



# Hallmarking of Watches

## Imported into Britain during the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

by David Boettcher (UK)

### Introduction

I inherited my grandfather's Rolex wristwatch, which has London hallmarks for 1918/1919, and became interested in early wristwatches. Many early wristwatches are from the Great War era (1914-1918) when there was a huge surge in demand for wristwatches from men fighting in the trenches; most of these were imported from Switzerland. Examples of these Swiss wristwatches found in Britain usually have British hallmarks, which make them easy to date by using the tables of hallmark date letters in Bradbury<sup>1</sup> and other standard works.

My collection expanded to include not only wristwatches from before the Great War but also pocket watches with Borgel cases, a dust- and damp-resistant screw case patented by François Borgel of Geneva in 1891. I noticed that British hallmarking in these earlier watches, particularly the pocket watches, seemed to be less common.

I acquired a wristwatch with a Borgel case and movement made by the International Watch Company (IWC) of Schaffhausen. IWC confirmed from its records that the watch was manufactured in 1906. The case had been ordered from Borgel in Geneva on September 15, 1906, and the completed watch was sold to Stauffer & Co. in London on January 9, 1907. The case has Swiss hallmarks but no British hallmarks. I assumed that the watch had not been imported into Britain but had perhaps been sent to Stauffer's Swiss factory in La Chaux-de-Fonds. However, the IWC records clearly showed the watch was sent to Stauffer & Co. in London. Figure 1 shows the case of this watch; note the Swiss standard mark of 0.935, meaning 93.5 percent silver, and the bears stamped by the Swiss assay office.

Richard Edwards, who has been collecting watches for many years, told me that he was not surprised that this watch did not have British hallmarks, because in his experience perhaps only 5-10 percent of Swiss watches found in Britain dating from before 1907 carry British hallmarks. I questioned his statement because hallmarking of gold and silver items

has long been a legal requirement in Britain. A few watches that were not hallmarked might be explained as personal imports, but not so many.

I turned to Bradbury for advice. The section on marks on imported plate says: "The Customs Act of 1842 made illegal the selling of imported plate either gold or silver in Great Britain and Ireland unless it has been assayed at a British office. In 1867 the Foreign Mark [an "F" in an oval shield] was introduced as an addition to the appropriate British Hallmarks." This is all nice and clear, but contrary to Richard's observations.

Adrian van der Meijden, a well-known collector of IWC watches, has a collection of IWC "Seeland" watches that were made between 1876 and 1879 when Frederic Frank Seeland was in charge of IWC. These Seeland watches have UK hallmarks on their cases. I helped Adrian read the hallmarks on five of the cases. They all have date letters to show they were hallmarked between 1877 and 1884 and sponsor's marks to show that the cases were not made in the UK, but they did not have the foreign "F" mark that Bradbury said foreign-made items should have carried after 1867.

These observations led me to look into the UK hallmarking of foreign-made watches in some detail. I was amazed to discover that the simple statements in Bradbury and other books on hallmarking about how foreign-made items "should" be hallmarked are far removed from

what actually happened, particularly with watches.

In this article I look briefly at the origins of hallmarking, but my principal objective is to discuss how the practice of hallmarking imported watches differed from the picture presented in the standard reference books on hallmarking.

### Hallmarking

British hallmarking has its origins in the reign of King Edward in the year 1300, when the "guardians of the craft" were directed to enforce the standards of gold and silver used by goldsmiths by assaying and marking

Figure 1. My 1906 Borgel wristwatch.



items. Readers of standard reference works on the subject of hallmarking such as Bradbury may think that this was all there was to say on the subject. However, the practices of hallmarking were far more complex than the laws suggest, especially for items that were imported. This can be unfortunate for those who buy or inherit an old watch in a gold or silver case that was made abroad because after consulting a reference book on hallmarking, they eagerly scan their piece for the hallmarks to find out when and by whom it was made and are often either baffled or driven to interpret irrelevant marks as “hallmarks.”

Although King Edward’s and subsequent laws were clear for the legal standards of fineness, they were distinctly short of provisions for ensuring the standards were upheld. The guardians of the craft called on by Edward were the wardens of the Goldsmiths’ Guild, and beginning in the fifteenth century London guild members were required to bring their work to Goldsmiths’ Hall for assaying and marking, giving rise to the term “hallmarking.” This meant that members of the Goldsmiths’ Guild enjoyed a virtual monopoly over the right to have items hallmarked for some 400 years. This left gold and silver items that were made “abroad”—and in the Middle Ages this effectively meant outside London—in something of a limbo. In 1300 this was of little consequence because most gold or silver items were made and sold in small workshop premises in the capital, and very few items were made outside London, let alone imported for retail. However, the origin of hallmarking as the privilege of a trade body rather than an official branch of government was to have unforeseen consequences centuries later as international trade developed.

### Hallmarking of Watchcases

Before the eighteenth century the situation for hallmarking watchcases was not clear. Watchmaking started in England sometime in the sixteenth century, but hallmarks are not found on watch boxes or cases from that time. It appears that watchcases were regarded by watchmakers as an adjunct to the expensive watch works, and the trouble and cost of getting them hallmarked was not necessary. They were able to get away with this because of the limited powers of the Goldsmiths’ Company to enforce their view of the law. Of course, the Company did not agree with this and gradually coerced and cajoled casemakers to have their cases hallmarked. The earliest watchcases with hallmarks recorded by Philip Priestley<sup>3</sup> are a gold watchcase hallmarked in 1683/1684 and a silver case in 1698/1699.

### The 1738 Plate (Offences) Act

The 1738 Act, “An Act for the better preventing Frauds and Abuses in Gold and Silver Wares,”<sup>4</sup> usually called the Plate (Offences) Act, was the beginning of current hallmarking practice. This Act consolidated a number of earlier acts and enshrined in statute many of the customs and practices of the Goldsmiths’ Company that had previously not had the support of law. The Act required that from

## The Four Parts of a Hallmark

The first part of a hallmark defined in 1300 was the leopard’s head, which was struck on items to show that they met the required standard of fineness. The standard mark was changed during the reign of King Henry VIII to a lion passant, a walking lion with raised right forepaw. The leopard’s head then became, and remains, the “town mark” of the London Assay Office. When other assay offices were set up later, they had their own town marks.

The “maker’s mark” was introduced in 1363 to identify the maker. It had to be registered with the assay office and struck on items before they were sent for assay. As the complexity of trade developed, it was recognized that the person sending items for hallmarking was often not the actual maker, so this mark was renamed the “private mark” and is now called the “sponsor’s mark.”

In 1478 the “assayer’s mark” was added; a letter of the alphabet changed each year when new wardens were elected. In London this was originally on May 19, the feast day of St. Dunstan, but at the restoration of King Charles II in 1660, the date was changed to May 29, the day the king reentered London and also his birthday. Other assay offices also changed their letters around the middle of the year. This mark is now called the “date letter,” and tables in Bradbury and others show in which year the letter was first used, but they do not make it clear that each date letter straddles two calendar years.

These four marks—the sponsor’s mark, the standard mark, the town mark, and the date letter—are the parts of a traditional British hallmark, and all four parts should be present in a valid hallmark.

## The Duty Mark: A Fifth Hallmark

In 1784 duties were made payable on all gold and silver plate, and the sovereign’s head was impressed as a fifth hallmark to show that the duty had been paid. To enable English watch manufacturers to better compete with foreign products, watchcases manufactured in the UK were made exempt from duty in 1798,<sup>2</sup> so the sovereign’s head duty mark shown in tables of hallmarks in Bradbury and other standard works for the period after 1798 until 1890 is not found on watchcases. The duty on all gold and silver plate was abolished in 1890; consequently, the sovereign’s head ceased to be impressed on assayed articles.

May 28, 1739, all items of gold or silver sold, exchanged, or exposed to sale in England should meet the British legal standards of fineness for gold or silver and should carry British hallmarks. The Act contained a list of items that

were exempt from marking, primarily those too small or delicate to bear the mark such as silver wire and jewelry, but watchcases were not among the exemptions.

Prior to this Act the assay offices had restricted the privilege of “assay and touch” to members of the Goldsmiths’ Guild or other established guilds. The only way that someone who was not a member could get an item assayed and hallmarked was to get a guild member to submit it with his own mark, a practice known as “coloring” and considered a very serious offence.<sup>5</sup> The 1738 Act opened the way for non-guild members to register their own marks and submit items for hallmarking on their own account, although it appears this was not widely known and registration was still in effect restricted by the Goldsmiths’ Company to those whom they deemed to be eligible.

The number of watchcases being hallmarked gradually increased, but even by the mid-eighteenth century less than half of all watchcases had hallmarks.<sup>6</sup> The introduction of duty on gold and silver in 1784 required that the sovereign’s head be impressed as a fifth hallmark to show that the duty had been paid. This was probably the stimulus that finally resulted in all British-made gold and silver watchcases being hallmarked. However, although the 1738 Act was clearly intended to apply to all gold and silver items without any exemptions for foreign manufacture, there was no concerted effort to ensure that foreign gold or silver watches were hallmarked; in fact, the assay offices made it difficult or impossible for foreigners to send any items for hallmarking, and the vast majority of imported watches escaped being hallmarked. This was no doubt allowed to continue because the lack of hallmarks on imported watches was not damaging to British watch manufacturers, the numbers of watches involved was probably relatively small, and the Goldsmiths’ Company was reluctant to take actions where there was little prospect of covering its costs from any fines. However, we must now look at two Acts of Parliament that the standard books on hallmarking tell us affected the hallmarking of imported gold and silver: the Customs Act of 1842 and the Customs Amendment Act of 1867.

### **The Customs Act of 1842**

Although it would appear the 1738 Act implicitly covered imported items, the Customs Act of 1842<sup>7</sup> made it explicitly illegal to sell imported gold or silver items in Great Britain and Ireland unless they had been assayed at a British office and stamped with the usual British hallmarks. To be hallmarked meant that the imported items had to meet the British legal standards of 22 or 18 karat for gold and Britannia or sterling for silver. Why this either explicit statement or extension of the 1738 law was thought to be necessary is not clear from the Act, but Forbes states that it was the result of the Manufacturing Silversmiths’ Society expressing concerns that an anticipated reduction in import duties on gold and silver items

would result in a flood of inferior foreign products entering the country, because there was “no provision in law for hallmarking imported items.”<sup>8</sup> It is evident from this that prior to 1842 hallmarking was in practice restricted to items made in Britain.

One consequence of this requirement was that for imported plate to be assayed and hallmarked, it was made lawful for any person to send items to be assayed and marked.<sup>9</sup> This conferred onto importers of gold and silver items the right to register their mark at an assay office so that they could send items for assay, giving a very artificial extension to what had previously been called the “maker’s mark,” where the term could be very misleading to those assuming the maker’s mark indicated the identity of the person who had actually made the item. This was recognized in the Gold and Silver Wares Act of 1844<sup>10</sup> when the term “maker’s mark” was changed to “private mark,” which the Act allowed could be registered by any worker, maker, and manufacturer of, or trader or dealer in, gold or silver wares. Today, the assay offices use the term “sponsor’s mark,” rather than “private mark.”

There was a major flaw in the 1842 Act. Although it was clear that parliament intended all imported gold and silver items to meet British standards of fineness and be hallmarked to show this, the Act did not include any mechanisms or procedures by which this was to be achieved, or identify any body responsible for ensuring that the law was complied with. It might be thought that the Goldsmiths’ Company should naturally be the organization to enforce such a law, but as a nongovernmental organization with origins in operating a medieval “closed shop,” they were not used to taking the initiative in interpreting and bringing into effect new laws. If a foreigner had approached them with a copy of the Act in his hand and demanded that they assay and mark his wares, they might have considered it, but there was no way that the foreigner would even know that the Act existed unless someone told him about it, which no one did, so things continued as before.

### **The 1867 Customs Amendment Act**

In the 1867 Customs Amendment Act<sup>11</sup> a requirement to stamp a letter “F” in an oval shield alongside the usual hallmarks on all foreign-made silver and gold items was introduced. That statute was repealed by the Customs Consolidation Act, 1876;<sup>12</sup> but the requirement for the “F” stamp on foreign items was reenacted in the same words by the Customs (Tariff) Act 1876.<sup>13</sup> I have been unable to establish the reason for this new requirement or who was behind it, but I am sure that it was not watchmakers or watchcase makers, for reasons that will become plain later.

I have never seen a piece of silver with this foreign “F” alongside the normal hallmarks, so I asked The Goldsmiths’ Company about this and was told that there was considerable difficulty in enforcing the 1867 Act, to the

extent that hardly any items of silver are known to bear the “F” mark until the early 1880s.<sup>14</sup> The same problem existed with these acts as with the 1842 Act. Parliament had laid down a law without mechanisms for its implementation or specifically charging anyone with putting it into effect. It seems rather extraordinary that this could happen, but communications then were not as effective as they are today.

Watches with the “F” mark appear to be even rarer than the comments by the Goldsmiths’ Company suggest; Philip Priestley told me that in handling more than 4,000 watches over 30 years he has seen only one example of the “F” mark on an imported watch and case.<sup>15</sup> Watches with foreign-made cases with British hallmarks dated after 1867 certainly do exist, but from the rarity of the “F” mark it is evident that agents of foreign manufacturers were able to send items for hallmarking without declaring that they were of foreign manufacture.

Examples of this are the so-called IWC “Seeland” watches, produced while Frederic Francis Seeland was in charge of the IWC factory between 1876 and 1879. The Swiss-made cases of some of these IWC Seeland watches have British hallmarks but without the letter “F.”

I examined the hallmarks in five IWC Seeland watches that Adrian van der Meijden owns. They all have date letters showing that they were hallmarked between 1877 and 1884. Four were hallmarked at Chester and one at Birmingham. Two carry the sponsor’s mark “AC” incised within an oval: the mark of Antoine Castelberg of 58 Holborn Viaduct, London. Castelberg first registered his mark with the London Assay Office on August 25, 1875,<sup>16</sup> and seems to have represented himself as an English watch manufacturer; he even appeared as part of the British representation at the Sydney International Exhibition in 1880.<sup>17</sup> However, in a court case at the Old Bailey, he said in evidence that he was a watch dealer and importer at Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, and Clerkenwell.<sup>18</sup> Castelberg was certainly not a watchcase maker, and the presence of his sponsor’s mark in these watchcases show that they were made in Switzerland.

Two carry the sponsor’s mark “FP” incised within an oval shield, very similar to Antoine Castelberg’s mark. This was the mark of Fritz Petitpierre, an associate of Castelberg’s and also of 58 Holborn Viaduct, London. The fifth, the one marked in Birmingham, has a sponsor’s FM in a rectangular shield. This is probably the mark of Frank Moss, 48 Frederick Street, Birmingham, a partner in the firm of J. Blanckensee & Co., watch manufacturers and importers. As with Castelberg, Petitpierre and Moss were certainly not watchcase makers, and the presence of their sponsor’s marks in these watchcases show that they too were made in Switzerland.

Figure 2 shows the inside case back of another watch with no “F” mark to indicate that it is of foreign origin, although the sponsor’s mark shows that it was not made in the UK. This watch is Swiss and was imported by the



Figure 2. Stauffer watch with UK hallmarks.

Anglo-Swiss firm of Stauffer & Co. It has the sponsor’s mark “CN” of Charles Nicolet, a director of the company, and London hallmarks for 1886/1887, but no foreign mark. Again, Nicolet was not a watchcase maker, and the presence of his sponsor’s mark in this watchcase shows that it was made in Switzerland.

## Contemporary English and Swiss Watches

Because English watches were expensive, they were still constructed as they had been for many years, their design had not been refined to make them easier and cheaper to make in the way that Swiss watches had, and the sheer quantity of gold or silver in English watchcases contributed substantially to their cost. Figure 3 shows a typical English lever watch of the period hallmarked for 1868/1869. It has a “consular” case where the movement is hinged to the middle part of the case. The inner case back, called the “dome” is firmly fixed to the case, which is why the assay office regarded it as part of the case and required it to be of the same quality material as the rest of the case. The watch is wound from the back, through a hole in the dome that is exposed when the outer case back is opened. There is a separate gilt base metal dust shield, and the dome could be seen as achieving nothing and quite unnecessary. The hands are set by opening the front bezel and applying a key to the central hand boss. The movement has a fusee, and the pillars are still fixed to the top plate by pins. This is a substantial watch made to designs and in a handcraft tradition handed down over generations.

Figure 4 shows a Swiss watch from slightly later, with a Longines movement and the sponsor’s mark of Longines’ London Agent Arthur Baume, hallmarked London 1877/1878. This watch has a much more modern appearance. The movement is inserted into the case from the front, held in place by half headed case screws. The front



**Figure 3.** English lever watch in sterling silver consular case.

bezel snaps on, and because the watch is wound and set, there is no need for the owner to open it and risk damage to the enamel dial. The movement has a right angled lever escapement with a going barrel and is held together with screws rather than pins. Inside the case back is a hinged inner cuvette to protect the movement while being wound and set, but this is not a substantial part of the case, and if it were not for the requirements of the assay, this would usually have been made from base metal, probably plated. This is still a substantial watch, and placing it side by side with the English lever they look very similar. But the Swiss watch shows much more modern features that are designed to make the watch easier, and therefore cheaper, to manufacture, and its case is lighter than an English case.

### Committee on Gold and Silver Hallmarking

In 1877 watchmakers from Liverpool and Coventry began to complain loudly that large numbers of foreign



**Figure 4.** Swiss lever watch in silver case with British hallmarks.

watchcases were being marked with British hallmarks and passed off as English manufacture.<sup>19</sup> As a result of this agitation, Sir Henry Jackson (1831-1881), the member of Parliament for Coventry, put forward a draft bill to prevent any watchcase not manufactured in the UK from being hallmarked. Alongside this draft bill a Select Committee of the House of Commons was set up to look into gold and silver hallmarking. The committee took in evidence over nine days in June and July in 1878 and compiled a dossier of 3,434 questions and answers with a mass of data as depositions.<sup>20</sup> The committee continued its work in 1879, with an additional 1,017 questions and answers and further depositions, and presented its report in May.<sup>21</sup>

One of the witnesses to give evidence to the Select Committee in 1878 was Walter Prideaux, clerk of the Goldsmiths' Company. Prideaux said he had first received complaints from watchmakers in 1874 about foreign-made watchcases receiving British hallmarks. He found that the assay officers could easily recognize these foreign watchcases, so he asked them to record the numbers. At first, there were only about 1,500 of 150,000 cases marked in the year, and he thought that it was such a small matter that no action was needed, but the number had subsequently grown rapidly. In the hallmarking year ending May 28, 1878, the totals of watchcases marked were 101,017 silver and 30,161 gold, of which 10,440 silver and 2,110 gold cases were foreign.

These watchcases were being marked with British hallmarks, but not with the foreign "F" as required by the 1867/1876 law. Prideaux noted that Goldsmiths' Hall had no power to inquire into the origin of things and that if a registered dealer sent items in with his private registered mark on it, Goldsmiths' Hall was bound to assay them and mark them.

The committee also heard that before 1876 all the watchcases marked at Chester were English made. In 1875 they hallmarked 25,778 silver watchcases; in 1876 34,846, of which 10,224 were foreign made; and in 1877 they hallmarked 45,355, of which 20,704 were foreign made. In other words, since 1875 the number of English watchcases marked had remained substantially the same, whereas the number of foreign cases had increased markedly. Although it is not mentioned whether these cases were marked with the additional "F" hallmark signifying foreign manufacture, it seems likely that they were not and that the Chester Assay Office, like the London Assay Office at Goldsmiths' Hall, was recording the numbers of foreign watchcases sent for hallmarking but powerless to require them to be declared as foreign manufacture.

Who was sending these foreign watchcases for hallmarking? The earliest mark I have identified was registered at the Chester Assay Office on January 31, 1875, by Frederick Francis Seeland, who was at the time a manager for the American Watch Co. of Waltham in the UK before leaving in late 1876 to take over at IWC. Another early registrant was Antoine Castelberg (see discussion of IWC

Seeland watches above), who first registered his mark at the London Assay Office on August 25, 1875. Alfred Bedford of Waltham UK registered his mark on August 30, 1876, probably in anticipation of Seeland leaving. Arthur Baume of Baume & Co. and Longines registered a mark on November 18, 1876, and Charles Nicolet of Stauffer & Co. on March 1, 1877. This list is by no means exhaustive and further research is required.

Alfred Bedford had presented a petition to parliament arguing against the draft bill proposed by Sir Henry Jackson and asking for the Select Committee to be set up. He was the only witness to appear before the Select Committee to protest against possibly being denied the right to send cases to have British hallmarks. In his evidence he stated that in 1877 Waltham UK had imported 5,000 cases from the United States and 18,000 from Switzerland, most of which had been hallmarked at Chester. It is interesting to compare the total of these figures—23,000—with the figure of 20,704 foreign watchcases hallmarked at Chester in 1877. It appears that all of the foreign watchcases marked at Chester could have been submitted by Waltham UK.

Although Bedford opposed the draft bill because he wanted to continue to be able to send foreign cases to be hallmarked, he pointed out that the American Watch Co. of Waltham always marked its own name on its watch movements, so there was no question of them being passed off as English manufacture.

So why were foreign watchcases being sent to be assayed and receive British hallmarks, and why was the number increasing so rapidly? This practice seems to have gone on at a low level for a considerable time. David Penney<sup>22</sup> told me, “The practice was at least 100 years old and well established by 1878.” However, the evidence from Walter Prideaux and the returns from Chester showed that in the years immediately before 1878 the number of foreign cases receiving British hallmarks had, from a very low level, increased rapidly.

Throughout the hearings representatives of the English watchmaking trade, and some members of the committee, repeated the view that English watches were the best in the world, that English watchmakers had the best reputation, and that foreign watchmakers wanted to exploit this by using British hallmarks to make purchasers think that the case—and by implication the whole watch—was of English manufacture. The reason advanced was that watches with British-hallmarked cases could be sold as English for a higher price than they would otherwise command.

Little solid support was given for this view, but the committee heard evidence from Lewis Joel of Joel, Son & Deal, watchmakers at Coventry, and secretary of the Watchcase Makers Association of Coventry. Joel stated that he had first noticed significant sales of foreign movements in cases with English hallmarks about five years earlier, although they had been sold in small numbers previous to that. When he was asked what injury this did to the public, Joel said it increased the price that could

be asked by the retailer and which the public would pay. If an American or Swiss watch was sold as such without British hallmarks, the price would be 50 shillings or £3, whereas with the British hallmarks the same watches were sold marked as English watches at prices four guineas or £4 10s, £1 or 30 shillings more than the unhallmarked items. As part of his evidence Joel produced a watch that had been advertised in a jeweler’s window as an English watch. The ticket stated that it was “an excellent English silver lever, extra jewelled,” and the invoice said it was “by Russell & Son, Liverpool, No. 99,628.” Joel said it was a pure Swiss watch movement and a Swiss-made case, hallmarked at Chester.

There is of course an alternative explanation along the lines of the one advanced by Alfred Bedford of Waltham: that foreign manufacturers and importers wanted to have a British hallmark on their watchcases as a public guarantee of the quality of their material. There would be nothing wrong in this, and it would actually have been complying with law, although nobody seems to have realized that. The demand by English manufacturers that the right to have watchcases hallmarked be denied to foreign manufacturers could be seen as protectionism by a trade that was suffering from international competition. Certainly, Alfred Bedford made a convincing case to the committee, and one would not expect reputable and long-lived companies such as Baume and Stauffer to be trying to deceive the public.

What seems most likely is that there was some truth in all sides of the story: some disreputable traders used the British hallmark to deceive the public while others used it as a genuine sign of quality, and those who would deny the use of British hallmarks to foreigners were acting to protect the public from the former, but if it also protected them from the latter, well then that was a welcome if unspoken side effect.

The committee came down firmly on the side of the English watchmakers. Their report included the following statements and recommendations:

*The chief complaint against the operation of the existing law comes from the manufacturers of watches and watch-cases. They have established by evidence that within the last few years a practice has sprung up, and is rapidly increasing, under which foreign-made watch-cases are sent to this country to be Hall-marked with the British Hall-mark, and are afterwards fitted with foreign movements, and are not then unfrequently sold and dealt in as British made watches; and they assert that this not only injures their own reputation and lowers the credit of British workmanship, but is contrary to the spirit and intention of our legislation. The Assay Offices are unable legally to refuse to Hall-mark these foreign watch-cases when brought for assay by registered dealers, though their officials are practically able to distinguish them from cases of British manufacture.*

*That Parliament has recognised the distinction between foreign and British plate is shown by the provisions of an*

## Swiss Hallmarking

Hallmarking in Switzerland originated in Geneva in the fifteenth century; the first recorded regulation for the fineness and marking of silver was enacted by Bishop John of Brogny in the year 1424. Hallmarking was later introduced in the cantons of Neuchâtel and Schaffhausen; each had its own system of testing and hallmarking and its own unique set of marks, but these hallmarks were not used on watchcases.

Swiss silver watches were often simply marked "Fine Silver," an unspecified standard of fineness. It was also permissible in Switzerland to use base metal for the bow (the ring on the pendant to which the safety chain was attached) and the cuvette (dome), the inner cover that protected the movement while a key was being used to wind it. The bow and the cuvette of Swiss watches often were made of brass silver plated, and the silver plating is often worn through in places or worn away completely. This was not permitted for British-made watches; the bow and the dome had to be made of the same material as the rest of the case, and if not, the case would not be hallmarked by the British assay offices.

The Swiss Precious Metals Control Act of December 23, 1880, introduced a uniform system of hallmarking for watchcases to be used throughout Switzerland with the marks shown in Figure 3. These hallmarks are seen on the vast majority of Swiss watches with silver or gold











Gold		Silver		Platinum (from 10.02.1914)
750‰	583‰	875‰	800‰	950‰
Helvetia	Écureuil	Ours	Coq de bruyère	Tête de chamois
				
				

Figure A. Swiss hallmarks 1880-1933.

cases imported to the UK from 1880 onward. The small "x" in each mark is replaced by the identifier of the assay office where the item was tested and marked: "G" for Geneva, "N" for Neuchâtel, "C" for La Chaux-de-Fonds, etc. Swiss hallmarks do not indicate dates, but items marked with the symbols introduced in 1880 must obviously have been marked after that date.

Some of the Swiss hallmarks were changed in 1933, but those and other later changes are outside the scope of this article. In the mid-1920s the Swiss introduced a system of Poinçon de Maître (literally "Punch of the Master" but usually translated in this context as Collective Responsibility Mark) for Swiss watchcase makers to indicate the actual maker of the watchcase. All precious metal watchcases made in Switzerland were required to carry a mark to identify the casemaker. These are analogous to the UK Sponsor's Mark discussed above. These are also outside the scope of this article.<sup>23</sup>

*Act 30 & 31 Vict. c. 82, s. 24, which requires all imported plate to be marked before sale with the letter F in an oval escutcheon, "in order to denote that such gold or silver plate was imported from foreign parts, and was not wrought or made in England, Scotland, or Ireland."*

*Until the practice of Hall-marking foreign watch-cases sprang up, the British Hall-marks were taken to indicate British workmanship, and your Committee cannot doubt that foreign watches in watch-cases so Hall-marked are frequently sold as of British manufacture. The Committee are therefore of opinion that all foreign-made watch-cases assayed in this country ought to be impressed with an additional distinctive mark (the letter F, by reason of its resemblance to existing marks, is not sufficiently distinctive) indicative of foreign manufacture, and that the law ought to be altered accordingly.*

The conclusion of the committee that the Foreign mark "F" was not sufficiently distinctive was based on two considerations. The first was that the public was used to seeing the mark of the lion on British items and looked

out for it, and it alone. Other marks, such as the maker's mark, were also present, as were marks made by the casemaker that had nothing to do with the hallmark, and the public, not being expert in matters of hallmarking, were quite likely to assume that the letter "F" was one of these other marks. The second consideration was that it had been demonstrated to the committee by a watchcase maker how easily small individual marks could be erased. As a result, the committee had explored with watchcase makers how a mark that was more difficult to alter could be devised, and the idea of a single composite mark with the word "foreign" at its center had been discussed.

The thoughts and questions of the committee were principally concerned with the rapidly increasing number of foreign watchcases bearing British hallmarks. In concentrating on the significant numbers of foreign watchcases that had begun to be hallmarked since the mid-1870s, they did not touch the question of the much larger numbers of watches that had entered the country since 1842 without British hallmarks. It seemed to be ac-

cepted by all parties that foreign watches could be imported with hallmarks.

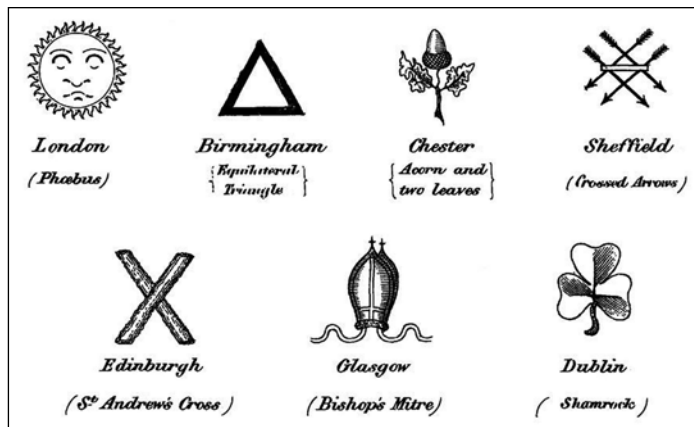
In his evidence Walter Prideaux said, "Foreign watches in unmarked cases have been always, I am informed, sold in England without challenge," although he thought that this was against the law and quoted the 1738 Act (12 Geo. II. c. 26). He later said, "What I say is this: that we have never been asked to sue for penalties. No man has ever come and given information, and said, 'Here is a foreign watchcase which I saw being sold, and I ask you to sue.' The thing has never been done. The practice has existed from time immemorial; in point of fact, before the time of 12 Geo. 2; and I certainly, in my position as legal adviser of the company, could not advise them to sue under those circumstances; but then I should find it difficult to give a reason for not doing it."

Prideaux also remarked that part of the problem was that clauses about hallmarking had been introduced into Acts of Parliament to which they did not relate, such as Customs Acts, and that sufficient thought had not been given to how they were to be enforced. He gave the 1867 Act requiring the "F" stamp as a specific example, in that importers were allowed to pay the customs duty on their plate and take it away, thinking that they had done all that the law required. There was no mechanism to force importers to send the plate for assay as required by the act, or even to inform them that they should do so. He said that if the laws were to be implemented as intended, then it was necessary that the Customs not be allowed to part with the imported plate unless it had been hallmarked.

The net effect of the committee and its recommendations was zero. Sir Henry Jackson's bill to prevent foreign watchcases receiving British hallmarks was never passed by parliament, and things continued as before; most foreign watches were not assayed and hallmarked in a British assay office, although an increasing number were, to the frustration of English watchmakers who were powerless to prevent it.

### 1883 Revenue Act

In 1883 the British law was tightened in response to Walter Prideaux's remarks that there was no mechanism to compel importers to have gold and silver items hallmarked. The Revenue Act of 1883<sup>24</sup> required that all gold and silver plate imported into Great Britain or Ireland be deposited in a bonded warehouse and not be released from bond until assayed and hallmarked. The marks for imported items remained the usual British hallmarks supplemented by the letter "F." This is no doubt the reason that items of silver bearing the "F" mark started appearing on items of plate in the 1880s, as noted in the earlier comments by the Goldsmiths' Company. However, the customs authorities continued to allow gold and silver watches to enter the country without hallmarks.



**Figure 5.** 1887 new town marks specified in an 1887 Act to be used by British Assay Offices on imported watches.

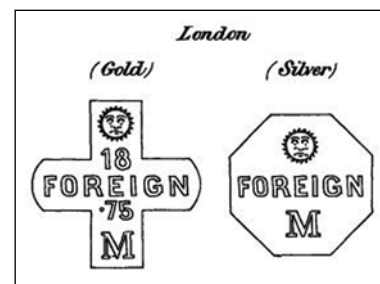
### 1887 Merchandise Marks Act

To alleviate concerns expressed by the Select Committee in 1878 that the "F" was not sufficiently distinctive and that marks could be too easily removed, the 1887 Merchandise Marks Act<sup>25</sup> and a subsequent Order in Council, which came into force on January 1, 1888, introduced completely new hallmarks for foreign-made watchcases. The Act also required a statutory declaration before an officer of an assay office, a justice of the peace, or a commissioner for oaths of the country of origin for all watchcases submitted for assay. I emphasize that these provisions applied only to watchcases, not to gold and silver items in general.

The new town marks to be used by the assay offices instead of the usual town marks (e.g., the head of Phoebus for London instead of the leopard's head) are shown in Figure 5. These new town marks were not intended simply to be used in place of the familiar ones but as part of a composite mark such as the London marks shown in Figure 6. The object of the design of these new composite marks was to make them difficult to alter; by placing the word "foreign" in the center of the mark it was impossible to obliterate it without also affecting the rest of the mark. Other assay offices were to strike similar composite marks, but with their own town mark in the place of the London Phoebus.

These large and complex marks with the word "foreign," which is used in a clearly derogatory manner, were good reasons why manufacturers and importers would not wish to have these marks applied to their watches. The net effect of the 1887 Act was to stop immediately foreign watchmakers sending foreign-made watchcases for assay and hallmarking.

Some of the assay offices prepared punches for these marks, but



**Figure 6.** Examples of composite marks to be struck on imported watches.



they were hardly ever used. William Redman, writing in 1907,<sup>26</sup> says the 1887 Act was “almost a dead letter” and that he had only seen three watchcases marked as required by the act in the 20 years it was in force. I have certainly never seen a watch with these marks, and I don’t know anyone who has.

### Swiss Reactions to the 1887 Act

Coincidentally with the passage of the 1887 Merchandise Marks Act in Britain, the Swiss authorities made an amendment to Swiss hallmarking practice and for the first time required that watchcases be hallmarked. Between 1880 and 1933 the normal Swiss hallmarks for silver were either a “bear rampant,” a bear standing on its hind legs, or a grouse. The bear mark indicates that the metal is silver above 0.875 (87.5 percent) silver content, and the grouse that the metal is above 0.800 (80 percent) silver content. Neither of these levels of purity met the British minimum standard of sterling (925 or 92.5 percent silver content) for silver, so items with these levels of silver content in the metal could not be hallmarked or legally sold in Britain, although this did not prevent the import and sale of thousands of watches of these standards, with the 0.800 standard being by far the most common.

However, it appears that the Swiss watchmakers became concerned that the British 1887 Merchandise Marks Act would prevent silver watches of less than sterling standard from being imported into Britain, so a new standard for silver of 0.935 was adopted by a Swiss Federal Council Decree of December 24, 1887. Swiss assay offices started using this standard in January 1888. To confirm that a watchcase assayed at 0.935 or better, rather than the 0.875, which was confirmed by stamping the mark of a single bear, a mark of three bears—one small and two large—as shown in Figure 7, was used. This was specifically for watches that were to be exported to England.

The practice was not universally appreciated, and cus-



Figure 7. Three bears.

tomers in the United States (for one) preferred to see a single bear rather than three. Because of this, watchcases made of 0.935 silver that were submitted to the assay offices in Switzerland in packets identified with “Destinée à l’Angleterre” were stamped with three bears; without this identification they were stamped with a single bear. Therefore, manufacturers could choose whether to have three bears or one bear stamped on 0.935 silver watchcases by marking the packets “Destinée à l’Angleterre” if they wanted three bears or omitting this if they wanted a single bear to be stamped.

### 1904 and 1906 British Import Marks

Standard reference works on gold and silver marks such as Bradbury contain tables of assay office marks for imported plate with dates of 1904 and 1906, but these 1904 and 1906 marks do not apply to watchcases.

In 1900 British manufacturers of gold and silver items started to demand of the government the same protection from foreign competition as was given to British watchcase makers. On June 28, 1900, a deputation from the Birmingham Jewellers and Silversmiths’ Association, and members of the Goldsmiths and Silversmiths’ Trade in London and Sheffield, was received at the Board of Trade in London. Speaking for the deputation, E. T. Pendleton (Birmingham) said the British hallmark was looked upon by the general public as a sign of British workmanship and that the letter “F” that was applied to foreign manufactured items was inadequate because it could easily be confused with the initials of the firm making the goods, or with the official date mark. The deputation therefore suggested the desirability of hallmarking foreign plate and jewelry with the distinctive Assay marks that were ordered to be used on foreign manufactured watchcases by the Merchandise Marks Act of 1887 and that had effectually stopped unfair competition in the sale of foreign watches in Britain.

The Board of Trade was not initially sympathetic, but in 1904 the “Hall-Marking of Foreign Plate Act” and a consequent Order in Council complied with the request. The Act specified that hallmarks different from the usual UK hallmarks were to be struck on “any plate or article imported from foreign parts” and the Order required that the same town marks be used as had been defined in 1887 for hallmarking imported watchcases (e.g., the sign of Phoebus for London). Numerical values were specified for the fineness mark so that the crown for gold and the lion of sterling silver would not be used on foreign plate. For gold the carat value together with its decimal equivalent was marked. For silver items the decimal equivalent of the standard was marked. For example, 18 carat gold was to be marked 18 and .75; sterling silver was to be marked .925. The combination mark specified in the 1887 legislation, with all the individual marks together with the word “Foreign” contained within a single shield, was not required; the word “Foreign” was omitted, and the marks were struck separately in the same way as traditional British hallmarks.

Some of the 1904 marks for imported items were soon found to resemble existing trademarks, so in 1906 new marks for imported items were defined by Order in Council for the London, Sheffield, Glasgow, and Dublin assay offices; the marks for Birmingham, Chester, and Edinburgh remained the same as before. The London Assay Office mark became the sign of the constellation Leo, which looks like an omega symbol, on a cross in an oval shield for silver and square for gold. The Glasgow Office mark became two opposed block letters "F" prone. The Birmingham Office symbol became an equilateral triangle.

The 1904 Act and consequent Order in Council, and the 1906 Order in Council that altered the town marks, did not alter or repeal the sections of the 1887 Merchandise Marks Act that applied to watchcases, or the Order in Council that defined the hallmarks that were to be applied to foreign manufactured watchcases from January 1, 1888. This meant that watchcases were still by law required to be marked in accordance with the 1887 Order in Council, including the composite marks with the word "Foreign" across the middle and with the town marks that had been found to be problematic when used on imported plate after the 1904 Order in Council came into force. The fact that these discrepancies were not noticed probably simply shows that no foreign watchcases were being sent for hall-marking at the time.

## A Bombshell Slowly Drops

By the end of the nineteenth century one might have thought that the authorities had at last an airtight solution for the hall-marking of imported gold and silver watches. The 1842 Act required that gold and silver items be hall-marked by a British assay office, the 1867 and 1876 Acts required that foreign items be identified by an "F," the 1883 Act required that they be kept in bonded warehouses until sent for assay, and the 1887 Act required a statutory declaration of the country of origin of watchcases sent for hall-marking and that different symbols be used for their hallmarks so that the public could not be deceived into thinking that they were actually of British manufacture.

But there was still a problem. Despite the large number of Swiss watches being imported, very few were now being hall-marked. A question about this was asked in the House of Commons on June 21, 1904:

*MR. CHARLES MURRAY (Coventry) To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he can inform the House of the number of gold and silver watch cases marked by each of the Assay Offices in the years 1902 and 1903, on declarations that such cases were made outside the United Kingdom.*

*(Answered by Mr. Gerald Balfour.) The Assay Offices have been good enough to supply the information desired by my hon. friend, and it appears that in London one gold watch-case was marked in 1902, and one gold and one silver case in 1903, on declarations that they were made outside the United Kingdom. No watch-cases were marked under similar circumstances at any of the other Assay Offices in either year.*

Three watches in two years! This must have caused some puzzlement.

Then someone discovered that the customs authorities did not regard complete watches in gold or silver cases as "plate" and therefore had not been ensuring that they were sent for assay as required by the 1883 Revenue Act. In fact, if we recall the evidence of Walter Prideaux to the Select Committee in 1878 "Foreign watches in unmarked cases have been always, I am informed, sold in England without challenge ... The practice has existed from time immemorial; in point of fact, before the time of 12 Geo. 2 [the 1738 Act]," it would appear that no one had ever attempted to enforce the 1842 Act, let alone the 1738 Act, and ensure that foreign gold and silver watchcases were hall-marked. The strange situation had arisen that importers of foreign watches could essentially choose whether to have their cases hall-marked purely on the basis of whether it was financially beneficial to them.

In 1904 the Board of Customs consulted the law officers of the Crown, who opined that the cases of watches imported complete should be hall-marked. However, the Board of Customs had long treated imported watches as not requiring to be hall-marked and was reluctant to change its practice without a formal decision, so they asked the Goldsmiths' Company to undertake a test prosecution.<sup>27</sup> The Company agreed and looked for a likely candidate to prosecute. They did not have to search far: William Wyatt had "form" as far as the Company was concerned. In 1897 Wyatt had been found guilty of fraudulently transposing hallmarks (cutting them from a legitimate item and soldering them onto another item of lower fineness) and sentenced to 14 months' imprisonment with hard labor. On March 14, 1905, Sir Walter Prideaux, clerk of the Goldsmiths' Company and son of the Walter Prideaux who gave evidence to the Select Committee in 1878 and 1879, went calling on William Wyatt and purchased four watches: two in silver cases and two in gold cases. None were hall-marked, so the Goldsmiths' Company started a prosecution under the 1842 Act.

## The Meaning of the Term "Plate"

The origin of the confusion revolves around the use of the term "plate" in the 1842 Customs Act. Plate is used by the assay offices, and hence in Acts of Parliament concerning assay, in two distinct ways: (1) in the ordinary way, to mean platters or shallow dishes and (2) in a particular way as a genus, which includes as species vessel, dish, cup, bowl, and every other form of gold or silver ware. Exceptions were particular items that are especially exempt because of the difficulty of marking them, but included items were those that would not ordinarily be called plate by anyone outside the assay office, including watchcases. Unfortunately, "anyone outside the assay office" included the customs authorities, who were primarily concerned with levying customs duties, not with hall-marking, and naturally turned to the schedules at the

back of the 1842 Act containing lists of articles on which duty was to be imposed and the amounts of the duty to be charged. In this schedule "Plate of Gold" and "Plate, Silver, gilt and un gilt" appear in Class VI "Ores, Minerals, Metals, And Manufactures Thereof," and "Watches of Gold or Silver, or other Metal" appear in Class XIX "Miscellaneous." This difference led the customs to treat gold and silver watchcases as "plate" (because they were clearly not watches), but complete watches as "not plate," because they were in a different class.

Tangible evidence for this view of the Board of Customs is provided by a General Order issued by the Commissioners of Customs in 1888 as a result of the 1887 Merchandise Marks Act. The 1887 Merchandise Marks Act was principally concerned with protection of the public from being deceived by false names and trademarks. It lays down procedures for imported goods bearing potentially misleading, forged, or imitation trademarks, trade names, etc., to be seized by the customs, and the sections concerning hallmarking of watchcases have clearly been shoehorned into this bill. The General Order states that watches may be imported if they are marked in accordance with the Order in Council, or with a foreign assay mark. It seems that with the concentration of the Act being on potentially misleading marks, the composer of the General Order either ignored or was not aware of the 1842 Act requiring that all imported gold and silver items be hallmarked in the UK, or probably more likely, that by 1887 the practice by the Customs of admitting watches without requiring them to be sent for assay was well established. Because the foreign assay marks were not misleading, watches bearing them were allowed to enter the country under the Customs General Order.

The initial judgment in *Goldsmiths' Company vs. Wyatt* under Justice Channell went against the Company but was reversed in the Court of Appeal before Lord Justice Collins, Master of the Rolls, and Lords Justice Cozens-Hardy and Farwell on November 30, 1906.<sup>28</sup> Lord Justice Sir George Farwell, in presenting the judgment of the court, clearly identified the two different uses of the term "plate" and concluded that watchcases were clearly plate within the meaning of section 59 of the 1842 Act and had in fact been treated as such by the customs and that it could not be contended that the insertion of works into a watchcase could make the watchcase no longer plate. He also pointed out that the schedule the customs had relied on when distinguishing between watchcases as "plate" and complete watches as "not plate" was concerned only with taxation and did not change the requirement of section 59 of the Act that required all foreign plate to be hallmarked. In his concluding remarks Lord Justice Farwell addressed the comment that no one would use the term "plate" to include gold and silver watches in common parlance by pointing out that the proper question was not whether gold and silver watches would be described as plate in ordinary language, but rather, whether they

were described as such in Acts of Parliament, where the Court found that they clearly were. Lord Justice Farwell concluded that watchcases were "plate" within the meaning of section 59 of the 1842 Act and therefore should be assayed and marked as required by the law.

### Consequences of the Judgment of 1906

The judgment that gold and silver watches were within the compass of the 1842 Act and should be hallmarked in a British assay office caused great concern to retailers who had stocks of watches that they thought had been imported lawfully; after all, the Customs authorities had permitted it. On December 10, 1906, *The Times* remarked that it would "startle many persons in the trade to find that they have been breaking the law for half a century and accumulating against themselves untold penalties."

One of the first to react was the company of Dimier Brothers. George and Edward Dimier had been active in London from the 1880s as Swiss watch importers, but their first "GD" sponsor's mark was registered with the London Assay Office on December 12, 1906, less than two weeks after the Appeal Court judgment. They subsequently registered eight more "GD" punches with the London Assay Office between March and December 1907<sup>29</sup> and five more "DBS" punches in 1907,<sup>30</sup> an indication of the volume of work needing to be stamped.

Watch importers were concerned that the watchcases they were now required to submit for hallmarking would be marked with the large marks defined by the 1887 Order in Council. On January 23, 1907, *The Times* reported that the Board of Trade had received representations that it would be difficult to place these marks on watchcases of small size or delicate manufacture. It was suggested that the simpler marks prescribed for foreign plate by the Order in Council of May 11, 1906, could be placed even on small watchcases and was adopted by a new Order in Council issued in May 1907, effective on May 14. This Order essentially repeated the requirements of the 1906 Order in Council, with specific application to watchcases, repealing the 1887 Order in Council. The new town marks to be applied to watchcases are shown in Appendix 1.

On May 28, 1907, *The Times* reported that the Board of Customs had notified the Board of Trade that

*"All Gold and Silver Watch Cases imported into this country on and after June 1st next will be dealt with by the Customs as Plate within the meaning of Section 10 of the Revenue Act, 1883, which provides that Gold and Silver Plate shall not be delivered for home use until assayed, stamped, and marked according to law."*

The Board of Trade recognized the impracticality of trying to apply the requirements of the 1842 Act to watches that had been imported over the 65 years since it had been passed and that had not been hallmarked, so the "Assay of Imported Watch-Cases (Existing Stocks Exemption) Act 1907," was proposed to exempt all watch-

cases imported into the UK before June 1, 1907, from the requirement to be hallmarked. The bill for this Act was first submitted to parliament on June 20, 1907, and it was initially proposed that the effective date should be July 1, but Lloyd George objected that this left open a period within which more watches could be imported without having to meet the requirements that British-made watches were subject to, so the effective date of the Act was then fixed retrospectively as June 1, 1907. The bill became an Act by Royal Assent on August 2, 1907.

A question remains as to what happened in the trade during the period between the Appeal Court handing down its judgment on November 30, 1906, and the law being enforced on June 1, 1907. As I mentioned previously, Dimier Brothers acted quickly after the judgment to register their sponsor's mark with the Assay Office, but other major importing agents, such as Arthur George Rendell (AGR) for Robert Pringle and Sons, and George Stockwell (GS), were not so quick. Stockwell first registered his mark at the London Assay Office for watchcases on June 15, 1907, with Rendell following on June 25.<sup>31</sup> It seems unlikely that Dimier Brothers had watchcases marked between December 1906 and June 1907 with the 1887 marks because the volume of watches they were preparing to handle with their array of punches would surely have left a trace, so it seems likely that there was a holdup while arrangements were settled.

From June 1907 there was a flood of foreign watchcases into British assay offices to be hallmarked. The number of silver watchcases received at the London Assay Office in the hallmarking year to May 29, 1908, was about 200,000 compared to only 3,000 for the previous hallmarking year of 1906-1907. It can be inferred that the 3,000 were all of UK manufacture, and the difference of 197,000 was made up of foreign watchcases, which gives some idea of the numbers of unhallmarked watches that were imported in the years preceding 1907. By the 1912-1913 hallmarking year the number of silver watchcases marked at the London Assay Office was around 700,000, reaching a peak in 1918 of more than 1.25 million. There was a similar increase in the number of gold watchcases being hallmarked at the London Assay Office. In the hallmarking year to May 29, 1908, this was approximately 78,500, compared to only 4,700 for the previous hallmarking year of 1906-1907. By the 1912-1913 hallmarking year the number of gold watchcases marked at the London Assay Office was around 255,000. The number then declined due to the war and sharply declined after an "ad valorem" import duty of 33 percent was imposed in 1915 on imported luxuries, including clocks and watches, to conserve foreign currency reserves as part of the war effort. Silver watches were also subject to the tax, but because they were cheaper than gold watches, their numbers did not suffer the same decline. Nearly all the watchcases hallmarked at the London Assay Office between 1908 and 1918 were of Swiss manufacture.<sup>32</sup>

## Irish Hallmarking

**I**speak in the article about British hallmarking of imported watches because watches were imported into the United Kingdom through London or one of the other centers of English watchmaking such as Coventry. However, Ireland had a long tradition of hallmarking, stretching back to well before the first Royal Charter was granted to the Goldsmiths of Dublin by Charles I in 1638, but no imported watches (or at least none that I have seen) were hallmarked in Dublin before the Irish Free State separated from the United Kingdom in 1922. As a result of this separation, Irish hallmarks were not accepted in the UK since 1923 and UK hallmarks were not accepted in Ireland since 1927. Because of this, watches imported into Britain and hallmarked in Britain, if sent to Ireland, were then also assayed and hallmarked in Dublin, so one sometimes sees watches with both British and Irish hallmarks.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusions

So what can be said about the hallmarking of foreign watches imported into Britain?

- Before 1842 the British assay offices effectively refused to assay foreign gold and silver items. Foreign gold and silver watches were imported in increasing numbers without being hallmarked.

- The 1842 Customs Act required that imported gold and silver wares should be assayed and hallmarked in a British assay office. Imported gold and silver watches should have been assayed and hallmarked. The customs authorities allowed complete watches to enter the country unhallmarked and the Goldsmiths' Company did nothing to stop this.

- The 1842 Act made it necessary that importers of gold and silver items be able to register their mark at an assay office and send items for hallmarking. This allowed importers of watches to obtain hallmarks should they wish. Small numbers of watch foreign watchcases received British hallmarks as a result of this, but the majority of imported watches did not.

- The 1867 Customs Act required that all foreign gold and silver items that received British hallmarks also had the mark of a letter "F" impressed to denote that the item was of foreign manufacture. However, there was no provision made for the country of manufacture to be declared to the assay offices. Agents of foreign manufacturers could send items to the assay office from a British address, and they would be marked with normal British hallmarks; the law about the "F" mark was so little known that they most likely did not even know it existed.

- In the mid-1870s the number of foreign watchcases receiving British hallmarks suddenly and rapidly increased to significant proportions, causing concern to

British watch manufacturers. It may be that the British manufacturers genuinely thought that the public was being deceived as a result of this, or it may be that they perceived an opportunity to restrict imports by having them prominently marked "foreign."

- From 1880 Swiss watches that would previously not have been hallmarked in Britain began to carry Swiss hallmarks.

- The 1883 Revenue Act required that all foreign plate be held in bond until marked with British hallmarks. As a result, some foreign items started receiving the "F" stamp, although there was still no statutory mechanism for establishing the country of origin. Large numbers of watches continued to be imported without British hallmarks, and agents of foreign manufacturers continued to send some watchcases for British hallmarking without declaring that they were of foreign manufacture.

- The 1887 Merchandise Marks Act introduced a requirement for a statutory declaration of the country of origin, together with massive and ugly hallmarks to be used on foreign-made watchcases, but also allowed foreign watches to be imported with foreign hallmarks. After this, foreign-made watchcases were no longer sent for British hallmarking. Swiss watches were imported with Swiss hallmarks.

- The assay office marks for imported plate with dates of 1904 and 1906 found in Bradbury and other standard works on gold and silver hallmarking were not used on watchcases.

- From June 1, 1907, all imported watches were hallmarked with the import hallmarks that were different from those used on UK-made items. In particular, the lion mark of sterling silver was not used, and the town marks were those shown in Appendix 1.

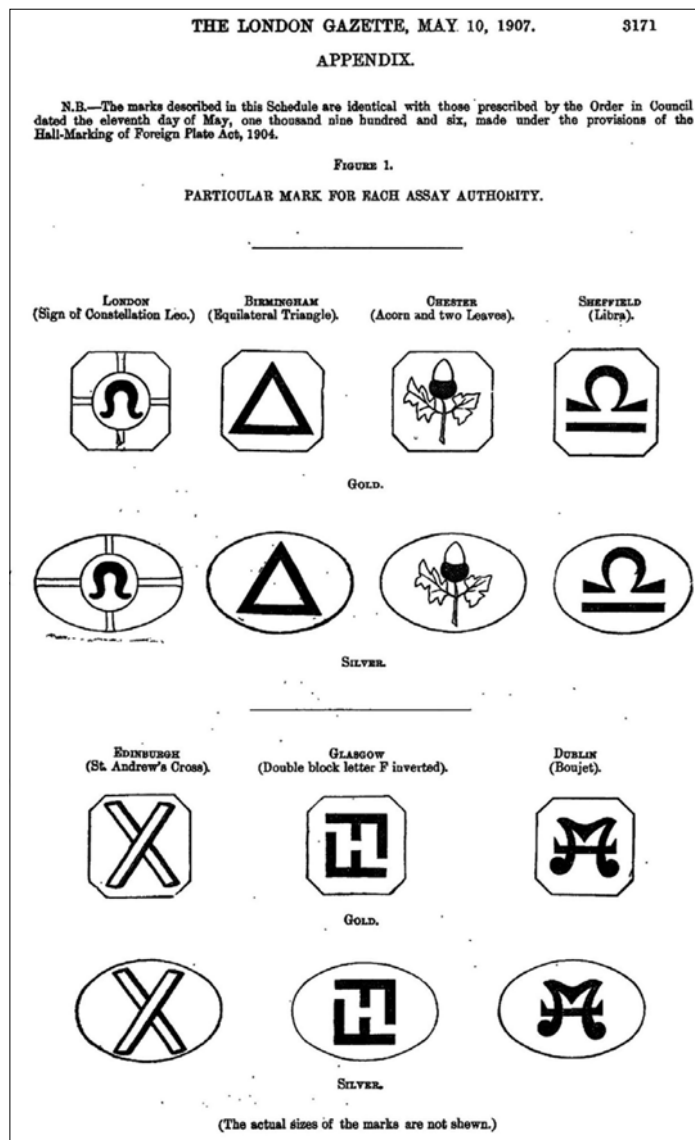
- Imported watches with UK hallmarks before 1907 are rare, except for the period from the mid-1870s until 1888 when large numbers of foreign watchcases received British hallmarks.

- As a result of the separation of the Irish Free State from the UK in 1922 watches hallmarked in Britain were re-hallmarked in Dublin after 1926.

### Acknowledgments

I thank Richard Edwards for drawing my attention to the general lack of UK hallmarks on Swiss watches imported prior to 1907; Adrian van der Meijden for information about his collection of IWC "Seeland" watches; David Penney for his encouragement in writing this article and comments; Philip Priestley for his help over many years with questions on hallmarking and his encouragement and comments on this article; David Beasley, librarian to the Goldsmiths' Company; Elspeth Morrison, archivist of the Edinburgh and Glasgow Assay Offices; Emma Paragreen, curator/librarian of the Sheffield Assay Office; and Deveron Jewellers for the picture of the hallmarks in Figure 2.

### Appendix 1: New town marks, May 10, 1907.



### Notes

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7. 5 & 6 Vict. c. 47 s. 59.
8. Forbes, 252.
9. 5 & 6 Vict. c. 47 s. 60.
10. 7 & 8 Vict., c. 22, s 8.
11. 30 & 31 Vict. c. 82 s. 24.
12. 39 & 40 Vict. c. 36.

13. 39 & 40 Vict. c. 35.
14. David Beasley, librarian, The Goldsmiths' Company, private communication to the author, December 2012.
15. Philip T. Priestley, private communication to the author, September 2013.
16. Priestley, 92.
17. *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 7, 1880.
18. Old Bailey records, Morris Schott; deception, bankruptcy, March 27, 1882.
19. *The Times, London*, September 11, 1877.
20. Report from the Select Committee on Gold and Silver (Hall Marking) House of Commons, July 31, 1878.
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25. 50 & 51 Vict. c. 28.
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27. Forbes, 269.
28. *The Times Law Report*, London, December 1, 1906.
29. Philip T. Priestley, *Watch Case Makers of England 1720-1920* (NAWCC Bulletin Supplement No. 20, Spring 1994): 107.
30. Philip T. Priestley, *Watch Case Makers of England 1720-1920* (NAWCC Bulletin Supplement No. 20, Spring 1994): 101.
31. Philip T. Priestley, *Watch Case Makers of England 1720-1920* (NAWCC Bulletin Supplement No. 20, Spring 1994): 109, 93.
32. Forbes, 269.
33. Ronald W A Le Bas, Assay Master & CEO Assay Office Ireland, private communication to the author, October 2013.

### About the Author

David Boettcher lives in Cheshire, England. He holds a degree in Engineering Science from the University of Bath, is a Chartered Engineer, a member of the Institute of Engineering and Technology, and a registered European Engineer. He has worked in nuclear power, retail, and IT and now works as a freelance engineer and IT consultant. His interest in vintage wristwatches was sparked when he inherited his grandfather's 1918 silver Rolex. His watch interest website is [www.VintageWatchStraps.com](http://www.VintageWatchStraps.com), and he welcomes comments or questions by email to [David.B.Boettcher@gmail.com](mailto:David.B.Boettcher@gmail.com).

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## Telling Time

Neck and head flat  
Like a swan on a pillow  
To swallow being tough  
She drinks in  
Daughter-fed  
Pride in that dazzling fur coat  
Her piano  
From five-and-dime savings  
A father who loved  
As friendly now  
With black-rimmed  
Hospital seconds on a wall

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This poem, written by Raymond Comeau, a former dean and current lecturer on French and Management in Harvard University Extension School, brings together two common themes found in lyric poetry, time and old age. Ray is an active member of NAWCC in New England, attending as often as he can sessions offered by the two Massachusetts chapters.

