alloys of metals" by electrolysis and in 1840 he took out a patent for a new process of depositing silver by

electrolysis, a discovery which he had made in collaboration with John Wright, following work he had carried out for the London maker Benjamin Smith.

The base metal was initially copper, subsequently nickel was used, hence the term EPNS (**E**lectro-**P**lated **N**ickel **S**ilver). Britannia Metal , an alloy of tin, copper, antimony and zinc is quite often found bearing the stamp EPBM.

Styles followed those that were most popular in silver. The most popular electroplated items are cake baskets, candlesticks and entree dishes. Tea sets are becoming increasingly popular. Being far less expensive even than Sheffield Plate, electroplated wares are not collected for their intrinsic worth but as inexpensive silver- style items. Electroplated flatware services provide the only alternative to silver, as it proved impossible to make flatware in Sheffield Plate without a large ugly seam. Flatware patterns tended to follow the styles of their Sterling counterparts.

Unlike Sheffield Plate, most electroplate has makers' marks and indications of quality such as "A1" "EP" or "EPNS". Some silversmiths made both electroplate and Sterling silver - for example, James Dixon & Sons, Elkington, and Walker & Hall. Although the marks used were similar on both their silver and their electroplates, the marks are applied in a noticeably different way.

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# Flatware

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- [Spoons](#)
  - [Forks](#)
  - [Knives](#)
- 

## • Spoons



***A Hanoverian pattern rat-tail spoon***

Image courtesy of [Schredds of Portobello](#)

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The earliest period for finding and collecting English spoons is the Middle Ages. Scottish spoons occur from around the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In those days, food was eaten either with a spoon or from the blade of the knife until the introduction of the fork in around 1660.

Early spoons had curved fig-shaped bowls and decorative [finials](#). The most common types of finial are the apostle and the seal top. The "seal" was hexagonal at first, then oval and finally round by the time it dies out in the 1660s. Until the 1670s, there was a set size for a spoon, when differences developed between teaspoons, dessert spoons and table spoons and serving spoons were introduced.

The late 17<sup>th</sup>-century spoons initially keep the old fashioned type of bowl and have very plain tops. However, by the 1680s the form of the bowl had more or less evolved into the shape it is today, and the spoon terminal had a so-called trefid end. This became less pronounced until it became the dog-nose pattern of the Queen Anne period (1702 - 1714). At this period spoons generally have a "rat-tail", or reinforcing rib, down the back of the bowl. Subsequently, throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there are really only two patterns: the Hanoverian and the Old English. The Hanoverian style can be distinguished by the upturned curve of the terminal, forks and spoons being laid face down. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the so-called rat-tail had disappeared and the bowl became more pointed and less oval.

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## • Forks



Image courtesy of [Schredds of Portobello](#)

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Forks were introduced to England in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century in the styles of spoons of the period. Until the 1770s most were made with three prongs; thereafter four prongs became normal.

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## • Knives

Strictly speaking, knives are not classed as flatware, they are termed cutlery, ie. anything with a cutting edge.

The 18<sup>th</sup>-century knife has a steel blade and a hollow silver handle with a pitch or resin core. The silver on the handle is often stamped from very thin sheet and consequently is often badly worn; it is also subject to damage if the resin expands. It is rare to find knives included in sets of flatware, and in fact it is probably more sensible to use modern ones which are much more durable.

**T**he early 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the introduction of many patterns. Some very elaborate designs were produced by the London goldsmith Paul Storr, and even more new types appeared during the Victorian period.

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# Drinking Vessels

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- [Beakers](#)
  - [Tumbler Cups](#)
  - [Jugs](#)
  - [Tankards](#)
  - [Mugs](#)
  - [Goblets](#)
- 

## • *Beakers*

The first beakers were made before English silver was hallmarked and are relatively common in England and the Continent of Europe but are not often found in America. The basic form varies very little: 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century examples are taller and have a slightly broader base than those of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They were not made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*Beakers are marked in a group underneath.*

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## • *Tumbler Cups*

The smaller form of the beaker is the tumbler cup, found in England between 1660 and the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These are hammered up from a single piece of silver ("[raised](#)"). As most of the weight is at the base, they tumble upright if pushed over on their side, hence the name. Examples from the 17<sup>th</sup> century tend to be broader than they are high and are usually of plain form.

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## • *Jugs*

The earliest domestic jugs appear in about 1660. Except the very first ones, they are almost invariably of baluster form and relatively plain throughout the 18th century. Until the end of the reign of George I they are sometimes found with covers. The grander examples were occasionally made in pairs. As the handles are silver and without insulation, they probably held only cold liquid.

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## • *Tankards*

Tankards, which differ from mugs in being lidded, were made in vast numbers from 1660 - 1780. As taste turned from ale to wine and spirits, tankards began to lose their popularity. Early tankards are straight-sided and late 17th-century examples are sometimes chased with [gadroons](#) or acanthus leaves, applied with [cut card](#) work, or engraved with [chinoiserie](#). The 18th-century tankard was plain, perhaps with a coat of arms. Most pieces made in the 19th century are presentation or commemorative items.

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## • *Mugs*





Image courtesy of [Schredds of Portobello](#)

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The earliest mugs date from the 1680s have a shape derived from contemporary pottery and are bulbous with a cylindrical reeded neck. Those made at the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century have straight, slightly tapered sides on a moulded base; the [baluster](#) shape gradually predominates after 1730, although many of the mugs that were made in [Newcastle](#) retain their straight sides. While 17<sup>th</sup>-century mugs are found with [chinoiserie](#) engraving or chased with [gadroons](#), those from the 18<sup>th</sup> century were usually plain, and any decoration is of a later date. With the onset of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mugs lost their practical use, but became popular christening presents. The later mug is therefore smaller and highly decorated, Victorian examples being particularly ornate.

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## • *Goblets*

Silver goblets were made in from the very earliest times but by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they seem to have fallen out of favour only to reappear in the 1760s. The form became standardised by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with a plain bowl on a trumpet-shaped foot. This becomes more elaborate during [Regency](#) times and the Victorians took the decoration further still , in extreme examples hardly any plain surface remains.

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## The Exeter Assay Office

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A capital letter "X", crowned (variations to 1701)

A three-towered turreted castle (from 1701)

[Exeter Date Letter Sequences](#)

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The making of wrought silver was recorded in Exeter in the Middle Ages. the Roman capital letter "X", sometimes crowned, was used as a town mark in the 16th and 17th centuries. From 1701 the Town Mark of a three towered turreted castle was used with the re-establishment of the Assay Office which closed in 1883. The date letter sequence started in November 1701, then changed annually in August from 1702.



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## The Norwich Assay Office

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A castle over a lion passant

[Norwich Date Letter Sequences](#)

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**N**orwich was established as an Assay Office centre in 1423 although goldsmiths have been recorded as working in the city from as early as 1142. Although Norwich was re-confirmed as an Assay Office by the act of 1701, it did not in fact re-open due to lack of demand. The town mark of a castle over a lion passant was joined in 1581 by a crowned rose which was perhaps used as a standard mark. A rose sprig has also been recorded 1643/88.

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## The Newcastle Assay Office

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Three separate castles (from city arms) from c.1670

[Newcastle Date Letter Sequences](#)

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Goldsmiths have been recorded working in Newcastle from the 13<sup>th</sup>C. Some late 17<sup>th</sup>C examples have a single castle as a "town" mark, and a lion passant. Later, the town mark of three separate castles was used. The Assay Office was re-established in 1702 although the early date letters were not consistently carried on. The Assay office was finally closed in 1884.



## The Chester Assay Office

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- **1686 - 1701** Three sheaves ("garbs") with sword.
- **1701 - 1779** Three sheaves / Three lions halved
- **1779 - 1961** Three sheaves with sword.

[Chester Date Letter sequences](#)

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Plate was assayed at Chester from the early 15th century. Marks were regulated from about the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Chester office was re-established in 1701 and closed in 1961. Prior to the establishment of the [Birmingham](#) Assay Office in 1773, most of the plate produced in the Midlands and the north west of England was "[touched](#)" at Chester. The date letter which followed a 25 year cycle was changed in July.



## The York Assay Office

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**Half leopard's head/half fleur-de-lys. (1560 - c.1697)**

**Half rose crowned/half fleur-de-lys. (c.1697 - 1701)**

**A cross charged with five lions passant. (1701 - 1857)**

### [York Date Letter Sequences](#)

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Goldsmiths have been recorded working in York as early as 1270. It was granted its own Assay Office by the act of 1423 when the town mark of half leopard's head/half fleur-de-lys was instituted. The date letter was introduced in 1560, and between 1632 and 1698 the town mark changed to half rose crowned/half fleur de lys. This in turn gave way in 1701 to a cross charged with five lions passant taken from the arms of the city. In 1716 the Assay office closed, and until it re-opened in 1776, York silver was "touched" at [Newcastle](#). The Assay Office finally closed in 1857.

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SilverMine

# British Silver Marks Birmingham 1773 - 1999



[1773 - 1900](#)

[1900 - 1999](#)

Assay marking began in Birmingham in 1773. The date letter was changed in July until 1975 when it (along with all other British date letter sequences) changed in January. The Britannia figure was used in silver of 95.84% purity.



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## THE SHEFFIELD CUTLERY INDUSTRY

Sheffield has been the home of cutlery for the best part of the last thousand years. Although there were many knife making and cutlery centres in Britain over the centuries, Sheffield became the pre-eminent centre for many reasons.

The first recorded mention of Sheffield cutlery is in the inventory of King Edward III's possessions in the Tower of London in 1340. King Edward must have valued the knife as he was very specific about leaving it to a beneficiary in his will. In the 1380's Chaucer wrote about a Sheffield knife in the Reeves tale, and can be seen wearing such a knife in the portraits that were painted of him. By the 1580's, Sheffield penknives were being recommended as the first choice for schoolmasters in *The Writing Schoolmaster*.

Sheffield has good natural resources. Five rivers flow from the surrounding hills down through the Sheffield area and powered the water wheels which drove grinding wheels for the cutlers. Coal for smelting and forging, and iron ore for making the blades were also both mined locally. Finally, nearby quarries provided the sandstone for the grindstones with which items were sharpened and polished, and it was the quality of these grindstones and the large number of water powered workshops using them that really gave Sheffield the edge above other cutlery making centres.

Another reason for the success of Sheffield's cutlery industry must be due to the system of organisation. Under George Talbot, Lord of the Manor of Sheffield, the cutlers operated under a system of guilds, with the Lord of the Manor at the head. Unfortunately, when George Talbot's successor died in 1617, the guild system fell down, as there was nobody to take over in the position of authority. The Sheffield cutlers were so concerned by the disorganisation, that 4 years later, they presented a bill to Parliament to form a new controlling body. This Act of Parliament formed the Company of Cutlers of Hallamshire (which covers the whole Sheffield area) which was established in 1624, and under this new authority, the cutlery industry flourished. The company is still around today, and although it lost it's authority in the early 19th Century, it still has some important functions, and is relevant today in Sheffield.

The Sheffield Cutlery trade grew throughout the 17th and early 18th Centuries, gaining extra growth when new developments in increasing the quality of steel gave the cutlers a finer basic product to work with. Specialisation of tasks also helped the industry to grow, and by the mid 19th Century, the Sheffield cutlery trade was very large, employing ten thousand people, and by the end of the Century more than fifteen thousand. In comparison, London had only one thousand, and then 500 cutlers at those dates. By the 1920's a new development - stainless steel started to be used, developed by a Sheffield metallurgist, and it is now the standard material for knife blades made today.

### Knives

We always talk about knives and forks, never forks and knives, probably because the knife has the longest history. The first very simple cutting edges were made from flint and date back 2 million years, but recognisable blades were made out of stone from five hundred thousand years ago during the palaeolithic period (500,000-10,000 B.C.)

By the Neolithic period four to seven thousand years ago (5000-2000 B.C.), stone blades were being polished and were fitted with crude handles along the top edge of the blade, which were made of wood or animal hides to protect the users hand.

Metal blade knives were first made from copper and then bronze in the years 3000-700 B.C., and they have many features that we still retain today. A bolster and tang was added so that a handle could be fitted to the end of the blade (just as they are today), and shapes developed that can still be seen in many carving knives that are still produced today. After the bronze age came the discovery that an iron blade had a much sharper and long-lasting edge, and iron knives were widely made from about 1000 years before the birth of Christ. The Romans in particular developed many different types of knife to suit a wide number of uses (including ritual animal sacrifices and knives for cutting hair!). Knives were considered to be very important possessions, and were treasured - people had their personal eating knives which they carried with them (they would not be provided at a table), and it was not unusual for people to be buried with their personal eating knives.

### Forks

Personal eating knives first appeared in Britain in the 14th Century. However, individual forks to be used with the knives were not in widely used until the the end of the 16th Century in Britain. Interestingly, it was the Italians who first started using forks, and it took more than 50 years before they were adopted by the British - the Italians were obviously much more fussy about using dirty fingers to pick up pieces of food!

It is believed that forks were first developed from a small steadying knife that was used to hold a joint of meat steady whilst it was being carved. The single point turned into a single prong, and then a two-pronged fork, much like carving forks today. Three-pronged and four-pronged versions were developed as forks became smaller and more suited to eating with, rather than carving with.

### Spoons

The first spoons were very crude - scooped out of the end of a bone or an animal's horn, or made out of a shell tied onto a stick. Spoons continued to be made out of these materials for many years, even though the bronze age and iron ages when knives were being made out of metal. Very few bronze spoons have ever been found, and iron was not suited for bending into spoons.

The Romans introduced more sophisticated spoons to Britain, making them out of bone, pewter, bronze and silver. The ealiest Roman



spoons are simply round bowls attached to a narrow handle, but different bowl shapes evolved as time went by, becoming thinner at the handle end, and more flared at the front. When the Viking and Saxon invaders came to Britain, spoon shapes changed again, the bowl becoming leaf-shaped, with decorative ends shaped like carved acorns. As with knives, personal eating spoons would be carried with a person - they would not be provided for people at a table, and were often given as Christening gifts. When Cromwell and the Puritans were in power, the decorative ends to spoons were removed and the end flattened, and the bowl changed to an elliptical (oval) shape that is now the familiar shape of a dessert spoon today.

# The SilverMine Guide to English Silver

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## Glossary

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### Acanthus

*Classical ornament in the form of stylized leaf decoration based on the scalloped leaves of the acanthus plant.*

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### Alloy

*Originally the fineness of gold or silver was determined "à la loi" - according to the law. Later this term was applied to the mixing of base metals such as copper to gold or silver to harden or colour it.  
An amalgam formed of two or more metals.*

---

### Andiron

*Metal objects in pairs, with a horizontal iron bar for supporting logs in the fireplace and a vertical decorative element at the front in brass, iron or silver. Popular in England until the 18<sup>th</sup>C when the use of logs as fuel was replaced by coal.*

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### Annealing

*Process for restoring the malleability of silver or other metals which have been made brittle by hammering; the metal is heated until red hot then plunged into cold water. This re-arranges the molecular structure of the metal.*

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### Anthemion

*From the Greek word for flower; bands of stylized lotus and palmette motifs derived from classical architecture.*

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### Apron

*Decorative framework between the supports of a kettle stand, basket, [épergne](#) or centrepiece. Often [cast](#), pierced and [chased](#).*

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- A**rabesque *Surface decoration of scrolling, and intertwining foliage, tendrils and scrolls. Thought to be of Moorish influence, it became popular in northern Europe in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup>C reaching England in the second half of the century and becoming popular in the decorative arts.*
- 
- A**rgyll *A vessel resembling a small coffee pot designed for keeping gravy warm whilst on the table. An inner chamber is filled with hot water thus keeping the surrounding gravy warm. First recorded c.1760, it was possibly first made for the 4th Duke of Argyll.*
- 
- A**rmorial *The representation of a full coat of arms including the motto (if any), the shield of arms, the helmet and crest engraved on a piece of silver.*
- 
- A**ssay *The testing and trial of metals to determine their purity by [touch](#), fire, [cupellation](#) or other means. There are four Assay Offices in Great Britain today; [London](#), [Edinburgh](#), [Birmingham](#) and [Sheffield](#).*
- 
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- A**ssay Scrape *The portion of silver scraped from an unfinished piece by the assayer, sometimes visible as a series of long gouges on the backs of trays and waiters. Usually these marks are removed by the maker during finishing when it has been returned from hallmarking.*
- 
- A**uricular *Early 17<sup>th</sup>C Dutch style characterized by lobe-shaped or cartilaginous forms; developed by Paul and Adam van Vianen of Utrecht. Found in English silver during the second quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup>C. Also known as the lobate style.*
- 
- B**aluster *Small vertical moulding of undulating profile and usually of circular section, commonly used for candlesticks and finials and stems of cups, etc.*
- 
- B**ath Border *A moulded applied border formed of pairs of shallow curves meeting at a point intersected by short straight sections. Used for [waiters and salvers](#).*
- 
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- B**eading *A decorative border ornament composed of adjacent half rounds. Used on trays, waiters and salvers particularly during the neo-classical period and later.*
- 
- B**illet *A simple box-like moulding of alternating relief bars, usually achieved by stamping and much used on mid-16<sup>th</sup>C plate.  
Also the [thumbpiece](#) on a flagon or tankard.*
- 
- B**ombé *A [baluster](#) - like curved form but of square or rectangular section rather than circular.*
- 
- B**oss *A raised area used in decoration, originally the protuberance on a shield.  
See: [Embossing](#)*
- 
- B**right-cut *A technique of engraving much used in the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup>C. The effect is achieved by the back of the graver burnishing the cut as the front part of the tool picks out the metal giving a distinctively crisp appearance.*
- 
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## Britannia

A silver [alloy](#) composed of 95.84% silver and 4.16% other metals, also expressed as 11 ounces 10 dwt (pennyweight) of pure silver to 8 dwt per pound [Troy](#).

It was introduced to prevent the use of the [sterling](#) coinage for plate-working. It was the enforced standard in English silver from 1697 -1719 and optional thereafter. The new standard was marked with a figure of [Britannia and a lions head erased](#), this practice continuing until 1975 when the leopard's head replaced the lions' head erased in association with the Britannia figure.

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## Buffet of Plate

The means by which the princes, nobility and ecclesiastics of the Middle Ages and the 16<sup>th</sup>C displayed their wealth . Plate and precious vessels were displayed in rows in the dining halls.

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## Bullet shape

Spheroid form popular for [teapots](#) during the second quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup>C, with flush cover and tapering sides.

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## Burnishing

The technique whereby gold or silver is brought to a high finish by rubbing the surface with a hard smooth object such as agate or other hardstone, a dog's tooth (presumably removed from the dog) or very high grade steel.

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## Campana

Of Greek vase shape, waisted like a bell. A term used to describe the neo-classical vases of the Regency period.

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## Candelabrum

A candlestick with arms and nozzles for two or more candles.

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## Carat

A measure of the purity of gold. Pure gold is 24 carats, alloyed with 50% of other metals it becomes 12 carats. Until the hallmarking act of 1798 all gold had to be 22 carat, although marked with the same marks as [sterling](#) silver. Legal standards of purity are now 9 ct, 14ct, 18ct, and 22ct.

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## Cartouche

Originally a scroll of paper (as in the surrounds for the names of the Pharaohs of Egypt), it was developed as a decorative shield, normally [engraved](#), [embossed](#) or [cast](#), and generally containing a coat of arms or an inscription.

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## Caster

A box or container of variable form but with a [pierced](#) cover, for sprinkling sugar, salt or ground spices. [More](#)

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## Casting

A process for making metal objects whereby molten metal is poured into a mould. Stronger but more extravagant with metal than raising, it is used in plate for items like feet, stems, spouts, and [finials](#).

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## Caudle Cup

Popular two handled vessel of the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup>C. Now more properly called a [porringer](#), these vessels were supposed to have been used for drinking "caudle", a warm spiced gruel of oatmeal, ale, sugar and spices which was much advocated for curing minor ills and recommended for pregnant women. Also known as a posset cup.

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## Cellini Ewer

William Elliot was the first to reproduce the so-called "Cellini" ewer in the 1820's, a vase shaped piece richly decorated with masks, foliage, [strapwork](#), medallions and scrolls in what was considered to be at the time the Renaissance style. The design continued to be made in silver and later in [electro-plate](#) throughout the 19<sup>th</sup>C.

<b>C</b> hamber Candlestick	<i>A small portable <a href="#">candlestick</a> on a plate-shaped base with a scroll or ring handle; often equipped with a snuffer or extinguishers. Found in the late 16<sup>th</sup>C and into the 19<sup>th</sup>C.</i>
<b>C</b> hamplevé	<i>A form of enamelling in which the ground is recessed to receive the enamel.</i>
<b>C</b> harger	<i>A large, shallow plate or dish used for serving meat. Sometimes used for decorative purposes.</i>
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<b>C</b> hasing	<i>The tooling or surface working of metal to create a relief pattern. Different punches of various sizes and shapes are used to push the metal into different patterns. Unlike <a href="#">engraving</a> or carving, this does not entail the removal of any metal.</i>
<b>C</b> hinoiserie	<i>An escapist Western style loosely based on Chinese art and motifs usually applied to European forms. The style was popular in silver during the late 17<sup>th</sup>C and mid 18<sup>th</sup>C with a further revival c.1820.</i>
<b>C</b> hippendale	<i>A moulded border of alternating long convex and short concave curves, much used for <a href="#">salvers and waiters</a> from c.1730 in imitation of the wood-carving patterns popularised by the furniture-maker Thomas Chippendale.</i>
<b>C</b> loisonné	<i>A form of enamelling in which narrow strips of metal wire are soldered on to the base to form compartments into which the enamel is poured.</i>
<b>C</b> lose Plating	<i>A method of applying a layer of silver foil to tinned steel by heat fusion and <a href="#">burnishing</a>. Originally a cutlers device for plating knives, scissors, spurs and the like.</i>
<b>Back to Top</b>	
<b>C</b> oaster	<i>A small tray for circulating bottles or food around the dining table, especially a circular decanter stand with silver sides and a turned wooden base.</i>
<b>C</b> ommunion Cup	<i>The vessel which took the place of the chalice in Anglican communion services after the Reformation, generally with a beaker-shaped bowl, knopped stem and circular foot.</i>
<b>C</b> oral and Bells	<i>Old name for a child's rattle, usually incorporating a whistle, the coral terminal being an aid to teething.</i>
<b>C</b> rest	<i>Heraldic device or badge surmounting a coat of arms. Originally worn on a knight's helmet, it was used on silverwares as an indication of ownership without the expense of having a full coat of arms engraved.</i>
<b>C</b> resting	<i>An edging ornament standing proud of a horizontal surface, fashionable on medieval and early Renaissance silver.</i>
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<b>C</b> ruet	<i>Small bottles, usually with a stopper, used for oil and vinegar in domestic settings and for wine and water in the eucharist; usually of glass, with silver stopper from the 18<sup>th</sup>C. <a href="#">More</a></i>

**Cruet frame** *Silver stand, fitted for cruet bottles, often designed in the 18<sup>th</sup>C for several bottles or two bottles and three [casters](#).*

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**Cupellation** *An [assaying](#) or refining process whereby the components of an [alloy](#) oxidised at high temperature are separated by absorption into the walls of a "cupel", a shallow porous vessel.  
The term "cupel" also refers to the bottom or receptacle of a silver refining furnace.*

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**Cut card** *Silver sheet of thin gauge cut into silhouettes, usually of foliage or scrollwork design, soldered on to bowls, cups, tankards, inkwells and other silver to produce ornament in relief. Especially popular during the last half of the 17<sup>th</sup>C.*

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**Cutlery** *Any implement with a cutting edge, including knives, scissors, penknives, razors but excluding fish knives and servers and butter knives which are classed as [flatware](#).*

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**Date Letter** *The letter of the alphabet used by assay offices to indicate the year of assay and changed annually. The months the letters changed were different for each office until 1975 when the remaining assay offices all started on the 1st January with the letter "A". [More](#)*

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**Diaper** *Ornament, often done by [chasing](#), producing a trellised or latticed design of diamonds, squares, and similar formal shapes.*

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**Duty Marks** *A mark of the Sovereign's Head in profile struck on all silver from 1st December 1784 to 1st May 1890 to indicate that duty had duly been paid at the time of assay. [More](#)*

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**dwt.** *see: [Pennyweight](#)*

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**Egg and dart** *An edge moulding, usually stamped in sections, of ovoid shapes alternating with vertical arrow-like bars. Said to have been derived from shields and spears. Chiefly used during the 16<sup>th</sup>C and early 17<sup>th</sup>C it was revived during the 19<sup>th</sup>C by the vogue for gothicism.*

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**Electroplating** *The process of coating a base metal (generally nickel) with pure silver through the process of electrolysis.  
The laws of electrolytic deposition had been formulated by Faraday as early as 1833 and the process was patented by the Elkington company of Birmingham c.1840.  
Experiments to gild silver using Volta's battery resulted in the "Galvanic Goblet" made by Paul Storr in 1814 which is now in the Royal Collection. [More](#)*

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**Electrotyping** *An extension of the [Electroplating](#) process that deposits a layer of metal on casts taken from originals. This process allowed the accurate reproduction of intricate and complex designs such as shields, plaques, sculptures and carvings. The process was patented by the Elkington company c.1840.*

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**Embossing** *Decoration worked from the back of the piece to bring up bosses and other relief shapes. Usually further definition of the embossed area is needed and this is done*

from the front with [repoussé](#) work.

## Engraving

Surface decoration of metal made by cutting fine V-shaped grooves with a sharp tool. Most commonly used in heraldic decoration, the technique can produce a delicacy of line akin to drawing.

## Epergne

The English term, of uncertain origin, for a table centrepiece, usually of silver, composed of branches, baskets, bowls, dishes and candle branches. Popular during the last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> C.

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## Etching

Form of surface decoration in which a pattern is eaten into the surface of the metal by acid. Used during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> C to produce engraved designs at less cost.

## Feather-edge

A slightly curved repeating pattern of cuts using the same technique as [Bright-cut engraving](#). First used from about 1700, it was chiefly used as a border decoration on [flatware](#) and [cutlery](#) but was also used on wine labels and small boxes.

## Festoon

A garland or drapery motif arranged in pendulant curves and often with a knot or ribbon at either end.

## Filigree

Work composed of fine wires, coiled and assembled into open panels. Probably originating in the Orient, it became popular in Holland during the 17<sup>th</sup> C. Most English filigree-work of that time is probably the work of immigrant craftsmen. Several filigree workers have been recorded working in Birmingham during the early 19<sup>th</sup> C making caddy-spoons, boxes and other smallwares.

## Finial

Ornament placed at the top of a cover or corner of a pediment.

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## Fish-skin

The tanned and treated skin of the shark or ray, which has spiny scales which are rubbed down to produce a roughened surface. Usually dyed black, it was used during the 17<sup>th</sup> C and 18<sup>th</sup> C for canteens and knife cases. Sometimes incorrectly known as [shagreen](#).

## Flagon

A tall covered pouring vessel with a handle, usually with a cylindrical or pear-shaped form.

## Flat-chasing

A technique for the surface decoration of metal, resembling [engraving](#) but produced with a hammer and punch which does not involve the removal of any metal.

## Flatware

The proper term for all flat tableware - spoons, forks, slices, scoops, casters etc. - that does not have a cutting edge but is used for scooping or parting food. [More](#)

## Fluting

Decoration imitating the vertical channelling of classical columns, resembling a musical flute cut in two.

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<b>F</b> rosting	<i>An acid treatment giving a slightly roughened surface. Popular during the 19 C.</i>
<b>G</b> adrooning	<i>A lobed border of stamped or convex curves, either vertical or slanting to left or right. A popular kind of border from the late 17<sup>th</sup>C onwards.</i>
<b>G</b> arnish	<i>An old term for a set of dishes or plates (usually pewter) and of services made en suite.</i>
<b>G</b> erman silver	<i>A white <a href="#">alloy</a> of nickel, copper and zinc. Used as a base metal for late-period fused plate, the alloy was said to have originated in China where it had been used from very early times. Also known as Argentine.</i>
<b>G</b> ilding	<i>The process of coating silver with a thin layer of gold. Until the introduction of electrolytic gilding in the 1860's the effect was achieved by applying an amalgum of gold and mercury to a piece and then driving off the mercury with heat. This was an extremely dangerous process which accounted for the very high prices charged by gilders and the scarcity of craftsmen prepared to carry out the work. The process is now illegal and all modern gilding is achieved by a process similar to that of electrolytic silver plating .</i>
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<b>G</b> oldsmith	<i>A term applied without distinction to craftsmen in gold and silver, and in modern times perpetuated by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths in the City of London, originally the trade guild of the craftsmen.</i>
<b>G</b> rotesque	<i>Fantastic human or animal forms used as decoration, engraved, chased or modelled. Often associated with intertwining scrollwork, flowers and foliage to produce bizarre or extravagant motifs.</i>
<b>G</b> uilloche	<i>A running spiral ornament composed of two or more ribbons or bands twisted one over the next, sometimes enclosing small rosettes or wheel-like motifs.</i>
<b>H</b> allmark	<i>The official mark struck on a piece of silver or gold by an assay office or guild as a guarantee of it's standard of purity. So named from its original use at Goldsmiths' Hall in London.</i>
<b>H</b> anap	<i>Medieval term for a drinking cup or bowl, the term has also been used by some writers for standing cups. The term derives through middle English from the Anglo Saxon "hnaepp".</i>
	<b>Back to Top</b>
<b>H</b> anoverian	<i>A plain <a href="#">flatware</a> pattern with the terminals turning upwards toward the bowl (as opposed to Old English in which the end curves downwards). Made from c.1710 to c.1775, the pattern was often engraved with crests, armorials or initials on the end, the spoons and forks being laid with the prongs or bowls downwards on the table.</i>
<b>H</b> elmet ewer	<i>A type of ewer reminiscent of an inverted Roman helmet, with an ovoid body on a low stem; particularly favoured by <a href="#">Huguenot</a> silversmiths.</i>
<b>H</b> ob-nob	<i>To drink together. The term is found in 18<sup>th</sup>C inventories to describe pairs of small waiters which presumably were used to hand glasses of drink.</i>



**H**ollow ware *A generic term for any vessel produced by raising, [casting](#), stamping or spinning. It includes any form of pot or other vessel, casters and even candlesticks and waiters.*

**H**uguenot *French protestants who were reluctantly tolerated after the Edict of Nantes in 1598 which gave them religious freedom until the Edict was revoked by Louis XIV in 1685. The revocation caused a flood of exiles to the British Isles, the Low countries, the Baltic States and Russia. Many goldsmiths of French extraction were allowed to settle in England and the best known Huguenot families include: Willaume, Harache, Tanqueray, de Lamerie (de la Merie) Courtauld and Platel. Their high standards of workmanship and design had a marked effect on the craft in the 17<sup>th</sup>C and 18<sup>th</sup>C. Huguenot craftsmen brought many of their traditions with them, one of which was the use of fleurs-de-lys and pellets in their maker's mark.*

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**H**usk *A decorative motif especially popular during the neo-classical period consisting of repeating bell shapes based on a wheat husk.*

**I**ncuse *A mark simply stamped or hammered in below the surface of the metal. Since such punches were cut proud of the die, they were easily damaged and although they were used by outworkers to mark small pieces, their use in the [duty marks](#) of 1784 - 1786 was soon superceded by a punch which gave a cameo impression and both the punch and the piece being struck were less liable to damage.*

**J**olly boat *Type of double wine bottle or decanter stand in the form of a shallow boat used by the Royal Navy. Often of leather, they were fashionable during the Napoleonic wars.*

**K**itchen *A type of tea urn with a lamp or heating iron and a spigot or tap. A term used by Matthew Boulton in his catalogues to describe his plated urns.*

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**K**itchen pepper *A small spice dredger or [caster](#), usually with a handle. Also known as a pepper box.*

**K**nop *A small boss or knob protruding from the stem of a cup or candlestick, or the [finial](#) on a cup, pot or spoon.*

**K**nurl *A simple ridged ornament, sometimes imitating ropework, used on less expensive wares instead of using applied wires and mounts.*

**K**nife-box *An upright box with a sloped lid fitted with slots to accommodate knives, and sometimes spoons or forks. Usually of wood, marquetry, [shagreen](#) or japanned ware sometimes with silver fittings.*

**K**rater *An art-historical term for a two handled vase of classical form. Also known as a crater.*

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**L**ambrequin *A deeply scalloped fringe-like ornament common in late 17<sup>th</sup>C French decorative arts*

*introduced to England by Daniel Marot.*

**L**atten

*A yellow, copper based [alloy](#) similar to brass.*

**M**aker's mark

*The mark officially registered at an assay office pertaining to a maker, firm or sponsor. [More](#)*

**M**ask

*Decorative motif of a human, bird or animal head, often [grotesque](#). Popular as applied decoration and for side handles with ring ends on punch bowls and the like.*

**M**agnetic plate

*A form of [electroplating](#) developed by J. Prime of Birmingham in 1844 using a magnetic machine to deposit gold, silver and copper.*

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**M**atting

*A series of punch marks applied evenly and close together to form an overall matt textured pattern. Often used to contrast highly polished areas.*

**M**azarine

*A flat or almost flat plate fitting into a large oval dish and pierced for the purpose of straining off excess water from fish, common in the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup>C and often decorated with elaborate [engraving](#).*

**M**olinet

*A long stirring rod inserted through the aperture on the top of a chocolate pot to whisk the chocolate into a frothy beverage. Projecting flanges, usually pierced, make the lower part resemble a battle mace. Very few molinets survive.*

**M**onteith

*A cooler for wine glasses, resembling a punch bowl but with a notched rim to suspend the glasses by their feet cooling in iced water. First found c.1680 and fashionable for about 40 years. [More](#)*

**M**oresque

*A linear decoration, popular during the mid 16<sup>th</sup>C and composed of scrolling stylized foliage. Derived from Near Eastern art and similar to the [Arabesque](#) but less tightly arranged.*

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**M**uffineer

*A small plain [caster](#), found during the late 17<sup>th</sup>C and early 18<sup>th</sup>C in silver and brass and often with a scroll handle to the side.*

**M**ullet

*An heraldic term for a five pointed star.*

**N**iello

*A black compound of copper, silver and lead or sulphur, lead and mercury used to fill engraved detail. Mainly used in Continental silver for enhancing scrollwork designs.*

**N**ozzle

*The socket with a flange, usually removeable, to hold the candle in the 'stick and to help prevent grease from running down the stem.*

**O**gee

*An architectural moulding consisting of a double curve, convex above and concave below.*

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**O**volo *An oval convex moulding placed vertically. Popular in 16<sup>th</sup>C stamped work.*

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**P**arcel-gilt *Silver which is gilded in selected areas. see: [gilding](#)*

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**P**atera *Circular ornament in low relief based on the classical libation dish, much used in 18<sup>th</sup>C neo-classical silver where it was also adapted to oval outlines. Often enriched with [fluting](#), foliage, etc.*

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**P**atina *The softened lustre of polished silver naturally resulting from usage, caused by oxidation of the surface by way of minute scratches.*

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**P**ennyweight *A measure of [Troy](#) weight, the twentieth part of an ounce [troy](#), equivalent to 24 grains. Usually abbreviated - dwt.*

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**P**ewter *An [alloy](#) consisting principally of tin and lead or bismuth. The Pewterer's Company required that an alloy of not less than 94% tin and 6% of other metals be used for the finest quality English pewter.*

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**P**iercing *Cut decoration. Until c.1760 it was done with very sharp chisels and was often enhanced with [engraving](#). Examination of the cut edges shows how the metal has been slightly turned in as the chisel presses into the metal. Saw piercing (similar to fretwork) generally superceeded chisel-piercing in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup>C and the method is revealed by the tiny vertical teeth marks in the cut. Shortly afterwards a mechanical development of chisel piercing, the fly press, was introduced and used on factory made goods. Simple dot punching for [casters](#) and the like was done with a round cutter or a bow-drill.*

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**P**lanishing *The first stage in finishing the surface of plate before polishing, the removal of hammer marks which occur during [raising](#) is achieved with the use of a special flat-headed hammer.*

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**P**late *Generic term for wrought silver and gold, derived from the Spanish word "plata" meaning silver. Not to be confused with [Sheffield Plate](#)*

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**P**orringer *A small shallow circular vessel with one or two flat handles, in silver or pewter, found in pewter from the mid 16<sup>th</sup>C. Also a deeper vessel, often covered, with two scroll handles, occurring mainly in silver, but sometimes in base metal and pottery from the mid to late 17<sup>th</sup>C. [More](#)*

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**P**ouncing *An overall punched decoration, similar to [matting](#) but usually rather coarser, used from the early 17<sup>th</sup>C onwards.*

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**P**ricked *A description of the dotted style used for simple initials, dates and inscriptions in the 16<sup>th</sup>C and 17<sup>th</sup>C. Chiefly found on spoons, small cups, dishes and other pieces intended for presentation at Christenings and weddings; presumably carried out by*

*shopkeepers who were not trained engravers.*

## Pricket

*The spike on which a candle was stuck before the introduction of the socket-type candleholder. Very rare in silver apart from the very large ecclesiastical candlesticks.*

## Quilting

*A rare form of chased ornament, resembling waves, used on tureens, candlesticks, etc., from c.1750 to c.1760.*

## Raising

*The method of making [hollow ware](#) by hammering and forming a sheet of silver over a raising stake.*

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## Reeding

*A moulding consisting of two or more parallel half-flutes. Sometimes combined with a ribbon-like motif traversing the reeded bands to form borders such as reed-and-tie and reed-and-ribbon.*

## Régence

*Not properly applicable to English silver, though the style was brought to England in the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup>C. Régence is a French decorative influence that made use of surface enrichment with [diaperwork](#), scalework, flowerheads, scrolls and masks formally arranged; often interpreted by [flat chasing](#) or [repoussé](#) chasing in low relief.*

## Regency

*A loose description of the taste of grandiose and usually gilded silver made from c.1790 to c.1820 - the period of the Prince Regent's influential patronage to the London silver trade, and especially Rundell, Bridge and Rundell. The actual Regency lasted from 1811 to 1820 when George IV succeeded.*

## Repoussé

*The process of [embossing](#) metal from the back by hammering domed punches into simple shapes, then giving definition and detail from the front by [chasing](#).*

## Rococo

*Probably derived from the French "rocaille" (pebble work) and certainly French in inspiration, probably due to the influence of [Huguenot](#) craftsmen. The rococo style consisted of motifs of shells, seaweed, corals, mermaids, shellfish and other marine themes in asymmetrical display combined with scrolls and double curves. It was in fashion between c.1730 and c.1760. Much of the finest rococo silver was cast and richly chased.*

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## Salver

*A tray or plate, sometimes footed, for serving food or drink; often with a moulded border and decorated with an engraved coat of arms in the centre. [More](#)*

## Sconce

*The socket for a candle at the top of a candlestick, often with a detachable nozzle inside it. Also a branched candlestick with an oval or elongated, polished or mirrored, back-plate fixed to a wall.*

## Shagreen

*Originally the skin of the ass (from the Persian "saghari", French "chagrin"), a leather covered with indentations formed by rubbing seeds over the moist skin and rubbing them in. Much used for scabbards.*

*In the late 17<sup>th</sup>C to early 18<sup>th</sup>C the term became confused with [fish-skin](#), shagreen was usually dyed green with a vegetable dye and used for covering boxes and caskets.*

*Method invented by Thomas Boulsover of Sheffield c.1743 of fusing a layer of sterling*

## Sheffield Plate

silver to a sheet of copper by heating and rolling the two together. The introduction of [Electroplating](#) spelled the end of the Sheffield plate trade which was virtually extinct by 1845. [More](#)

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## Silver-gilt

Silver plated with a thin layer of gold (see: [parcel-gilt](#))

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## Sinking

The first stage in making a piece of silver by hand. A flat sheet of silver is placed over a depression and hammered in to a bowl shape prior to being turned over and placed over a stake for [raising](#).

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## Skillet

English medieval term for a saucepan with a round bowl, three feet and a long handle.

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## Snuffer

An instrument of scissor form with a box at the end, for trimming candle wicks; a redundant form after the invention of the self-consuming wick at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>C.

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## Spinning

A method of working metal using a long handled tool and working the metal over a shaped chuck rotating in a lathe. Used for making [tea and coffee pots](#), [casters](#), [jugs](#), [bowls](#), etc. in the 18<sup>th</sup>C.

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## Stamping

A relief ornament produced by hammering the metal from the back over dies. About the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup>C die-stamping was developed, particularly in Sheffield and Birmingham, to produce candlesticks, vases, baskets and coasters.

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## Standish

Early term for an inkstand, usually fitted with an inkwell and sand box and, until the mid 18<sup>th</sup>C, often with a bell.

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## Sterling

The minimum permitted standard for silver in Britain, allowing 18dwt. of base metal (usually copper) to the pound [Troy](#) or 925 parts per 1000 pure silver (92.5%) to harden it.

Established in 1300, it has been the standard for wrought silver ever since except from 1697 to 1720 when the higher [Britannia standard](#) was in force.

There seems to be different interpretations of the term "sterling". One school of thought is that is derived through the Middle English "starling", from the small star stamped on the silver pennies, from the Old English "steorling": steor = STAR (+ LING)

The other interpretation is it is from the 12<sup>th</sup>C "Easterling", a term for Germans (from the east) who were called in by King John to regulate the fineness of the coinage.

Until c.600AD the only foreign gold coins had circulated in Britain. In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, the gold and silver coinage was crude and locally distributed. King Offa of Mercia (757 - 796) who controlled much of England introduced Frankish silver currency, soon minting his own well made and regulated silver coins which became the first "national" currency since Roman times. It seems likely that these links to the East remained until the time of King John.

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## Strapwork

Form of decoration resembling strips of cut and curling leather. Also used to describe the pierced spine of silver decoration applied to the wooden or leather-covered handles of coffee and chocolate pots c.1690 to 1710.

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## Swags

Bunches of fruit, flowers or foliage, often arranged as festoons or garlands, and engraved or chased. Popular on 16<sup>th</sup>C silver, the style was revived during the [rococo](#) period and re-introduced more formally during the neoclassical period.

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## Tankard

A mug with a hinged cover, usually for beer. [More](#)

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## Thumbpiece

Sometimes called a [billet](#), the cast projection above the hinge of a tankard, jug or pot. Elizabethan designs include angels, cherubs and the like. Later 17<sup>th</sup>C designs feature double corkscrews, acorns and simple bifurcated shapes.

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## Tine

The prong of a fork.

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## Tolerance

The permitted deviation from the standard fineness of a precious metal for which allowance was made during [assay](#), largely because the old [touchstone](#) methods of testing were inaccurate.

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## Tontines

A group of silverwares (and in one instance, a piece of gold) recording the names of subscribers to a loan, together with their date of death and sometimes also their ages. The last survivor inherited the whole income from an annuity based on a scheme by the Italian banker Lorenzo Tonti who devised the scheme whereby subscribers to a loan or fund shared the proceeds among the survivors. The earliest example of a tontine is a gold tumbler cup of 1702 by Pierre Harache. Others include a pair of silver waiters, a cup and cover, a large mug and an inkstand. Tontines should not be confused with pieces bearing memorial inscriptions.

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## Touch

In early records, the Touch indicated the standard of fineness with reference to the [Touchstone](#). Later the term came to be applied also to the marks struck on the gold and silver by the assayer.

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## Touchstone

A black jasper or flinty slate (later replaced by Wedgwoods black Jasperware pottery) used for testing gold and silver by rubbing the metal on the stone and comparing the streak with that made by needles of known fineness. The method was inaccurate and was replaced by a chemical method of assaying c.1840 which in turn was replaced by the Gay-Lussac process of volumetric analysis in 1932.

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## Toy

A term used to describe smallwares such as buttons, buckles and the like.

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## Trefoil

A three-leafed shape.

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## Troy

The gold and silversmith's traditional unit of weight.

$24 \text{ grains} = 1 \text{ pennyweight (dwt)} = 1.555 \text{ grammes} = 0.055 \text{ oz}$   
 $20 \text{ pennyweight (dwt)} = 1 \text{ ounce Troy} = 31.1 \text{ grammes} = 1.097 \text{ oz}$   
 $12 \text{ ounces Troy} = \text{one pound Troy} = 373.2 \text{ grammes}$   
 $1 \text{ gramme} = 0.032 \text{ ounce Troy} = 0.643 \text{ dwt.}$

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**V**ermeil

*Gilding of silver or bronze in the French manner to achieve a reddish colour.*

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**V**itruvian

*A regular wave-like scroll ornament much used in neoclassical silver.*

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scroll

**V**olute

*A spiral scroll as used in Greek architecture, usually with two scrolls placed at either end of a flat section. Sometimes twisted.*

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**W**ater-leaf

*A stylised leaf shape especially popular as chased or applied decoration on neoclassical silver and popular well into the 19thC. Also applied to water lily leaves.*

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**W**ickering

*Plaited split withies (willow) used to insulate the handles of jugs, kettles, coffee pots and other vessels used for hot liquids.*

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## **The Newcastle Assay Office**

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**Three separate castles (from city arms) from c.1670**

**[Newcastle Date Letter Sequences](#)**

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**G**oldsmiths have been recorded working in Newcastle from the 13<sup>th</sup>C. Some late 17<sup>th</sup>C examples have a single castle as a "town" mark, and a lion passant. Later, the town mark of three separate castles was used. The Assay Office was re-established in 1702 although the early date letters were not consistently carried on. The Assay office was finally closed in 1884.



## 1773 - 1900

1773 - 1798



1798 - 1824



1824 - 1849



1849 - 1875



1875 - 1900



## 1900 - 1999

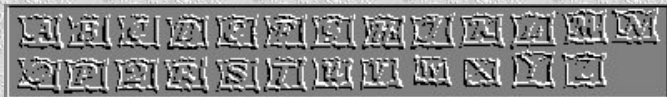
1900 - 1925



1925 - 1950



1950 - 1974



1975 - 1999



# Trays and Salvers

- [Trays and salvers](#)
  - [Serving dishes and plates](#)
- 

## • Trays and Salvers

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*An early George II Square Salver  
by Paul de Lamerie, London, 1728*

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The difference between salvers and trays is that trays have handles and salvers do not. Trays are not found before the late 18th century. Most early salvers perished in the English Civil War and there are few survivors before the reign of Queen Anne.

America imported many salvers from England. Those they made themselves are similar to English ones at an earlier period, and because rare, are expensive. The most common pre-Revolution salver has a shell and scroll border and is more restrained than English salvers of the period.

Salvers under 6 inches (15cm), are occasionally called waiters. The early 18th-century salver is found with a central foot and is sometimes incorrectly called a tazza. Borders generally follow those of the period.

There are few oblong salvers, and square examples tend to date from c.1720-40, when a few rare octofoil (eight sided) examples were also made. Oval salvers, usually from the late 18th century, are much sought after.

Trays are usually oblong or oval, and being larger than salvers, are more expensive. Trays from the 1750s are rare and command high prices. Very large round salvers, being awkward to use, are not as collectable as their size might indicate.

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## • Serving dishes and plates

The earliest surviving plates and their attendant serving dishes are found in the early 18th century. At this time borders are absent but a thread moulding appears by the 1720s. By about 1730 the gadroon border takes over and the outline becomes waved and remains so, although plain circular plates were produced again at the end of the 18th century. More expensive plates have shell-decorated borders and some Regency ones have tied reed borders; beaded borders appearing around 1780.

Shaped oval meat dishes were made *en suite* with the plates and most popular are the very small and the very large. Some of the largest have tree-like wells for draining the juices and occasionally a [mazarine](#), although these have frequently been separated from their dishes. A set would have comprised six dozen dinner plates, two dozen soup plates and 15 or 20 dishes. Such sets are very rare today.

# Cruets and Casters

- [Casters](#)
  - [Cruets](#)
  - [Salts](#)
- 

## • *Casters*

In the days when keeping food fresh was a problem, spices such as pepper, nutmeg and cinnamon were used to enhance or disguise the taste of it. These were usually held in casters, so-called because they cast their contents over the food.

Since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the shape of the caster has scarcely altered. The early cylindrical and baluster shapes come with bayonet-type covers. These have two flaps that fit through wire at the rim and are turned to hold the lid in place. Octagonal examples appear in the reign of George I and after this time covers have bezels sitting inside the caster bodies.

Before about 1780 casters often came in sets of three: one with a large piercing for crushed loaf sugar; one for pepper and a third for other spices, or for dry mustard. In the latter case the caster would have a "blind" cover, without piercing. After about 1780 casters came singly or in pairs.

*18<sup>th</sup> C casters are usually marked in a group under the base. Some 18<sup>th</sup> C and 19<sup>th</sup> C examples are marked in a line on the side of the body.*

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## • *Cruets*

Framed cruets are found from about 1700. These usually comprise two bottles for oil and vinegar and three casters, all held by a silver, or Warwick, frame. The modern style mustard pot appears from about 1760. These usually have blue glass liners and are often pierced.

*Mustard pots are marked in a group on the base, in a line on the body or in a curve round the base*

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## • *Salts*



*A large circular saltcellar with gadrooned lip, fluted body on 3 anthemion feet with gilt interior by Adey, Bellamy and Savory, London 1830.*

Image courtesy of [Schredds of Portobello](#)

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**F**rom the early 18<sup>th</sup> century salt was kept in pairs of salt cellars. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century most are on three feet. The exceptions are trenchers, the common form at the start of the period, and some that were made at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was usual to gild the inside of salts to resist corrosion. Some very elaborate salts were made in Regency and Victorian times.

*From the mid 18<sup>th</sup> C, salts are marked in a group on the base or in a line on the body.*

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# Bowls

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- [Monteiths](#)
  - [Porringers](#)
  - [Brandy Saucepans](#)
- 

## Monteiths

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*Early punch bowls or monteiths will be marked in a straight line on the side of the body. Detachable rims must also be fully marked. Later examples are likely to be marked at the points of the compass underneath.*

*A late 19th-century lobed and fluted Monteith with  
12½"(32cm)*

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The term monteith is said to derive from a Scotsman called Monteith who is reputed to have had a cloak with a scalloped edge. Punch bowls and monteiths first appeared at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Early monteiths were smaller than punch bowls, with a waved border on the rim whose function was to enable glasses to be hung on the scalloped notches of the rim by their stems, their bowls cooling in iced water. The monteith rapidly expanded in size and by the 1690s had acquired handles, usually hung from lions' masks. As the monteith approached the size of the punch bowl the rim was often detachable so that the bowl could do duty as either; these rims have often been lost.

Early monteiths tend to have [gadroon](#) borders on at least the foot mount and there is almost invariably space on the body for a large and impressive coat of arms. The rims are often decorated with cherubs' masks or shells.

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## • *Porringers and Bleeding bowls*

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*A late 17th-century porringer,  
London 1685, with  
engraved  
chinoiserie figures.  
ht6½"(16cm)*

*English bleeding bowls can be marked as Monteiths, and in addition there should be a lion passant on the handle. Porringers and caudle cups are marked in the same way as other bowls, and in addition any covers must also be fully marked on examples earlier than the mid 18<sup>th</sup> C. Thereafter a maker's mark and lion passant are sufficient.*

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There are various derivatives of the basic bowl. A shallow bowl with a [pierced](#) handle is known in England as a bleeding bowl and in America as a porringer, which seems more reasonable as these bowls were almost certainly used for porridge. In America porringers were largely an 18<sup>th</sup>-century item. Styles followed the form of English ones of an earlier period. Bleeding bowls were made in England for about 100 years after the accession of Charles I in 1625. The earliest ones have straight sides and are indistinguishable from [skillet](#) covers. Later types have curved sides. As a rule the handles tended to become more elaborate over the years. The English porringers used for a variety of drinks and mixtures is a two-handled, rather deeper bowl with straight sides. Some have a spout. Those with [baluster](#) sides are sometimes known as caudle cups also known as posset cups.

These vessels were supposed to have been used for drinking "caudle", a warm spiced gruel of oatmeal, ale, sugar and spices which was much advocated for curing minor ills and recommended for pregnant women. . The earliest survivors date from the middle of the 17th century; the caudle cup continued for 50 years or so, but the porringer in its final form survived until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Its successors are the cups and covers produced in an infinite variety of styles down to the present day.

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## • *Brandy Saucepans*



*A baluster brandy saucepan  
and cover ht 6½" (16cm)*

*Brandy saucepans are usually marked in a group on the base*

The brandy saucepan is an 18<sup>th</sup>-century product. While some of the smaller ones may well have been used for heating brandy, the larger ones must surely have had other uses. The earlier examples have [baluster](#) or slightly flared bodies, whereas those made at the end of the century sometimes have straight sides. Some have a cover.

Bowls with an early 18<sup>th</sup>-century appearance are easily made up from tureen liners or dishes of a later date. It is often apparent that such bowls are not genuine as the style of decoration rarely accords with the date of the marks - usually late 18<sup>th</sup>-century.

# Candlesticks

- [Candlesticks](#)
  - [Chambersticks](#)
  - [Tapersticks](#)
- 

## • *Candlesticks*



*A cast silver candlestick, London 1730 ht.6" (15.5cm)*

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Candlesticks have not survived in any numbers prior to around 1660, despite the fact that they must have been found in many homes.

The typical late 17th-century candlestick was "[raised](#)" from sheet metal and had a cluster column stem. This style was superseded toward the end of the century by the cast candlestick, which continued until after the middle of the 18th century, when increasing mechanisation brought about the introduction of the "loaded" candlestick which was stamped from sheet silver, the interior being filled with pitch.

Candlesticks became taller as the 18<sup>th</sup> century progressed, starting at about 6 or 7 inches (15-18cm), rising to 10 inches (25cm) in the 1750s and rising to a full 12 inches (30.5cm) by the start of the 19th century; Victorian candlesticks returned to about 10 inches (25.5cm).

Detachable nozzles, which stop the wax pouring down the stem of the candlestick, became a regular feature by the 1740s. They usually have the same decoration and conform in outline to the base of the candlestick.

*Sheet metal candlesticks are visually marked in a line on the stem just above the base. Cast candlesticks can be marked in the well, and if so the marks are likely to be worn. More often they are marked underneath in each corner if the candlestick is square, or in a line if it is circular. Cast candlesticks can also be marked on the outside of the base, where again wear is likely, or on the inside rim, in which case they are sometimes hard to find. Candelabra branches must be fully marked. Detachable drip pans, sconces and nozzles must bear at least a lion passant. The sconce on cast candlesticks is cast separately, so any made prior to 1784 should ideally have a lion passant struck on it, although this may have worn off. The nozzle should have the maker's mark and lion passant.*

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## • *Chamber candlesticks*





*A late 18th-century chamberstick, London 1783, with beaded border; ht 5.5" (14cm)*

The classic chamber candlesticks, (here comes a candle to light you to bed...), have not, as a rule, survived in good condition. The earliest examples have flat handles and date from the early 18th century. From c.1720 the ring or scroll handle became standard and is frequently fitted with a slot to take the conical extinguisher (snuffer) found from the middle of the century on.

*Chamber candlesticks are marked in a line, usually on the base; nozzles and extinguishers should have a maker's mark and lion passant.*

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## • *Tapersticks*

Tapersticks, made to hold a wax taper, exist from the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and generally follow the style of candlesticks of the period. Unlike full-size candlesticks, they are usually found singly; pairs are rare and can usually command almost the same price as full-size candlesticks.

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# The Date Letter

[Date Letter Sequences](#)

[Date Letter Decoder](#)

Towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup>C it was ordained that the "keeper of the touch" (the Assay Master) should be responsible for maintaining the standards of gold and silver presented for assay. This was a result of continuing complaints regarding substandard wares which did not comply with the Sterling standard. Towards this end, the date letter system was introduced, devised to ascertain the year a piece was presented for assay and to trace offending makers (and Assay Masters).



*The date letter sequence starting 1697 (London)*

The first full cycle of date letters in London began in 1478 with "A" and continued in an unbroken series of twenty year cycles (omitting the "J" and from "V" to "Z") until the Britannia standard was introduced as a result of the "Great Recoinage" of William III in 1696.



*The date letter sequence starting 1975 (London,)*

A new twenty year cycle was begun at this time and this continued, differentiated by changing styles, cases of letter and shield shapes until the four remaining Assay Offices were harmonised with the Hallmarking Act, a new cycle starting with "A" on the 1st January 1975.

Until 1660 the date letters were changed on St. Dunstan's Day (the patron saint of goldsmiths), May 19th. On the restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, the date was changed to Oak-apple Day (the King's birthday), May 29th.

The Edinburgh date letter system was adopted in 1681 and at the same time the "Deacons Mark", which was used as a standard mark from 1457, was changed to the Assay Masters Mark alongside the date letter which was changed in October, following a twenty five year cycle. One happy result of this five hundred years of legislation as far as the modern collector is concerned, is that a piece can be dated with an accuracy that many collectors of other antiques and works of art would envy.

Although SilverMine is primarily concerned with sterling silver, we have included this brief guide to Sheffield Plate and Electroplate. These items can provide an interesting (and less expensive!) alternative.

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- [Sheffield Plate](#)
  - [Electroplate](#)
  - [History of Cutlery](#)
- 

## Sheffield Plate

The search for a silver substitute was prompted by the increasing prosperity of the 18<sup>th</sup>C middle classes and led to the invention of Sheffield Plate by Thomas Boulsover c.1743. The new material was made by fusing a sheet of sterling silver to an ingot of copper in a furnace. The resulting material was then rolled or hammered into a sheet and made up into both decorative and practical objects, using the power of the new technologies of the time.

The "double sandwich" form of Sheffield Plate was developed around 1770. Used for pieces such as bowls and mugs that had a visible interior, it consisted of a sheet of silver each side of a piece of copper; early manufacturers applied a film of solder over the bare edge of copper although such pieces are very rare. Later on, borders were applied with a U-shaped section of silver wire to conceal the copper which can be felt as a lip on the underside.

From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>C the borders of Sheffield Plate pieces became increasingly ornamental, more so than on [sterling](#) silver wares, probably because they could be produced far less expensively than solid silver borders. Borders should be carefully examined for wear. A little copper showing is generally considered attractive, but more than that is not. The decoration of Sheffield Plate is always [flat-chased](#), and the pattern should be visible on the underside of the piece. Engraving is not a feature of Sheffield Plate (except for coats of arms), as it would have meant cutting through to the copper base. In early pieces the copper showed through where coats of arms were engraved, but from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>C a more heavily plated disc, which could take the engraving, was let into the piece. In the Regency period this method was superseded by letting in a pure silver oblong; this can be easily seen as the rest of the object has a surface of sterling standard (92.5%), it oxidizes at a different rate from the pure silver part.

Most pieces of Sheffield Plate hollow ware, such as candlesticks and coffeepots, have a visible seam. If no seam is visible, the article has either been re-plated and the seam covered up in the process, or it is not Sheffield Plate. Some articles have a liner - for example, urns. Once this is removed, a dull lead-ish colour, caused by tin, should be visible on the inside. A silver colour inside indicates re-plating.

Much of Sheffield Plate is unmarked although some makers used a symbol. Some early 19<sup>th</sup>C Sheffield Plate had marks that resembled those used on sterling silver. A piece with "Sheffield Plate" stamped on it is electroplate made in Sheffield since the 19<sup>th</sup>C, rather than genuine Sheffield Plate. The end of Sheffield Plate was signified by the discovery of electroplating in the 1840's. By the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851 almost no Sheffield Plate was exhibited, electroplate being the new fashion..

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## Electroplate

This method of plating silver was used from c.1840 and gradually replaced Sheffield Plate, which after the Great Exhibition of 1851 became increasingly rare. Electroplating creates a coating of pure silver which is whiter and harsher in appearance than the softer glow of Sheffield Plate. The process involves covering one metal with a thin layer of silver by electro-deposition. The laws of electrolytic deposition had been formulated by Faraday as early as 1833 and the process was patented by the Elkington company of Birmingham in the mid 19<sup>th</sup>C.

In 1836 G.R. Elkington applied for a number of patents for "an improved method of gilding copper, brass, and other metals or alloys of metals" by electrolysis and in 1840 he took out a patent for a new process of depositing silver by

electrolysis, a discovery which he had made in collaboration with John Wright, following work he had carried out for the London maker Benjamin Smith.

**T**he base metal was initially copper, subsequently nickel was used, hence the term EPNS (**E**lectro-**P**lated **N**ickel **S**ilver). Britannia Metal , an alloy of tin, copper, antimony and zinc is quite often found bearing the stamp EPBM.

**S**tyles followed those that were most popular in silver. The most popular electroplated items are cake baskets, candlesticks and entree dishes. Tea sets are becoming increasingly popular. Being far less expensive even than Sheffield Plate, electroplated wares are not collected for their intrinsic worth but as inexpensive silver- style items. Electroplated flatware services provide the only alternative to silver, as it proved impossible to make flatware in Sheffield Plate without a large ugly seam. Flatware patterns tended to follow the styles of their Sterling counterparts.

**U**nlike Sheffield Plate, most electroplate has makers' marks and indications of quality such as "A1" "EP" or "EPNS". Some silversmiths made both electroplate and Sterling silver - for example, James Dixon & Sons, Elkington, and Walker & Hall. Although the marks used were similar on both their silver and their electroplates, the marks are applied in a noticeably different way.

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# Flatware

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- [Spoons](#)
  - [Forks](#)
  - [Knives](#)
- 

## • *Spoons*



***A Hanoverian pattern rat-tail spoon***  
Image courtesy of [Schredds of Portobello](#)

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The earliest period for finding and collecting English spoons is the Middle Ages. Scottish spoons occur from around the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In those days, food was eaten either with a spoon or from the blade of the knife until the introduction of the fork in around 1660.

Early spoons had curved fig-shaped bowls and decorative [finials](#). The most common types of finial are the apostle and the seal top. The "seal" was hexagonal at first, then oval and finally round by the time it dies out in the 1660s. Until the 1670s, there was a set size for a spoon, when differences developed between teaspoons, dessert spoons and table spoons and serving spoons were introduced.

The late 17<sup>th</sup>-century spoons initially keep the old fashioned type of bowl and have very plain tops. However, by the 1680s the form of the bowl had more or less evolved into the shape it is today, and the spoon terminal had a so-called trefid end. This became less pronounced until it became the dog-nose pattern of the Queen Anne period (1702 - 1714). At this period spoons generally have a "rat-tail", or reinforcing rib, down the back of the bowl. Subsequently, throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there are really only two patterns: the Hanoverian and the Old English. The Hanoverian style can be distinguished by the upturned curve of the terminal, forks and spoons being laid face down. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the so-called rat-tail had disappeared and the bowl became more pointed and less oval.

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## • *Forks*



Image courtesy of [Schredds of Portobello](#)

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Forks were introduced to England in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century in the styles of spoons of the period. Until the 1770s most were made with three prongs; thereafter four prongs became normal.

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## • *Knives*

Strictly speaking, knives are not classed as flatware, they are termed cutlery, ie. anything with a cutting edge.

The 18<sup>th</sup>-century knife has a steel blade and a hollow silver handle with a pitch or resin core. The silver on the handle is often stamped from very thin sheet and consequently is often badly worn; it is also subject to damage if the resin expands. It is rare to find knives included in sets of flatware, and in fact it is probably more sensible to use modern ones which are much more durable.

**T**he early 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the introduction of many patterns. Some very elaborate designs were produced by the London goldsmith Paul Storr, and even more new types appeared during the Victorian period.

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# The Makers Mark

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In 1363 Edward III ordered that "each Master Goldsmith shall have a mark unto himself, and which mark shall be known by those who shall be assigned by the King to supervise their works and allay."

At first, these marks were often a symbol of either the maker's shop sign or a rebus (pun) of the maker's name, but gradually during the 17<sup>th</sup>C initials, usually embellished with symbols, became more common. The [Huguenot](#) craftsmen who registered their marks tended to follow the custom of their native France and use a fleur-de-lis and two pellets (or grains) above their initials.

In 1697 when the [Britannia standard](#) came in to force, makers were required to re-register their marks in the form of the first two letters of the surname. With the re-introduction of the Sterling Standard in 1720 makers were required to mark their Sterling wares with the initials of the forename and surname but makers continuing to use the Britannia standard used the first two letters of the surname.

The Act of 1739 ordered that workers should destroy their existing marks and substitute others with the initials of their Christian names and surnames in letters of a different character from those used previously. This form of mark has been used until the present day

# British Silver Date Letter Marks

## SilverMine Date Letter Decoder

Select a town by clicking on an image below, holding the mouse pointer over the image will show a description of the mark. Your browser must support frames (IE3 or Nav3 or better) . Internet Explorer in full screen mode and a screen resolution of 1024 x 768 is recommended. It must be remembered that the images of the marks are just a computer rendering of drawings of the actual marks. They are intended only as a guide to the approximate shield or cartouche shape and the style of the lettering.

<b>London</b> <i>1558 - 1999</i>			
<b>Birmingham</b> <i>1773 - 1999</i>			
<b>Sheffield</b> <i>1773 - 1999</i>			
<b>Edinburgh</b> <i>1681 - 1999</i>			
<b>Chester</b> <i>1701 - 1961</i>			
<b>Exeter</b> <i>1701 - 1883</i>			
<b>glasgow</b> <i>1681 - 1964</i>			
			



**Newcastle**

*1702 - 1884*

**York**

*1559 - 1857*

